

# National Child Protection Inspections

South Yorkshire Police  
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## Foreword

All children 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 to 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 well, the police service must undertake all its core duties to a high standard. Police officers must talk with children, listen to them and understand their fears and concerns. The police must also work well with other agencies to ensure that 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 (PCC) 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 services in South Yorkshire Police, which took place in May 2014. The report comprises nine chapters in three main parts. The first part provides information on the background to the inspection and to South Yorkshire Police. 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 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 experiences of children 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 case audits<sup>1</sup> carried out by the force and case audits and interviews with police officers and staff and representatives from partner agencies, conducted by HMIC.

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<sup>1</sup> Details of how we conduct these inspections can be found at Annex A.

### 3. Context for the force

South Yorkshire police has approximately 5,025 staff. The work force is made up of:

- 2,722 police officers
- 1,887 police staff
- 334 police community support officers<sup>2</sup>

The force provides policing services to a population of around 1.3 million. Approximately 22.3 percent of the population is under 19 years of age.

South Yorkshire Police is divided into four geographically based districts, each of which shares a boundary with a local authority. The force covers an area of 600 square miles across four local authority areas:

- Barnsley
- Doncaster
- Rotherham
- Sheffield.

Sheffield is the major city in the force area and the fourth largest in England, with a population of approximately 551,800. Other significant towns within the force area are Doncaster with a population of 302,402, Barnsley with a population of 233,671 and Rotherham with a population of 257,600.

The four local authorities are responsible for child protection within their boundaries. There are four separate local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs)<sup>3</sup> in the force area, one in each local authority administrative area.

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<sup>2</sup> *Police workforce, England and Wales, 31 March 2014*. Home Office, [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2014](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2014)

<sup>3</sup> 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.

The most recent Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills judgments for each of the local authorities are set out below.

Local authority	Judgment	Date
Barnsley	requires improvement	June 2014
Doncaster	inadequate	October 2012
Rotherham	adequate	July 2012
Sheffield	requires improvement	January 2014

In South Yorkshire Police, public protection services are led by a detective superintendent, supported by a detective chief inspector and senior police staff member. The detective superintendent lead is a senior investigating officer who reports to a detective chief superintendent and assistant chief constable, responsible for protective services. They are responsible for public protection units based in each of the four districts, consisting of child abuse investigation teams, child sexual exploitation teams, domestic abuse and adult protection teams.

They are also responsible for the central public protection unit which includes:

- a rape investigation team;
- a child sexual exploitation team;
- ViSOR<sup>4</sup> teams;
- multi-agency public protection arrangements<sup>5</sup>; and
- multi-agency risk assessment conference coordination<sup>6</sup>.

Recently the force introduced a central referral unit (CRU) where, in cases of child protection and domestic abuse, referrals from police officers, children's

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<sup>4</sup> The Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR) is a national information technology system for the management of people who pose a serious risk of harm to the public.

<sup>5</sup> The Criminal Justice and Court 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.

<sup>6</sup> Known as MARAC, these are locally-held meetings where statutory and voluntary agency representatives come together and share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse. The aim of the meetings is to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase an adult or child's safety, health and well-being.

social care services and other agencies are sent. The unit assesses these cases and then allocates them for action.

At the time of the inspection, in May 2014, the force was actively negotiating with partner agencies to establish multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH)<sup>7</sup> across the force area. Although no hubs were in place at that time, plans were being considered for such arrangements to be established in Rotherham and Doncaster.

## 4. The police role in child protection

Under the Children Act 1989, the police service, working with partner agencies such as local authority children's social care services, health services and education services, is 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<sup>8</sup>. The police are duty bound to refer to the local authority those children in need they find in the course of their work<sup>9</sup>. Government guidance<sup>10</sup> outlines how these duties and responsibilities should be exercised.

The specified 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
- the exercise of emergency powers to protect children.

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<sup>7</sup> This is an entity in which public sector organisations with common or aligned responsibilities in relation to the safety of vulnerable people work; the hubs comprise staff from organisations such as the police and local authority social services; they work alongside one another, sharing information and co-ordinating activities to help protect the most vulnerable children and adults from harm, neglect and abuse.

<sup>8</sup> Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> *Working Together to Safeguard Children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, HM Government, March 2013.

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 on 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 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 who manage registered sex offenders and dangerous people living in communities. They must visit sex offenders regularly, establish the nature of risk these offenders currently pose and put in place any necessary measures to mitigate that risk.

