



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

National Child Protection Inspections

Norfolk Constabulary
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Foreword

All children and young people deserve to grow up in a safe environment, cared for and protected from harm. Most children thrive in loving families and grow to adulthood unharmed. Unfortunately, still too many children are abused or neglected by those responsible for their care; they sometimes need to be protected from other adults with whom they come into contact and some occasionally go missing, or are spending time in environments, or with people, harmful to them.

While it is everyone's responsibility to look out for vulnerable children, police forces, working together and with other agencies, have a particular role in protecting children and ensuring that their needs are met.

Protecting children is one of the most important tasks the police undertake. Only the police can investigate suspected crimes and arrest perpetrators, and they have a significant role in monitoring sex offenders. Police officers have the power to take a child who is in danger into a place of safety, or to seek an order to restrict an offender's contact with children. The police service also has a significant role working with other agencies to ensure the child's protection and well-being, longer term.

Police officers are often the eyes and ears of the community as they go about their daily tasks and come across children who may be neglected or abused. They must be alert to and identify children who may be at risk.

To protect children and young people well, the police service must undertake all its core duties to a high standard. Police officers must talk with children and young people, listen to them and understand their fears and concerns. The police must also work well with other agencies, ensuring no child slips through the net, and that over-intrusion and duplication of effort are avoided.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is inspecting the child protection work of every police force in England and Wales. The reports are intended to provide information for the police, the police and crime commissioner and the public on how well children are protected and their needs are met, and to secure improvements for the future.

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1. Introduction

This report is a summary of the findings of an inspection of child protection in Norfolk Constabulary, which took place in April 2014. It is the first in a programme of inspections that will continue into 2016. The report comprises seven chapters in three main parts. The first part provides information on the background to the inspection and to Norfolk Constabulary. The second part focuses on the inspection findings, and the third part looks to the future and makes recommendations for improvement.

2. Background

Between October 2011 and March 2013, HMIC was involved, on a multi-agency basis, in a number of child protection inspections. Along with evidence of strengths and effective practice, these inspections highlighted areas for improvement, in particular: the quality of joint investigations; the identification of risk; dealing with domestic abuse; and the detention of children in custody.

To address these issues, HMIC decided to conduct a programme of single agency inspections of all police forces in England and Wales. The aims of the inspection programme are to:

- assess how effectively police forces safeguard children and young people at risk;
- make recommendations to police forces for improving child protection practice;
- highlight effective practice in child protection work; and
- drive improvements in forces' child protection practices.

The focus of the inspection is on the outcomes for, and experience of, children and young people who come into contact with the police when there are concerns about their safety or well-being.

The inspection methodology builds on the earlier multi-agency inspections. It comprises self-assessment and self-case audits¹ carried out by the force and case audits and interviews with police officers and staff and representatives from partner agencies, conducted by HMIC.

¹ The self-assessment is completed by the constabulary and describes practice, management and leadership. Cases are selected by the constabulary for a self assessment of practice. Details of how we conduct these inspections can be found at Annex A.

3. Context for the constabulary

Norfolk Constabulary polices the largely rural county of Norfolk with a workforce that includes 1,582 police officers, 913 police staff and 247 police community support officers.² The city of Norwich, where the constabulary has its headquarters, is the administrative centre for the county.

Norfolk covers an area of 2,074 square miles and has a population of approximately 862,000: about a fifth of the population is under 19 years of age. It is a two-tier local government area served by Norfolk County Council and seven district councils:

- Breckland
- Broadland
- Great Yarmouth
- Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
- North Norfolk
- Norwich
- South Norfolk.

Norfolk County Council is responsible for child protection across the county. In January 2013, Norfolk County Council was assessed by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills as inadequate. There is one local safeguarding children board (LSCB)³ referred to throughout this report as Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board.

At the time of the inspection, Norfolk Constabulary was re-organising the policing structure for safeguarding and investigations, and investing in additional staff for public protection. The new arrangements are led by an assistant chief constable, a chief superintendent and two detective superintendents. They are supported by three detective chief inspectors that are responsible for management of the:

- multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)
- child sexual exploitation/missing persons units

² *Police workforce, England and Wales, 31 March 2014*. Home Office, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2014

³ LSCBs have a statutory duty, under the Children Act 2004, to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

- child abuse investigation units
- criminal investigation departments (CID)
- public protection units
- safeguarding children online team
- sexual assault referral centre (SARC).

A further chief inspector is responsible for early help. This responsibility involves working with partners to provide help and support to children and families with additional needs, and looking at new ways to address problems before they become worse. Other responsibilities include: safer schools, and working with children and young people in the community, to understand issues that affect them, and to improve their trust and confidence in the police.

4. The police role in child protection

Under the Children Act 1989, police forces, working with partner agencies such as local authority children's social care services, health services and education services, are responsible for making enquiries to safeguard and secure the welfare of any child within their area who is suffering (or is likely to suffer) significant harm.⁴ The police are duty bound to refer to the local authority those children in need that they find in the course of their work.⁵ Government guidance⁶ outlines how these duties and responsibilities should be exercised.

