

HMICFRS: Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children's mental health in Portsmouth

Response from: Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire

This inspection, focusing on the children and young people of Portsmouth subject to child in need and child protection plans, and children in care who are living with mental ill health, highlights the hidden vulnerabilities, additional factors and challenges these young people face daily.

Working with our partner agencies, to support those who need it the most is critical. It is enlightening to see the recognition of the positive work being undertaken to protect our vulnerable children, from the innovative practices having a positive impact on the emotional well-being and mental health of children, including the trauma-informed model of care for children in care and the team around the worker approach, to the strong focus on child centred policing and a clear ambition to divert children away from police custody and the criminal justice system, as well as to protect children is commendable. But this area of safeguarding and child protection is not without fault.

The inspection highlights and identifies key areas for improvement. With some cases it appears that the lived experiences of the child are not sufficiently assessed or understood, and there is a lack of professional curiosity and focus on the child, and inconsistency in decision-making. This included decisions around the thresholds at which children were held and the type of investigation to be conducted. From a policing perspective areas for improvement includes a backlog of police referrals within the MASH. The cause of this has been identified by senior managers, and a plan of action is in place to mitigate risk. Also it is believed Hampshire Constabulary currently does not have enough information to understand thoroughly the impact and outcomes of the service it provides to children at risk of harm.

The OPCC invests heavily into both prevention and support services. Our Youth Commission for two years consulted through their Big Conversation on mental health¹, Youth Commission members have also worked with Hampshire CAMHS to produce posters that help young people know where to turn to access support. We recognise the importance of hearing from those most vulnerable from within our communities, and work with partners for no one service can tackle this alone.

Recommendations: The Director for Children's Services in Portsmouth will prepare a written statement of proposed action responding to the findings outlined by 13.05.2020.

¹ <https://www.hampshire-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/youth-commission/campaigns/mental-health>