To ensure that agencies co-operate to keep children safe and look after their welfare, each local authority must establish an LSCB. The four LSCBs in the South Yorkshire Police area are made up of senior representatives from all agencies (including the police). They promote safeguarding activities, ensure that the protection of children remains a high priority across their area, and 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, South Yorkshire Police audited 26 cases in accordance with the criteria provided by HMIC. Although the force was not asked to rate each of the 26 self-assessed cases individually, practice was viewed as good by the force assessors in all of the cases, and very good in some. Inspectors reviewed all 26 cases that had been self-assessed. They found 17 cases to be good, 6 adequate, 2 inadequate and 1 requiring improvement<sup>11</sup>. Inspectors identified more practice weaknesses than the self-assessors. Inspectors selected and examined a further 55 cases where children were identified as being at risk. Twenty were assessed as good, 14 as adequate, 20 as inadequate and 1 as poor.

### **Initial contact**

Across the range of child protection cases we examined, the police force responded quickly to specific and clear concerns raised about children. Officers were prompt in undertaking a range of preliminary tasks, such as ensuring the immediate safety of children, checking on suspects and making an assessment about how best to proceed, when the concern was clearly defined as a child

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<sup>11</sup> The case types and inspection methodology are set out in Annex A.



protection matter. There were examples of officers identifying and acting on risk – for example, by recognising that children might be at risk from a dangerous dog, or by conducting more searching enquiries in cases when there were children involved.

Inspectors examined several incidents, however, where officers did not attend immediately. There were two incidents where the delay was unacceptable. One concerned a 14-year-old boy who had called police because his father was assaulting him. Two days later, he had still not been seen by police to check on his welfare. In the other case, a woman called the police and said that her husband had threatened to hit her, and that he had made the threat in front of her children. Although the police record of the incident indicated that there was a history of domestic abuse at the address, the woman had still not been seen several days later. The force appreciated that delays had taken place but no action was apparently taken to remedy the situation.

When further action was necessary – for example, a joint interview with children's social care services or a medical examination – this was organised promptly. On the whole, officers undertook prompt and thorough enquiries, searched for suspects and used their power to arrest when necessary. In most of the cases we examined, they were quick to interview suspects and also to take further action to protect children. In 5 of the 16 cases we examined that related to sexual exploitation and missing children, however, officers were slower to follow up action. For example, inspectors saw 2 cases of 13 and 14-year-old girls who were frequent runaways: there was no record of efforts made to look more deeply into their behaviour patterns, the places they frequented or the people they might be meeting. This meant that the risk to these girls remained high for considerable periods of time without appropriate action being taken.

Officers were sensitive during initial contact and in interviews with children and families where a young child had alleged a sexual assault. Their investigation usually involved prior discussions with others in the child's network such as a parent, social worker or school staff to determine the best approach. They considered the age and development of the child plus any special needs. Officers engaged well with the children, sometimes taking the first steps through an intermediary and with the support of the parents. Careful attention to this first stage had paid dividends in building rapport with children and obtaining good evidence to support prosecutions.

For the most part, police attending an incident of domestic abuse checked that a child was safe and well and ensured their immediate safety. However, the behaviour of a child was often not recorded. A child's demeanour, especially in those cases where he or she is too young to speak to officers, or where to do so with a parent present might present a risk, provides important information about the effect of an incident on the child. This should inform the initial assessment of a child's need and whether a referral to children's social care services is necessary.

**We recommend that, within three months, South Yorkshire Police ensures that officers always record their observations of a child's behaviour in domestic abuse incident records, so that a better assessment of a child's needs can be made.**

**We recommend that, within six months, South Yorkshire Police ensures that staff training on safeguarding and protecting children highlights how important it is to understand and assess the implications of a child's behaviour when considering the risk to that child.**

**We recommend that South Yorkshire Police immediately ensures that there are procedures in place to escalate any concerns about incidents involving children at risk if, for whatever reason, police have been delayed in attending the incident or alleged crime.**

## **Assessment and help**

The CRU is the focal point for information exchange in cases of child protection and domestic abuse. The referral unit manages large volumes of information and, for the most part, processes it quickly and efficiently, but the unit's staff work Monday to Friday only. Specialist officers in public protection units reported backlogs in work due to the volume of referrals received from the CRU on Monday mornings. HMIC acknowledges that at the time of the inspection, the CRU had only recently been formed, and the force would be monitoring its progress.

In most of the cases examined by inspectors, there was follow-up action after the initial concern about a child was raised. In those cases where there was clear evidence of abuse or neglect against a child, the contact with children's social care services was good. There were many examples of agencies working well together – identifying risks, making plans to reduce them, and supporting children and families. Inspectors saw evidence that the police gave additional help and support to children and their parents, for example on internet safety and the dangers of posting inappropriate images on Facebook. They also provided information to people on other services for support and assistance, for example, specialist alcohol treatment services<sup>12</sup>.

Assessment and help were less apparent in cases where the record keeping (which included evidence for potential prosecutions) was not up to date or was limited in detail, or in cases concerning children who were detained in police custody. The case sample included ten allegations of physical assault upon children. In two of these cases, the parents admitted the allegations. Following this, the police and children's social care services assessed the family's circumstances and put a support plan in place. In the other eight cases, there

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<sup>12</sup> These services are provided by the statutory, independent and private sectors throughout England and Wales.

was either insufficient evidence to prosecute, or the child refused to provide evidence against the parent. In these cases, once the allegations were no longer being pursued as crimes, no further action was taken to protect or help the children.