The specific police roles set out in the guidance relate to:

- the identification of children who might be at risk from abuse and neglect;
- the investigation of alleged offences against children;
- their work with other agencies, particularly the requirement to share information that is relevant to child protection issues; and

⁴ Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

⁵ Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 places a general duty on the local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area who are believed to be 'in need'. Police may find children who are 'in need' when they attend incidents and should refer these cases to the local authority. A child is 'in need' if he or she is disabled, unlikely to achieve or have the opportunity to achieve a reasonable standard of health or development, or if their health and development is likely to be impaired without local authority service provision.

⁶ *Working Together To Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, HM Government, March 2013.

- the exercise of emergency powers to protect children.

Every officer and member of police staff should understand their duty to protect children as part of their day-to-day business. It is essential that officers going into people's homes regarding any policing matter recognise the needs of children they may encounter. This is particularly important when they are dealing with domestic abuse and other incidents, where violence may be a factor. The duty to protect children extends to children and young people detained in police custody.

Many teams throughout police forces perform important roles in protecting children from harm, including those who analyse computers to establish whether they hold indecent images of children and others that manage registered sex offenders and dangerous people living in communities. They must visit sex offenders regularly, establish the nature of the risk these offenders currently pose and put in place any necessary measures to mitigate that risk.

In order to ensure that agencies co-operate to keep children safe and look after their welfare, each local authority must establish an LSCB. Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board is made up of senior representatives from all agencies (including the police), to promote safeguarding activities, ensure that the protection of children remains a high priority across their area, and to hold each other to account.

5. Findings: the experiences, progress and outcomes for children who need help and protection

During the course of the inspection, Norfolk Constabulary audited 30 cases in accordance with the criteria provided by HMIC. In about three-quarters of the cases, the conclusions reached about the quality of practice by the constabulary's own assessors and the inspection team were broadly similar.⁷ When there were differences, the inspectors generally assessed practice as being less good than the assessment given by the constabulary. In these cases, inspectors found that the assessment of the selected incident was credible, but that assessors had either taken insufficient account of the history of police involvement, or insufficient account of the continuing risk. Three of the case assessments had not been completed to a satisfactory standard to make a judgement.

When a concern for a child or an incident was identified from the outset as a child protection matter, the police response was invariably good. The constabulary responded promptly, engaged children and their families well, conducted good-quality investigations, pursued evidence, and worked with other agencies to protect children and ensure their needs were met. For example:

- A 13-year-old girl was having a sexual relationship with a 20-year-old man. A detective identified the girl as a potential victim of sexual abuse, arranged for specially trained officers to interview the family, provided them with some immediate advice and reassurance, quickly involved children's social care services and organised a medical examination at the SARC. The man was arrested promptly, and appropriate bail conditions were imposed that took into account the risk he posed to other children.
- A 12-year-old boy was the victim of assaults perpetrated by his mother. The assaults were reported to police by an aunt. The boy was very distressed and had started to run away from home to escape the violence. The child's needs were carefully considered in consultation with him, his aunt and his mother. He was interviewed by a specially trained police officer and social worker. His mother was arrested for child cruelty and later convicted at court. The child remained in the care of his aunt

⁷ An assessment of the cases is included throughout the report and in section 7. The case types are listed in Annex A.

and the family received ongoing support. His mother was referred to an alcohol treatment programme.

Inspectors also found that the constabulary's response to concerns about those who pose a risk to children was, in most cases, good. Officers undertook prompt and thorough enquiries; searched for suspects; used their power to arrest those who failed to keep to their registration requirements or other conditions (for example, prohibiting contact with children), and worked with other agencies on plans to protect children.

Although the inspection team generally found that the constabulary thought about how best to safeguard children when cases of child abuse were reported to them, it did not always do enough to identify and apprehend the suspects and assess the risk they could pose to other vulnerable people, particularly in cases of child sexual exploitation. In two of the six self-assessed cases, the suspects were not pursued because of the reluctance of the child to support a prosecution. This should not have prevented officers identifying the likely offender, obtaining intelligence and determining the risk they could pose to other children. For example, one case examined involved a 13-year-old girl who had sent intimate images of herself to two men. Although safeguarding measures were put in place for the girl, officers did not make sufficiently thorough enquiries – for example, through media analysis – to attempt to identify the men.

We recommend that Norfolk Constabulary takes immediate action to improve the effectiveness of action plans for identifying, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators involved in child sexual exploitation.

