

HMICFRS: National Child Protection Inspections: 2019 thematic report
Response from: Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire

While Hampshire Constabulary was not a part of this thematic inspection, we value the findings and outcomes, and any learning points on which we can implement. Protecting children is a priority area for both for the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the force, both investing heavily in training and support services.

Child protection is a complex area. The devastating and lifelong impact this can have on the most vulnerable individuals who cannot always speak out is evident. With increased awareness of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and this becoming embedded in our trauma informed approach to such situations, we recognise that child abuse is often hidden and any reporting can take time and trust. We do not shy away from the challenges surrounding child abuse, in working with our partner agencies we strive to keep victims at the heart of all we do. Safeguarding and protecting those who need it is essential, by closely monitoring the decisions made by Hampshire Constabulary we can ensure through scrutiny that all child protection cases continue to be assessed with rigor and senior officer oversight.

Recommendations:

- We recommend that chief constables take steps to reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of children. Such steps could include (but don't need to be limited to) considering fully a child's circumstances when making decisions; more effective use of legislation to discontinue prosecutions not in the public (or child's) interest; the development of more effective non-criminal justice pathways for vulnerable children who commit lower level crimes.

OPCC comment: with the force adopting a trauma informed approach, along with partner agencies, there is a clear motivation to reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of children. Along with utilising alternative methods such as out of court disposals (OOCs) and utilising early intervention with the developing work of the Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) here in Hampshire, we continue to closely monitor this area.

- We recommend that chief constables should review performance management and quality assurance approaches to ensure that assessments of the nature and quality of decision making are routinely made. The purpose of this would be to reinforce the understanding that compliance with policy or process is only one part of effective practice.

OPCC comment: a key role of our office is the continued scrutiny of the force, we will continue to work alongside force leads to ensure ongoing performance management and quality assurance approaches are utilised in the decision making process.

- We recommend that chief constables on those forces not yet inspected by the NCPI or JTAI take steps to identify and implement good practice and the learning highlighted from these programmes. This may include engaging with those forces who have been inspected, direct contact with the HMICFRS child protection lead or participating in a regional or national learning event.

OPCC comment: Hampshire Constabulary was inspected by the Joint Targeted Area Inspection of the multi-agency response to abuse and neglect in Hampshire between 5th and 9th December

2016, looking at the multi-agency response to abuse and neglect in Hampshire. This inspection included a 'deep dive' focus on the response to children living with domestic abuse, with the findings published back in February 2017. In working with our partners we continue to work tirelessly to ensure the safety of children is paramount.