Police practice was also weak when assessing and helping adolescent boys and girls. In two of the five cases where children were reported as missing, inspectors assessed police action as inadequate. In one case, staff from a children's care home reported that three young girls were at the flat of an older man. When officers went to the flat, some 11 hours later, they found the girls. Although officers recorded that a child abduction warning notice<sup>13</sup> should be considered to prevent the man having further contact with the girls, this had not been served one month later. In another case, a grandmother reported her 14-year-old grand-daughter missing after she failed to return from school. Police records indicated that the girl had been reported missing from home on 40 previous occasions and she was considered at risk of child sexual exploitation. However, on this occasion, officers recorded on a referral form<sup>14</sup> that the grandmother no longer had any control over her, and other agencies were unable to provide any further help to the family. Inspectors did not see any evidence of a safeguarding plan to protect this vulnerable girl.

Inspectors had significant concerns about how well police understood the needs of children in care homes in some areas, most notably in Doncaster. In one case, three young girls had been placed in a children's care home and police and children's social care services identified that, together, they were becoming involved in increasingly risky behaviour. A meeting took place with partner agencies and all agreed that the three girls needed to be separated immediately. It took a month for this to happen. However, in the interim, the plans that were put in place did not sufficiently protect the girls. During this period, the girls were reported missing on numerous occasions; they were found drunk and under the influence of drugs; they were arrested several times for offences such as criminal damage and assaulting care home staff; they were sexually assaulted by several men; and one was detained in police custody after charge for her 'own protection'. Although officers knew and were concerned that the girls continued to be at risk of child sexual exploitation, they reported a sense of helplessness and did not escalate their concerns to senior officers. There was also insufficient action taken against the men who were

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<sup>13</sup> A non-statutory notice issued when the police become aware of a child spending time with an adult who they believe could be harmful to them. A notice is used to disrupt an adult's association with a child or young person and warns an adult that association could result in arrest and prosecution.

<sup>14</sup> Locally, police officers must make a referral to children's social care services on an agreed form, providing information about their concerns. This referral must be made as soon as possible when any concern of significant harm becomes known.

exploiting the girls, such as investigating their behaviour, monitoring their activities or identifying other children who might be in contact with them - even though police knew that these men were likely to pose a risk to other children.

**We recommend that South Yorkshire Police immediately:**

- **undertakes a review of any concerns raised about children in care homes across the force area and brought to the attention of the police, to ensure that there are safeguarding plans in place for those children at risk of serious harm to themselves or to others;**
- **takes action to review its plans for identifying, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators involved in child sexual exploitation against children in care homes; and**
- **ensures that police officers know how to escalate their concerns about children at risk, and that senior officers raise these concerns with relevant agencies or, where appropriate, with the local safeguarding children board.**

**We recommend that, within six months, South Yorkshire Police:**

- **undertakes a review of the options and measures that can be considered to safeguard adolescents, and ensures that this informs future service improvements; and**
- **improves staff awareness of their responsibilities for protecting adolescent children – in particular, where cases are complex and require a multi-agency approach.**

## **Investigation**

There were some examples of very good investigations by the force with sensitive interviewing of children, the pursuit of evidence from a range of sources, and attention to detail in searches of homes and computers. In some cases of child sexual abuse, the police built a sensitive rapport with parents and helped them to approach their conversations with the child in ways that would allow the child to be supported by the family but not jeopardise any prospective criminal trial. Police visited the interview suite with families before holding interviews, and gave the child sufficient space between contacts with police to get used to the idea of telling their story. All the interviews were undertaken by specialist officers.

Inspectors also saw some good examples of work within the multi-agency joint investigation teams. The police and children's social care services routinely held discussions about investigations. They gathered and assessed information quickly, allowing for a prompt plan of action to safeguard children and prevent further harm by offenders. The co-location of agencies enabled joint visits to families to take place very quickly. We found, for example, that the force

provided support at an early stage and provided information to families on other appropriate services. However, this ease of contact led, on occasions, to planning discussions that were unstructured. As a result, it was not always clear what decisions had been made to protect children or what the main priorities were for the criminal investigations. This created a risk that critical actions may not have been completed within the time agreed, or completed at all.

We also identified some cases of concern. For example, police and social workers agreed, without consulting a medical practitioner, that eczema was the likely cause of vaginal bleeding of a four year old child, even though the child had made sexual allegations against a family member. In another case, police failed to investigate men who had allegedly given drugs to a girl in exchange for sex.