In most cases, Norfolk Constabulary deals in a timely way with child protection investigations. However, inspectors found that there were three significant areas causing unacceptable delays:

- Analysis of computers and other media. The high-tech crime unit (HTCU) provides a service for both Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies. Delays in media analysis from suspects' computers were reported as between 12 and 16 weeks, with 68 cases pending at the time of the inspection. Norfolk Constabulary has a policy for prioritising cases in the HTCU by way of risk assessment. Inspectors saw some evidence of this policy in practice but the unit requires greater oversight and supervision from the constabulary to reduce delays and manage the large volume of cases requiring analysis, more efficiently.
- Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decisions. On the whole, prosecutions were proceeded with promptly, but inspectors found unacceptable delays in some cases sent to the CPS for review. The chief constable has been in regular discussion with the Chief Crown Prosecutor and as a result, changes have been made. There is still work to be done to meet the

demand and improve timeliness, but the constabulary and the CPS are working together to achieve this.

- Disclosure of relevant information from Norfolk children's social care service. An investigation may often need information about a child held by another agency. There are long delays in obtaining this information from children's social care services. A new information sharing protocol, introduced recently, may help to resolve this, but the constabulary will want to monitor compliance closely.

Delays are not in the best interests of either the child, who is not able to put the incident behind them, or the suspect, who may be on bail or in custody. When delays occur in all three areas (the HTCUs; decisions from the CPS; and disclosure of information from children's social care services), the length of time between the crime report and a criminal justice outcome can be considerable. In one case, a 15-year-old girl reported that her father had been sexually abusing her for a number of years. Safeguarding measures were put in place to protect the girl and her younger siblings. The father was arrested and given bail conditions. This case was reported in November 2013 and her father's computer was seized and submitted for analysis. The case was submitted for CPS advice in early January 2014. The computer analysis was not completed until March 2014. The investigating officer recorded in April 2014 that he was still waiting for a decision whether to prosecute.

We recommend that Norfolk Constabulary takes immediate steps to reduce the timescales for analysis in the high-tech crime unit.

We recommend that, within three months, Norfolk Constabulary monitors compliance with the recently introduced information sharing protocol to address the delays in the exchange of information between the constabulary and Norfolk County Council.

We recommend that within three months, Norfolk Constabulary identifies and reviews all child abuse investigation cases that have taken more than three months to investigate from the first report, ensures that each child is supported and safeguarded, and puts in place appropriate measures to manage the risk posed by suspects.

Inspectors found that staff in the constabulary control room were alert to risk and vulnerability and knew what to do when they received a report about a vulnerable child. A training programme developed by supervisors keeps staff regularly updated. This programme is supported by a comprehensive performance framework which assesses the quality of their work and involves regular feedback to improve the service provided. They assessed potential risk, harm and threat to the child and generally, for example, passed on relevant information to officers attending the scene of a domestic incident report. However, in all the domestic incidents examined by inspectors, officers attended without knowing whether or not there was a child protection plan in

place at the address. The child abuse investigation system holds important information, including whether concerns about a child have been sufficiently serious for a multi-agency child protection plan to have been put in place. Control room supervisors have access to the system and it is important that all information is passed to officers if there is a child at risk.

We recommend that, within six months, Norfolk Constabulary ensures that all officers and staff dealing with any concern about children know whether a child protection plan is in place, and that this information informs their risk assessment.

Eight of the 30 self-assessed cases involved some form of domestic abuse even though, in three of the cases, the matter had come to the attention of the police for some other concern. Generally, police attending an incident of domestic abuse checked that children were safe and well and ensured their immediate safety. In several cases where the children were very young, or not present at the address, the decision not to speak to them was properly thought through and recorded. The demeanour of the child was recorded in most cases. However, records varied in detail from case to case. More information to understand the child or young person's perspective would provide a better assessment of their needs.

There was some good multi-agency practice in cases of domestic abuse where children were at risk of harm, such as the support for a woman who had retracted her complaint after her violent ex-partner had threatened to harm her. The threats were taken very seriously because he had recently been released from prison for a previous assault on her. The risk was assessed as high, and the offender pursued. Police officers contacted children's social care services because they were worried about the mother and her child. Safety measures were put in place and they were found alternative accommodation and provided with support.

Generally, concerns about children were noted and information properly recorded and passed on to children's social care and other services. The volume of information passed on in this way was considerable and there was little differentiation between minor and more serious concerns. In more serious cases, attention should have been drawn to the concern identified in the records to ensure that it was picked up by receiving agencies. Some cases should also have been followed up to establish if concerns were being addressed by the relevant agency and, when necessary, an inter-agency meeting arranged by the police.

Inspectors also considered that some referrals from police to children's social care services were lacking in important information and failing to identify the level of concern clearly enough. The underlying assumption appears to have been that the concern would be picked up somewhere else in the system, or that, as the child was in another agency's care, the child would be safeguarded.

As only those incidents initially assessed as being medium or high risk were assessed in depth, often police officers did not identify the long-term risks caused by persistent low-level abuse, such as the continuous exposure to domestic aggression. For example, police were called seven times to disturbances at the home of one family in a 12-month period. Individually, none of the incidents appeared to be high risk, but cumulatively the effects on the child were considerable. Police officers completed a risk assessment for each incident and sent it to the MASH and to children's social care services, but they did not take account of previous incidents. It was not until the father started to strike the child's mother that police action properly addressed the child's needs. It took a further violent incident, resulting in a short period in prison, before agencies came together to formulate a plan to safeguard the child, 18 months after the police were called to the first incident.

Co-ordination and joint working within Norfolk Constabulary and with other agencies was not sufficiently, or consistently, robust. As a result, some children were exposed to harm for long periods. In a number of domestic abuse cases, inspectors were concerned that the adult victim was the sole focus of multi-agency planning. There was little reference in records reviewed by inspectors to the best interests of children, or what was needed to protect or help them.

One case involved long-standing domestic abuse, when the mother of a 6-year-old boy entered into a new relationship. Over the years, there had been numerous reported assaults on the mother, and sometimes on her son, by both the step-father and the mother. Police had attended on many occasions, referrals had been made to children's social care services, and the boy had been placed on a child protection plan for a time. His mother had also requested support for her son for his emotional problems. He is now 14 years old, and the domestic abuse continues. In this and other cases, Norfolk Constabulary generally followed procedures, officers investigated crimes, made 35 referrals to children's social care services in 5 years, and attended case conferences. However, officers have not always spoken to this boy alone. Nor has there been a conscious effort to draw his story together, to allow a proper risk assessment and investigation to take place. Inspectors recognise that it is not just a police responsibility to protect and safeguard children, but in this case, officers should have done more to look at this situation through the eyes of this child.

The constabulary refers domestic abuses cases that are assessed as 'high risk' to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) for longer term safeguarding plans to be put in place. Inspectors found that there were few meaningful actions contained within the minutes of the MARACs reviewed. Some agencies did not attend consistently; nor did those officers and social workers who were working with or knew the relevant family. Meeting notes should clearly set out what action is currently being taken to protect children and what plans are in place to safeguard their welfare. The constabulary has formally raised poor attendance with the relevant agencies.

The inspection team concluded, overall, that there were a number of occasions when police officers and staff had failed to recognise the signs of obvious, continuing risks of harm or had failed to take action to safeguard children in domestic abuse cases.

We recommend that, within six months, Norfolk Constabulary takes steps to improve practice in cases of domestic abuse involving children. As a minimum, these should include:

- **improving staff awareness of the severe adverse effects of chronic domestic abuse on children;**
- **improving the information (history of abuse and assessments of risks and needs) passed to other agencies;**
- **improving the oversight of assessments and the provision of information to children's social care and other services;**
- **identifying the range of responses and action that the police can take;**
- **ensuring that multi-agency risk assessment conferences record what safeguarding action has been taken and the actions planned for the future; and**
- **ensuring that when police officers and staff recognise a risk and consider that other agencies are failing to play their parts, they raise that issue with managers to ensure that the risk is properly addressed. Staff should know how to escalate their concerns.**

The Norfolk MASH enables agencies to respond promptly to any immediate safeguarding concerns, and there were good examples of this taking place. For example, following a report by a hospital doctor about injuries to a 6-week-old baby, social workers and police immediately went to the hospital. They held a meeting with medical specialists and put protective plans in place. These included the arrest of the father who was charged and later admitted at court that he had caused the injuries.

It is a very serious step to remove a child from his or her family by way of police protection.⁸ There were three cases in the sample of cases assessed by the

⁸ Section 46(1) of the Children Act 1989 (available from <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents>) empowers a police officer, who has reasonable cause to believe that a child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, (a) to remove the child to suitable accommodation and keep him/her there or (b) to take such steps as are reasonable to ensure that the child's removal from any hospital, or other place, in which he/she is then being accommodated is prevented.

constabulary that resulted in children being taken into police protection. In two cases, the use of police protection was appropriate, and follow-up action was taken in accordance with statutory guidance. Police protection should not have been used in the third self-assessed case because the child was safe at school, his father was in police custody and social workers had attended to remove the child. The constabulary correctly identified (through the self-assessment) that children's social care services should have applied to a court for an Emergency Protection Order.⁹ The recording of information and decisions about police protection was sparse and inconsistent. The inspection team found that management oversight, the recording and retention of relevant documentation, and the auditing of the effective use of police protection all require improvement.

We recommend that, within three months, Norfolk Constabulary:

- **improves staff awareness of the importance of recording information when a child is removed using police protection powers;**
- **issues guidance to officers and staff on the management and retention of police protection documentation; and**
- **introduces a periodic monitoring and auditing process to make sure that police powers are being used correctly and in the best interests of the child.**

Of the 30 self-assessed cases, half involved adolescents or teenagers and there were very good examples of police providing support. Inspectors were particularly impressed with the commitment of the constabulary to engaging with children and young people, especially that demonstrated by school-based officers. At the time of the inspection, there were ten dedicated safer school officers working full-time in nine secondary schools across Norfolk. There were also plans to provide support to the other 42 secondary schools in the county through a nominated neighbourhood-based police constable or police community support officer based in each school on one day each week.