When allegations of child sexual exploitation were made, the depth of investigations varied. In one case, in the face of parental indifference and a long history of the child going missing, the police searched for the girl, pursued the men they believed were abusing her and brought together agencies to plan for the future. In other cases, children under 16 went missing frequently – 30 or 40 times was not uncommon – with little police activity and no search for suspects or follow-up action.

**We recommend that South Yorkshire Police immediately:**

- **ensures that joint investigation teams involve health expertise in their decision making, and that the health needs of children are considered in all cases where there are allegations of physical or sexual abuse; and**
- **ensures that decisions and actions, with timescales, are recorded for all discussions that are held by joint investigation teams.**

## **Decision making**

The police response was good when the concern was defined clearly as a child protection matter from the beginning. Referrals from other agencies were assessed promptly and the police considered what other support may be necessary. For example, a 16-year-old girl disclosed to her social worker that she was, and had been, in a sexual relationship with a much older man (living with his partner and with children of his own). The police quickly arranged a joint visit with children's social care services and sought information from other agencies. Although she refused to disclose any sexual activity to the police and declined additional help from a voluntary organisation, agencies identified the risks the girl faced and the potential risks that the man posed to other children. A support package was put in place taking account of the girl's wishes.

It is a very serious step to remove a child from his or her family and into police protection<sup>15</sup>. Inspectors found that officers were prompt in attending incidents where there were significant concerns about the safety of children, such as parents leaving children alone at home or intoxicated while looking after them. There was also an excellent response to a 14-year-old girl who was concerned that she was about to be taken abroad for a forced marriage. The police gathered information from other agencies and made appropriate contact with children's social care services before the decision was taken to remove the child to a place of safety. Inspectors examined seven cases of children being taken into police protection. They found that the police had considered the best interests of the child in every case. The police also took decisive action against those who posed a risk to children, for example, by immediately arresting offenders for child neglect or assault.

Police systems for recording incidents are cumbersome and not integrated with each other. Information is not always readily accessible because records are only held by the force for 13 months before being archived. As a result, officers do not always have access to all the information they need to make good decisions.

When officers attend an incident where there is concern for a child, as well as taking any necessary action to protect the child, they should complete a child notification form. This form outlines the incident, the risks to the child and any action taken. An incident may be minor and require no further police action, but the record is important because it enables patterns of abuse to be identified. Inspectors found cases where vital information had not been recorded. In one case, four children were living with chronic domestic abuse. Although there had been six previous incidents during the year, relevant child notification forms had not always been completed. As a result, information was not readily accessible to officers dealing with each incident. It was only when the abuse escalated to serious assaults that all the information was drawn together and the children's safety properly considered. By this time, a seven year old child had witnessed a serious assault on her mother.

Inspectors also noted a lack of supervision, which may have contributed to the poor recording of information in some cases.

Not all information available on police systems was gathered by officers when called to domestic abuse incidents involving children. Inspectors found that officers were not always undertaking routine information checks to identify

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<sup>15</sup> Section 46(1) of the Children Act 1989 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.

immediate safeguarding concerns. For example, a woman who was assaulted by her partner in their home with their children present told officers that this was the first time it had happened. However, when specialist officers researched the police systems the following day, they found that her partner had been arrested previously for assaulting her. Had the attending officers known this, their response to the situation might have been different, and protective action, such as the arrest of the perpetrator, might have taken place sooner.

In eight of the ten cases examined by inspectors in relation to domestic abuse involving children, officers attending the incident had graded the initial risk assessment as less of a concern than the specialist officer who later reviewed the case in accordance with force policy. The force had recently introduced a requirement for officers who attended domestic abuse incidents to conduct a formal, graded initial risk assessment. After considering the incident along with all the information held on the police systems, the reviewer assessed the risks to be much greater than initially thought. Inspectors recognise that this supervisory oversight has considerable merits, including the use of specialist expertise to inform judgements. However, it does not negate the need for officers attending the incident to be aware of important and available information. Understanding and practice will improve when learning from such cases is fed back to frontline staff.

HMIC found some evidence of specialist departments working in relative isolation. For example, a girl assessed as being at low risk went missing for five days. Cases considered to be low risk are given low priority for carrying out search action or investigation. Information about the girl's circumstances had not been matched with information held elsewhere in the force about her likely contacts. These people were known to the police for their involvement in street crime and use of weapons. If information held by different parts of the force had been linked, the case might have been given a higher risk assessment and managed with greater urgency.

**We recommend that, within three months, South Yorkshire Police:**

- **ensures that police officers and staff understand the significance of drawing together all available information from police systems to improve their risk assessments;**
- **ensures that all relevant information is properly recorded in all cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children and, as a minimum, provides guidance to staff on:**
  - what information (and in what form) should be recorded on systems to enable good decisions;**
  - maintaining up-to-date and timely records;**

**recording and communicating decisions reached at meetings;  
and**

- **ensures that managers carry out quality assurance checks on records and provides feedback to police officers and staff.**

## **Trusted adult**

When the concern was recognised as serious and immediately identified as one of child protection, investigation processes were carefully considered – leading to stronger relationships between the victim and the police. In most cases, the officer explored different options with the parent (or the social worker when the parent was a suspect) on how best to engage with the child. The social worker and officer determined together how best to communicate with the family throughout the case. In cases involving young children, where the parents were the main conduits for contact between the police and the child, police engagement with the family was good. They kept families informed and provided additional support throughout criminal justice processes.

On the whole, police acted in the best interests of children, including in cases where they were seriously challenged by parents or where there was parental indifference. In certain cases, such as ongoing domestic abuse, where parents could not be relied upon to put the well-being of the children first, there was evidence of the police and social workers taking decisions to protect a child, even against the wishes of a parent. But there were also examples where the child's interests had not been given priority and were later lost. For example, in 2 different cases of boys who were aged 11 and 12, who each alleged that they had been assaulted by their fathers, there was no supporting evidence. As a result, a decision was made to take no further action. No work was undertaken with the boys, however, to assess if there was a continuing risk to them or to leave a trusted communication route open for them for the future.

## **Managing those posing a risk to children**

Professionals who worked with sex offenders were clear about their responsibilities. They assessed risk and took action to reduce it. Inspectors found some good examples of work by the police and of work across agencies. For example, one sex offender was released from custody and the police worked with probation, children's social care services, the offender's family, his church and his children's school to develop a protection plan that would also support the offender and give him the best chance of staying crime-free.

HMIC found good examples where police responded well to risks posed by those who sexually exploit children, particularly in Sheffield and Rotherham where there were mature and established partnership arrangements and agencies were co-located. Responses were less well developed in Barnsley



and Doncaster. As part of Operation Makesafe<sup>16</sup>, police targeted suspects with child abduction warning notices and engaged in other disruptive activity to deter them. They also worked with the local hotel industry and bed and breakfast providers to prevent men using their premises for sex with children. Response and neighbourhood officers had a good awareness of child sexual exploitation. Information about suspects, including photographs, was circulated routinely to local officers for their information and awareness.

## Police detention

Inspectors looked at 11 cases of children in detention. The youngest child was 13 years old, the oldest 17. Three of the detainees were girls, 2 of whom were 13 and 1 was 15 years old. South Yorkshire Police carried out self-assessments in three cases, all boys.

The inspectors' view of the quality of practice in the cases they examined was different from that of the force. Inspectors considered only three of the eleven cases to have been adequately handled. In all cases the record keeping was deficient, but in 8 cases it was so deficient that inspectors could not be certain that the minimum statutory guidance requirements had been met<sup>17</sup>.

The inspectors' sample showed that releasing the child from police detention after charge had been considered in only one case, and an approach to the local authority for accommodation had been made in one other case<sup>18</sup>. The threshold for continued detention in a police station (or the use of residential care) appears to be low. The continued detention of a child or young person overnight in a police station should be rare<sup>19</sup>. In one of the cases the force assessed, the child was detained after charge on the basis that he was already on supervision for theft of a moped. There was no evidence that he posed a serious risk to either himself or others (he was later released to local authority accommodation).

Children were usually held overnight because of long delays before they were interviewed. Officers gave little consideration to what alternative overnight

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<sup>16</sup> One of a number of specific operations carried out by South Yorkshire Police with partners, to educate businesses and other agencies about child sexual exploitation (CSE). Operation Makesafe was piloted in Sheffield and is now to be launched nationally. It involves officers visiting hotels in order to raise awareness of CSE, help management and staff to recognise the signs, and encourage those employed in the hotel industry to contact the police with information.

<sup>17</sup> These are set out in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE), Code C Practice for the detention, treatment and questioning of persons by police officers.

<sup>18</sup> Section 38, Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

<sup>19</sup> A Court of Appeal judgment in 2006 recognises that children should not be detained in police cells if that is at all possible: *R(M) v Gateshead Council* [2006] EWCA Civ 221.

arrangements might be appropriate. Applications for secure (i.e. locked) residential care accommodation were made in the middle of the night, several hours after it became clear that such accommodation was likely to be required. Children arrested for a breach of their bail conditions or breach of a court order were automatically denied further police bail and detained in police custody. There was no evidence that officers had considered whether this was necessary to protect the public or whether it was in the child's best interests. There was also an assumption on the part of custody officers that there was no point in applying for open residential or secure care places, because none would be available. It was noted on some of the child detention certificates<sup>20</sup> that there were 'no beds' in secure accommodation or an alternative care home. However, it was not clear what enquiries had been made.

Inspectors acknowledge that there has been a recent agreement in Sheffield for the provision of beds for children detained in police custody, but at the time of the inspection this has not been extended to other local authority areas.