Inspectors found that school-based officers were alert and responsive to risk. For example, concerns were raised about a pupil who was taking medication for depression and thought to be using cannabis. The officer immediately made the appropriate referrals and also contacted the Matthew Project.¹⁰ A plan to

⁹ Under section 44 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority can apply for an Emergency Protection Order where there are reasonable grounds for believing there is a risk of significant harm to a child.

¹⁰ The Matthew Project is a charity based in Norfolk and Suffolk working in innovative ways with adults, young people and communities affected by drugs and alcohol.

support the child was quickly put in place involving the school, the child's family and the appropriate agencies.

The constabulary's public protection units are responsible for the management of registered sex offenders within the Norfolk Constabulary force area. Plans to manage the risk are generally kept on a national database, 'Visor', which is not readily accessible to control room staff responsible for the deployment of officers to an incident. Consequently, officers attending an address may not be fully aware either of the possible presence of a sex offender, or of any plans in place to manage risk. This can hamper both the officers' responses and the constabulary's ability to manage risk.

Overall, however, multi-agency public protection arrangements¹¹ for individuals who pose a serious risk of harm to the public were judged to be effective, with clear, systematic information-sharing and inter-agency plans to manage risk.

We recommend that Norfolk Constabulary takes steps to ensure that officers attending incidents have access to relevant information about registered sex offenders or families at risk, including information on safeguarding and risk management plans.

The case records examined by inspectors demonstrated that officers and staff working in police custody units in Norfolk knew how to care for detained children and young people. Inspectors found that an arrest and detention of a child or young person occurred only when necessary; the risk assessment identified safeguarding concerns; and the investigation had been prioritised and progressed to ensure that there were no undue delays. Inspectors found that the majority of custody records examined contained the relevant information.

In those cases where bail had been refused for children under 17 years of age charged with criminal offences, alternative accommodation was found in the majority of cases. There were two cases where the records examined contained insufficient detail of the measures taken or the reason for the child remaining in police detention overnight.

Inspectors found good practice in the constabulary when working with children and young people who go missing from home. There was a clear focus on the child and family. Efforts were made to understand why the child might be running away and support was provided at the earliest opportunity. Officers always conducted checks to ensure that children were safe and well on their return. They understood that children and young people might not always be

¹¹ The Criminal Justice and Courts Services Act 2000 requires the police and probation services to act jointly as the 'Responsible Authority' and make arrangements to assess the level of risk individuals pose and manage individuals who may cause serious harm to the public. These arrangements are known as multi-agency public protection arrangements. The Criminal Justice Act 2003 includes Her Majesty's Prison Service as a 'Responsible Authority' and places a duty on other agencies to co-operate with the named authorities.

happy to talk to them, and there were examples of well thought through decisions to work through other agencies such as the Rose Project.¹² Staff from the Rose Project often conducted further 'return to home interviews' either on the second occasion when a child had gone missing, or on the first occasion if the child had been assessed as 'at risk'. Five reports were examined by inspectors, all on children who had been reported missing more than twice. All were referred to the Rose Project as soon as they went missing so that support workers could assist officers with locating and then supporting them.

There are 520 'looked after children'¹³ from other local authority areas currently living in Norfolk, many accommodated in private residential care homes. These children are likely to be vulnerable; a number may have a history of going missing and may be at risk of sexual or other exploitation. At present, Norfolk Constabulary is not always informed when a child or young person has been placed in the area. Consequently, the constabulary may have insufficient information available to safeguard these children and conduct a thorough investigation if they are reported missing or officers are called to a disturbance at the home. In addition, inspectors found little information on local constabulary intelligence systems about children placed in Norfolk from other areas and who may be at risk of sexual exploitation, or who may pose a risk to others. At the time of the inspection, the constabulary's missing person co-ordinator was developing a protocol with care homes with a view to working more effectively with them.

Inspectors found good practice in the care of children detained for their own protection. Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 allows a police officer to remove an apparently mentally disordered person from a public place to a place of safety. Although a 'place of safety' can include a police custody suite, it is preferable for the person to be taken directly to health facilities, such as a hospital. In Norfolk, six children were detained within a 9-month period and all were immediately taken to health facilities. The constabulary assesses all arrests of children and young people when the arrested child is considered to have mental health difficulties. The circumstances are reviewed the following day and the information is regularly monitored, at both constabulary and multi-agency levels, to identify problems and to develop services.

¹² The Reaching Out on Sexual Exploitation (ROSE) project is an outreach and one-to-one service aimed at helping young people at risk of exploitation through online sex work. The project was launched by the Magdalene Group, a Norwich-based charity working to prevent and support people affected by sexual exploitation.