Two of the girls in our case sample were clearly vulnerable; both were 13, in care, known to go missing and identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation. In one case, the girl, who had been arrested for breaching bail conditions (that she reside at her children's home), was found at the home of a sex offender with condoms in her possession. There was no record of children's social care services being notified, her parents being informed or an appropriate adult or solicitor sought. Furthermore, there was no indication of any enquiries about the man in whose home she was found, or any evidence of a risk assessment being completed.

Inspectors were concerned about the lack of information recorded about food and drink offered to children who were held for considerable periods in cells. Inspectors were also concerned about the detention of children in cells for adults when detention rooms<sup>21</sup> appeared to be available.

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<sup>20</sup> When a child continues to be detained in police custody after charge, because there is no alternative accommodation, a certificate must be completed by the custody officer. This is to certify that the continued detention was necessary and to explain the circumstances. Section 38(7) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

<sup>21</sup> For further information see: <http://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/detention-and-custody-2/detainee-care/children-and-young-people/#detention-rooms-and-cells>

**We recommend that South Yorkshire Police immediately undertakes a review (with other relevant agencies) of how the force manages the detention of children. This review should include, as a minimum, how best to:**

- **ensure that all staff act within the law, and that children are only detained when absolutely necessary and for the absolute minimum amount of time;**
- **meet the welfare needs of children in custody, including the provision of food and drink, and ensure that the details are recorded on the custody record;**
- **improve awareness among custody staff of child protection, the standard of risk assessment required to reflect children's needs, and the support required at the time of detention and on release;**
- **engage families (for example, through a voluntary organisation, or a statutory agency) to increase the likelihood of children being able to return home and to meet bail obligations;**
- **ensure that children have access to someone who will advocate and challenge on their behalf;**
- **assess, at an early stage, the likely need for secure or other accommodation and work with children's social care services to achieve the best option for the child; and**
- **work with its constituent local authorities to ensure that no child who is looked after by a local authority is refused accommodation by them.**

## **6. Findings: leadership, management and governance**

The then PCC for South Yorkshire prioritised the protection of the most vulnerable members of the community in his police and crime plan,<sup>22</sup> with a particular focus on child sexual exploitation. This focus is also reflected in the force's implementation plans. In 2013, the force put forward detailed proposals for the expansion of child protection and public protection services and as a result, the PCC invested an additional £4.5 million. There has been a significant increase in capacity and capability for: training for specialist roles;

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<sup>22</sup> The South Yorkshire police and crime plan for 2013-17 can be accessed at <http://www.southyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk/Document-Library/Publications/Police-and-Crime-Plan-Final.pdf>

multi-disciplinary approaches; and investigation teams. These increases have been supported by staff briefings for a wide range of service personnel to raise awareness. However, inspectors did not find evidence of a structured plan for implementing this major change, and inconsistencies in practice across the four district public protection units remain.

HMIC found that some staff were well motivated and highly committed to protecting children. Many were knowledgeable and skilled, particularly those working in specialist teams. However, some vulnerable children who came to the attention of the police for an offence, or whose behaviour was seen as a nuisance, received a lesser service.

We found examples where staff were well supported by their immediate line managers and heads of unit. However, there was inconsistency in the supervision of staff, and inspectors found little evidence of managing workloads and supervisory oversight of investigations. Inspectors also found that some staff were unclear about their responsibilities, particularly when there was an overlap between crime and child protection incidents. For example, in the case of a vulnerable girl involved with older, drug-dealing men, supervision was inadequate, with limited evidence of the investigation being monitored to ensure that the service provided to the vulnerable girl was of a high standard. Inspectors also saw some examples of poor recording practice, and in some cases child protection systems were not updated with new information.

For the most part, staff were well trained for their roles and the force had clearly recognised that new staff working in child protection required appropriate training. At the time of the inspection, a training programme was in the early stages of development. However, there was less evidence of continuous training and development (for example, updating the requirements of Achieving Best Evidence<sup>23</sup> interview training) or training for staff working in areas with significant crossover with child protection. For example, the missing from home co-ordinators<sup>24</sup> would benefit from training on dealing with child sexual exploitation. Custody staff had not received sufficient training on child protection matters.

South Yorkshire Police has good working relationships with local authorities and other services across the force area. HMIC found evidence of joint working to improve services and the co-location of agencies has improved communication and the timeliness of actions. In one area, co-location has enabled inter-agency consideration of every child who goes missing (without, seemingly,

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/victims-and-witnesses/vulnerable-witnesses/achieving-best-evidence>

<sup>24</sup> Police missing from home co-ordinators pro-actively co-ordinate the management of individual cases.

overburdening services), whereas in other areas a meeting will only take place between the police and children's social care services for those children who go missing on three occasions in a month. While it is for the force to determine how best to configure its resources, no child should receive lesser consideration of their risks and needs because of where they reside in the force area. In some areas, children's social care services reported that there were too many referrals from the force that fell below the level at which a social care assessment was required, and scant details were recorded on some referral forms. It was acknowledged, however, that the force was working with children's social care services to address these problems.

Inspectors found inconsistencies in practice across the South Yorkshire Police area. Doncaster was a cause for concern. Staff reported delays in holding meetings and joint visits; inconsistent decision making; and the absence of social workers from meetings. Police leaders need to do more to raise concerns directly with the local authority or through the LSCB.

Officers contributed to the four LSCBs' programmes of work and reviews, and at local level communication and liaison were generally good. Although attendance at LSCB meetings was good, there were some mixed responses about the commitment of police to some sub-group meetings. Although some LSCBs expressed satisfaction with the response to child sexual exploitation, others considered that the police needed to do more with the LSCB to support other priorities, such as domestic abuse and neglect. There were some initial concerns about the role of the new CRU (as outlined earlier in this report). The force would benefit from providing information about performance to provide reassurance about improvements to the service which come from the new arrangements.

The force has a number of IT recording systems for different areas of police activity including recording incidents, deploying personnel, managing reports of child abuse, investigating crime, command and control<sup>25</sup>, recording and disseminating intelligence, registered sex offender management and missing from home reports. These systems are not well integrated and can be cumbersome to use. This makes it difficult to ensure that staff have all the information they need before making decisions. The command and control system only retains information for 13 months before it is archived.

The concerns outlined in the earlier section on children in police detention indicate the need for a more thorough review of all agencies' understanding of their responsibilities towards children in this context, coupled with further inter-agency efforts to resolve the problems.

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<sup>25</sup> A command and control system records information at the first point of contact with the police and provides the information to manage the deployment of personnel and other resources.

This work should focus on children who offend and who are looked after<sup>26</sup> by the local authority, and those who may need alternative accommodation after arrest for an offence. Consideration should also be given to ensuring that bail conditions are suitable and necessary, and that support is in place to assist children to understand fully and comply with them. The recently appointed 'child in care liaison officer' (whose role it is to liaise with children's care homes) and the development of a bail fostering service for children, with some police input into training of its staff, makes a constructive start to addressing the problem.

South Yorkshire Police serves diverse, multi-cultural communities (which include a number of black and minority ethnic victims and offenders). However, data on ethnicity does not appear to be used to improve services. Nevertheless, inspectors saw some evidence of culturally sensitive practice, for example with girls from the Asian community who were identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation, or who were being assaulted by male relatives. Some members of the Roma community had come to the force's attention for breaches of the law in England and Wales relating to underage sex and marriage, and this was being addressed by liaison and education officers. Work had also been undertaken with children from Slovakia to protect them from sexual exploitation. However, staff struggled to know how to respond to an Asian boy who reported sexual abuse, out of normal office hours, when the officer did not have access to advice.

It is particularly important for the force to demonstrate that the recent investment in additional capacity and capability is improving services and achieving better outcomes for children and their families. However, inspectors found that performance data and other information, for example information on local demographics and ethnicity, to help develop and improve services, were limited. There was information on the nature and volume of referrals across all local authority areas. Some LSCBs had access to profiles created by the local authorities about some areas of vulnerability (for example, children who go missing), but information across the whole force area was patchy. There was little information collated about how children and families experienced services and how these services might be improved.

While South Yorkshire Police had no programme of regular review of its child protection work, the force had reviewed its approach to missing and absent children. This resulted in some improvements in response times, investigations and record-keeping, and more detailed information being available on police records and systems. The force will now need to assess what this more

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<sup>26</sup> 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' also includes those who have committed an offence.

comprehensive information reveals about local needs and how it can be used to improve practice.

The force had recognised that good quality analysis can provide a better understanding of problems and had produced profiles identifying the threat to children of sexual exploitation in its policing districts. However, it had not always acted on the recommendations, and there had been missed opportunities to address some problems at an earlier stage. For example, a potential network of individuals committing offences against children in care homes in Doncaster had been identified in a child sexual exploitation report, but inspectors found that children were still at risk, with little done to draw information together and tackle the problem.

Supervising officers reviewed cases on a regular basis. However, when inspectors examined cases already assessed by the force, the limited amount of detail provided in each of these cases and the lack of critical analysis of police actions raised questions about the value that these reviews were adding to practice.

**We recommend that within six months, South Yorkshire Police develops a force-wide good practice regime aimed at improving their response to child protection issues, so that no child receives an inadequate service by reason of the place where they live.**

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

South Yorkshire Police has a clear set of priorities to protect children and progress has been made to align resources to improve services. This is illustrated by increased capacity in child protection teams, the new CRU, and the development of work on child sexual exploitation.

Inspectors found some examples of good practice but also significant weaknesses. When the matter was clearly identified as one of child protection, the force responded well. In difficult or complex cases, such as those involving adolescents, the response was weaker. This was more apparent in some areas than others.