¹³ Local authorities have specific responsibilities and duties towards children who are being looked after or who have previously been looked after. A child may be 'looked after' by a local authority if his or her parent(s) or a person with parental responsibility and rights to look after that child is unable to do so or has neglected the child. The term 'looked after children' also includes those who have committed an offence.

6. Findings: Leadership, management and governance

The police and crime plan¹⁴ for Norfolk has three priorities, and the most relevant for this inspection is to:

“Reduce vulnerability, promote equality and support victims.”

The plan also sets the constabulary’s objectives, which include an increase in detection rates for serious sexual offences, violence and domestic abuse; an increase in public satisfaction; a reduction in the number of priority crimes and a reduction in re-offending of the most prolific offenders. The constabulary also has a comprehensive child protection action plan. Police officers and staff are aware of the importance of child protection and of the vulnerability of children who have been affected by domestic abuse. There is a strong emphasis on partnership working and a focus on the needs of victims. The recommendations in this report will support the attainment of this objective.

Inspectors found clear evidence of visible leadership from the chief constable and the chief officer team on child protection. Staff at all levels expressed appreciation for this, and were enthusiastic about the changes to the public protection structure and the recent pace of change. The constabulary was viewed by partners as influential, open, forward-thinking and an organisation that is striving to learn and improve for the benefit of children. There was good strategic engagement between senior officers from the constabulary and senior staff from local agencies. The constabulary was held in high regard by the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board.

The constabulary has invested significantly in child protection (along with the wider protection of vulnerable people).

Staff across the police force area working in the various child protection and public protection teams were committed, enthusiastic, knowledgeable and focused on protecting children and holding offenders to account. However, the quality of practice varied across specialist and safer neighbourhood teams, and patrol officers.¹⁵

Most police officers and staff had strong working relationships with local partners and multi-agency meetings were held to co-ordinate efforts. The cases

¹⁴ The Norfolk police and crime plan for 2013-17 is available from <http://www.norfolk-pcc.gov.uk/documents/key-documents/police-and-crime-plan/PCC%20Police%20and%20Crime%20Plan.pdf>

¹⁵ Safer neighbourhood team patrol officers respond to 999 and priority calls and operate from 18 patrol bases across the county. Norfolk Constabulary has 49 teams working with local people and partners to identify and deal with issues of concern.

reviewed showed that managers clearly understood and supported inter-agency working between practitioners. There are a number of joint teams and other inter-agency arrangements that work well. However, there were some tensions between partners associated with the current referral process in the MASH. Partner agencies report that there are too many referrals from the police to children's social care that fall below the level at which a social care assessment is required. At the time of the inspection, there had been a 31 percent increase in police referrals in a 3-month period (3,224 compared with 1,774 between January and March 2013). A review of the referral arrangements had recently been commissioned and would be overseen by the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board.

Staff in specialist units, such as those working in child abuse or child sexual exploitation units, are generally well-trained for their roles. However, inspectors were told there was a backlog for initial interview training. Response teams, safer neighbourhood teams and the CID are less well trained in child protection work and this has been slow to progress. Training (using a bespoke e-learning module) had recently been prioritised, and inspectors were encouraged by the planned training programme. This will need to be supplemented by other learning methods, including inter-agency learning.

Norfolk Constabulary regularly reviews its work, seeking and implementing improvements. This was demonstrated by its review of child abuse investigations and subsequent changes to the way cases are allocated (by risk rather than crime type). The constabulary had also reviewed safeguarding arrangements and increased resources for child protection as a result.

Inspectors found that the performance framework in place to monitor and evaluate outcomes for children and improve practice was under-developed. The constabulary could report on the volume of activity, such as the number of referrals to children's social care services, but there was little information on outcomes, the quality of service provided or the views and experience of children and families. Lack of information on these matters limits the ability of the constabulary and Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board to meet needs and improve services and outcomes for children. At the time of the inspection, the constabulary was in the process of developing performance measures, analytical products and quality assurance processes for vulnerability, including for child protection.

The constabulary had an adequate number of purpose-built interview suites that were suitable for children. SARC services were available to children aged 13 and over, and children could refer themselves. A child advocate also provides a service to children under 16 years.

While some agencies were identifying and referring children who may be at risk of sexual exploitation, there is more to be done to improve awareness. A co-ordinated multi-agency response to child sexual exploitation was in the early stages of development and the constabulary was taking the lead on tackling

child sexual exploitation across partner agencies. A sub-group addressing the problem had been reinvigorated and the constabulary was bringing real pace and purpose to the work. The constabulary and children's social care services had formed a team and children were being identified and protected much sooner than had previously been the case. The constabulary had also commissioned work on a profile of child sexual exploitation across Norfolk to understand better the nature and scale of the problem in relation to children at risk and those committing offences against children.