There was inconsistency in practice across policing districts and inspectors had particular concerns about Doncaster. Inspectors found shortcomings in the protection of children in care homes and limited understanding of the risk posed by offenders who target vulnerable children.

The response to child sexual exploitation was also inconsistent across the force area. Inspectors saw some good practice, particularly in Sheffield and Rotherham. Responses were less well developed in Barnsley and Doncaster

and although at the time of the inspection improvements were underway, inspectors found some individual cases that were cause for concern.

Performance information for child protection was under-developed. The force needs to do more to understand and record outcomes for children to improve and further develop services. There was limited evidence that the force had undertaken reviews or audits to improve performance.

South Yorkshire Police has developed good relationships with partner agencies and LSCBs. Co-located multi-agency working is paying dividends, and there is a desire to develop these arrangements further to establish multi-agency safeguarding hubs across the force area.

## 8. Recommendations

### Immediately

We recommend that South Yorkshire Police immediately ensures that there are procedures in place to escalate any concerns about incidents involving children at risk if, for whatever reason, police have been delayed in attending the incident or alleged crime.

We recommend that South Yorkshire Police:

- undertakes a review of any concerns raised about children in care homes across the force area and brought to the attention of the police, to ensure that there are safeguarding plans in place for those children at risk of serious harm to themselves or to others;
- takes action to review its plan for identifying, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators involved in child sexual exploitation against children in care homes; and
- ensures that police officers know how to escalate their concerns about children at risk, and that senior officers raise these concerns with relevant agencies or, where appropriate, with the local safeguarding children board.

We recommend that South Yorkshire Police:

- ensures that joint investigation teams involve health expertise in their decision making, and that the health needs of children are considered in all cases where there are allegations of physical or sexual abuse; and
- ensures that decisions and actions, with timescales, are recorded for all discussions that are held by joint investigation teams.



We recommend that South Yorkshire Police undertakes a review (with other relevant agencies) of how the force manages the detention of children. This review should include, at a minimum, how best to:

- ensure that all staff act within the law and that children are only detained when absolutely necessary and for the absolute minimum amount of time;
- meet the welfare needs of children in custody, including the provision of food and drink, and ensure that the details are recorded on the custody record;
- improve awareness among custody staff of child protection, the standard of risk assessment required to reflect children's needs, and the support required at the time of detention and on release;
- engage families (for example, through a voluntary organisation or a statutory agency) to increase the likelihood of children being able to return home and to meet bail obligations;
- ensure that children have access to someone who will advocate and challenge on their behalf;
- assess, at an early stage, the likely need for secure or other accommodation and work with children's social care services to achieve the best option for the child; and
- work with its constituent local authorities to ensure that that no child who is looked after by a local authority is refused accommodation by them.

## **Within three months**

We recommend that South Yorkshire Police ensures that officers always record their observations of a child's behaviour in domestic abuse incident records, so that a better understanding of a child's needs can be made.

We recommend that South Yorkshire Police:

- ensures that police officers and staff understand the significance of drawing together all available information from police systems to improve their risk assessments;
- ensures that all relevant information is properly recorded in all cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children and as a minimum, provides guidance to staff on:

what information (and in what form) should be recorded on systems to enable good decisions;

maintaining up-to-date and timely records;

recording and communicating decisions reached at meetings; and

- ensures that managers carry out quality assurance checks on records and provides feedback to police officers and staff.

## **Within six months**

We recommend that South Yorkshire Police ensures that staff training on safeguarding and protecting children highlights how important it is to understand and assess the implications of a child's behaviour when considering the risk to that child.

We recommend that South Yorkshire Police:

- undertakes a review of the options and measures that can be considered to safeguard adolescents, and ensures that this informs future service improvements; and
- improves staff awareness of their responsibilities for protecting adolescent children – in particular, where cases are complex and require a multi-agency approach.

We recommend that South Yorkshire Police develops a force-wide good practice regime aimed at improving their response to child protection issues, so that no child receives an inadequate service by reason of the place where they live.

## **9. Next steps**

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

South Yorkshire Police 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 force 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 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*<sup>27</sup>, 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.

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<sup>27</sup> *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](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 for 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 exercising 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; and
- the detention of children and children in police custody.

Below is a breakdown of the type of self-assessed cases we examined in South Yorkshire Police.

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.	4
Sex offender enquiry	3
Police protection	3
At risk of sexual exploitation	3
Child in custody	3

## Annex B

### Glossary

child	person under the age of 18.
local safeguarding children board (LSCB)	statutory body, established in 2004 under the Children Act, whose members typically include the police, probation, health, education and representatives from housing and all children's services. The purpose of a board is to agree how relevant agencies in each local authority area will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and to ensure that what they do is effective in keeping children safe from abuse or harm at home and within the local community.
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.
police and crime commissioner (PCC)	elected entity for a police area, established under section 1, 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.

registered sex offender

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.