Although practice is not, as yet, consistent across all the elements of this inspection, the constabulary has given considerable attention to listening to and communicating with children. It has introduced training for those officers most likely to have significant contact with children and produced a guide for all staff on how to communicate effectively with children. Senior staff have also promoted the message that this is an important aspect of safeguarding children well. Practice in respect of children and young people held in police cells was positive, demonstrating that the constabulary properly considers the needs of children in their care.

7. Findings: The overall effectiveness of the constabulary and its response to children who need help and protection

Norfolk Constabulary has a strong commitment to child protection with a clear set of priorities and plans that support it.

The inspection team noted the full engagement of the constabulary with the self-assessment exercise. Most of the case assessments completed by the constabulary were thoughtful, analytical, detailed and extensive; few were superficial. Although there were some differences between the constabulary's assessments and those of the inspectors, similar strengths and weaknesses were identified. The inspection team concluded that the constabulary was in a good position to learn from these inspection findings and implement the recommendations.

Inspectors found much good practice, but some weaknesses, which could affect the treatment of children. Practice is stronger when, from the outset, the matter is clearly one of child protection, when a perpetrator is a known sex or violent offender, or when the case is managed by a specialist unit. When police officers engage well with children, directly or through other agencies working as intermediaries, outcomes are better and children's trust is gained.

The constabulary has clearly made efforts to improve the ability of frontline staff to recognise that children may be at risk of abuse or neglect, but knowledge and

skills were variable and more still needs to be done to increase awareness and understanding.

Practice in relation to children involved in long-term and high-risk domestic abuse incidents was inconsistent. Arrangements need a greater focus on the impact on the child as well as the adult victim.

Leadership of the constabulary is strong. Demonstrable progress has been made to align resources to service priorities – for example, with increased resources for the teams protecting vulnerable people, and the development of work on child sexual exploitation. Focus now needs to be given to tackling the backlog of cases awaiting analysis in the high-tech crime unit, improving access to information within the constabulary, and developing performance information for managers with an outcome focus.

The constabulary, at all levels, has positive and meaningful relationships with partner agencies and the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board. There is a clear commitment to continuous improvement and development. The review of the MASH is a positive step and further evidence of the desire to improve.

8. Recommendations

Immediately

We recommend that Norfolk Constabulary:

- takes immediate action to improve the effectiveness of action plans for identifying, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators involved in child sexual exploitation; and
- takes immediate steps to reduce the timescales for analysis in the high-tech crime unit.

Within three months

We recommend that Norfolk Constabulary:

- monitors compliance with the recently introduced information sharing protocol to address the delays in the exchange of information between the constabulary and Norfolk County Council;
- identifies and reviews all child abuse investigation cases that have taken more than three months to investigate from the first report, ensures that each child is supported and safeguarded, and puts in place appropriate measures to manage the risk posed by suspects.

We recommend that Norfolk Constabulary:

- improves staff awareness of the importance of recording information when a child is removed using police protection powers;
- issues guidance to officers and staff on the management and retention of police protection documentation;
- introduces a periodic monitoring and auditing process to make sure that police powers are being used correctly, and in the best interest of the child; and
- ensures that officers attending incidents have access to relevant information about registered sex offenders or families 'at risk', including information on safeguarding and risk management plans.

Within six months

We recommend that Norfolk Constabulary:

- ensures that all officers and staff dealing with any concern about children know whether a child protection plan is in place, and that this information informs their risk assessment.

We recommend that Norfolk Constabulary takes steps to improve practice in cases of domestic abuse involving children. As a minimum, these should include:

- improving staff awareness of the severe adverse effect of chronic domestic abuse on children;
- improving the information (history of abuse and assessments of risks and needs) passed to other agencies;
- improving the oversight of assessments and the provision of information to children's social care and other services;
- identifying the range of responses and action that the police can take;
- ensuring that multi-agency risk assessment conferences record what safeguarding action has been taken and the actions planned for the future, and;
- ensuring that when police officers and staff recognise a risk and consider that other agencies are failing to play their parts, they raise that issue with managers to ensure that the risk is properly addressed. Staff should know how to escalate their concerns.

9. Next steps

Within six weeks of the publication of this report, HMIC will require an update from Norfolk Constabulary of the action being taken to respond to the recommendations that should be acted upon immediately.

Norfolk Constabulary should also provide an action plan within six weeks to specify how it intends to respond to the other recommendations made in this report.

Subject to the responses received, HMIC will re-visit the constabulary no later than six months after the publication of this report to assess how it is managing the implementation of all of the recommendations.

Annex A

Child protection inspection methodology

Objectives

The objectives of the inspection are:

- to assess how effectively police forces safeguard children and young people at risk;
- to make recommendations to police forces for improving child protection practice;
- to highlight effective practice in child protection work; and
- to drive improvements in forces' child protection practices.

The expectations of agencies are set out in the statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of Children*¹⁶, published in March 2013. The specific police roles set out in the guidance are:

- the identification of children who might be at risk from abuse and neglect;
- investigation of alleged offences against children;
- inter-agency working and information-sharing to protect children; and
- the exercise of emergency powers to protect children.

These areas of practice are the focus of the inspection.

Inspection approach

Inspections focused on the experience of and outcomes for the child following the child's journey through child protection and criminal investigation processes. They assessed how well the service has helped and protected children and investigated alleged criminal acts, taking account of, but not measuring compliance with, policies and guidance.

¹⁶ *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, HM Government, March 2013. Available from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281368/Working_together_to_safeguard_children.pdf

The inspections considered how the arrangements for protecting children, and the leadership and management of the police service, contributed to and supported effective practice on the ground. The team considered how well management responsibilities for child protection, as set out in statutory guidance, were met.

Methods

- Self-assessment – practice, and management and leadership.
- Case inspections.
- Discussions with staff from within the police and from other agencies.
- Examination of reports on significant case reviews or other serious cases.
- Examination of service statistics, reports, policies and other relevant written materials.

The purpose of the self-assessment is to:

- raise awareness within the service about the strengths and weaknesses of current practice (this formed the basis of discussions with HMIC); and
- serve as a driver and benchmark for future service improvements.

Self-assessment and case inspection

In consultation with police services the following areas of practice have been identified for scrutiny:

- domestic abuse;
- incidents where police officers and staff identify children in need of help and protection, e.g., children being neglected;
- information-sharing and discussions regarding children potentially at risk of harm;
- the exercise of powers of police protection under section 46 of the Children Act 1989 (taking children into a 'place of safety');
- the completion of section 47 Children Act 1989 enquiries, including both those of a criminal nature and those of a non-criminal nature (section 47 enquiries are those relating to a child 'in need' rather than a child 'at risk');
- sex offender management;

- the management of missing children;
- child sexual exploitation;
- the detention of children and young people in police custody.

Below is a breakdown of the type of self-assessed cases we examined in Norfolk Constabulary.

Type of case	Number of cases
Child protection enquiry (s. 47)	5
Domestic abuse	5
General concerns with a child where a referral to children's social care services was made.	5
Sex offender enquiry	3
Missing children	3
At risk of sexual exploitation	3
On-line sexual abuse	3
Child in custody	3

Annex B

Glossary

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)	independent and principal prosecuting authority in England and Wales, established in 1986. The CPS is responsible for advising the police on cases for possible prosecution; reviewing cases submitted by the police; determining any charges in more serious or complex cases and preparing and presenting cases for both magistrates and the higher courts, including the Crown Court and the Court of Appeal.
child protection plan	written record for parents, carers and professionals which identifies specific concerns about a child and assesses the likelihood of a child suffering harm. Each plan sets out what work needs to be done to protect a child from harm, by when and who is responsible for that work. A child is no longer subject to a protection plan when it is judged that he or she is not believed to be suffering or at risk of suffering harm.
high-tech crime unit	police computer crimes unit that undertakes examination and retrieval of evidence or intelligence from computers, computer-related media and other digital devices.
multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)	locally-held meeting where statutory and voluntary agency representatives come together and share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse. Any agency can refer an adult or child whom they believe to be at high risk of harm. The aim of the meeting is to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase an adult or child's safety, health and well-being. The agencies that attend will vary but are likely to include, for example: the police, probation, children's, health and housing services. There are over 250 currently in operation across England and Wales.

multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)	locally-held meetings that act as a single point of contact for all safeguarding concerns and bring together a range of professionals from the police and other services that have contact with children, young people and families. The aim of the meetings is to share information and make the best possible use of their combined knowledge to keep children safe from harm.
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED)	non-ministerial department, independent of government, that regulates and inspects schools, colleges, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, education and training in prisons and other secure establishments, and the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service. It also assesses children's services in local areas, and inspects services for looked-after children, safeguarding and child protection. Ofsted reports directly to Parliament.
partner agencies	public sector entities, such as those concerned with health, education, social services and the management of offenders, which from time to time work with the police to attain their common or complementary objectives
police and crime commissioner (PCC)	elected entity for a police area, established under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, responsible for securing the maintenance of the police force for that area and securing that the police force is efficient and effective; holds the relevant chief constable to account for the policing of the area; establishes the budget and police and crime plan for the police force; appoints and may, after due process, remove the chief constable from office

sexual assault referral centre (SARC)	specialist centre providing examinations, health care and other support for victims of sexual assault. The centres offer immediate medical services and care to anyone who has been sexually assaulted, regardless of whether they wish to report an assault. They are run in partnership between police, health and voluntary services.
registered sex offenders	a person required to provide his details to the police because he has been convicted or cautioned for a sexual offence as set out in Schedule 3 to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, or because he has otherwise triggered the notification requirements (for example, by being made subject to a sexual offences prevention order); as well as personal details, a registered individual must provide the police with details about his movements, for example he must tell the police if he is going abroad and, if homeless, where he can be found; registered details may be accessed by the police, probation and prison service.