

Joint child protection inspection of identification of initial need and risk in Southampton July 2025

Report: [Joint child protection inspection of identification of initial need and risk in Southampton](#)

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

Neglect, abuse, violence and exploitation can destroy a child's future and requires fast, coordinated action. This report highlights the determination and ambition of all agencies in Southampton to work together to protect vulnerable young people. Whether a child is facing homelessness, suffering after a family breakdown, or being exploited by criminal gangs, frontline professionals must recognise the signs and act quickly.

Although the report identifies some delays in police referrals, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has strong systems in place to identify and support children at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation. Cutting red tape and removing unnecessary barriers to information sharing is vital to help police make timely referrals and do their job effectively. As Police and Crime Commissioner, I fund specialist intervention services to help support young people and victims of crime and strengthen joint efforts across Southampton.

Key Observations & Concerns

Inspectors conducted a joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency safeguarding response in Southampton during May 2025. The following were identified:

- Strengths in leadership and child-centred working: Officers acted within a cohesive, caring multi-agency culture, effectively responding to children's needs. Leaders implemented strong oversight and reflective learning outputs.
- Timely referrals overall, though some delays were flagged when police did not recognise risk accurately, impacting initial strategy meeting timeliness.
- Effective models in place such as Operations Encompass and Endeavour, ensuring schools receive timely information, but early years settings did not consistently receive the same alerts.
- Inconsistencies in risk and missing-child assessments: A small number of cases saw delayed or inaccurate assessments by police, hindering swift partner intervention.

These concerns demonstrate that while multi-agency coordination is strong, there remain opportunities to tighten the police response, especially regarding initial risk recognition and safeguarding systems.

Recommendations for Improvement

The inspection letter sets out several areas for improvement in collaboration with childcare, health, and social services colleagues:

1. Ensure timely police recognition and referral: All officers must promptly identify and act on safeguarding risk, minimizing delays to strategy meetings.
2. Extend notification processes to early years providers: Expand Operations Encompass/Endeavour to include early year's settings, to support vulnerable children comprehensively.

3. Improve recording of ethnicity and child voice: Police should record demographic data and capture the child's experience at the earliest point of contact.
4. Strengthen risk and missing-child assessments: Enhance training and audit of police risk assessments, ensuring high-risk cases lead to multi-agency strategy without delay.
5. Enhance feedback loops: Police should receive timely written records from CRS (children's resource service) strategy meetings to avoid information gaps and ensure shared understanding.

Our Commitment

These findings are taken seriously, and we are committed to ensuring that HIOWC supports multi-agency safeguarding to the highest standard across the region:

- I will hold my Chief Constable to account for action on early risk recognition, ensuring officers are trained and equipped to make prompt referrals and identify safeguarding triggers.
- We will work with Southampton City Council to expand notification systems to improve collaboration with key partners.
- Performance reviews and audits will include metrics on ethnicity recording, missing-child assessments, and strategy referral timelines leading to driving improvement in practice.
- We will support cross-agency feedback protocols, ensuring police receive consistent written updates following strategy meetings, strengthening transparency and information sharing.
- I will continue to promote ongoing multi-agency training on child voice and risk assessments, especially around partnership engagement with younger children and families.

Conclusion

The JTAI in Southampton reflects both strengths and areas for improvement in our multi-agency safeguarding framework. While collaboration and leadership are strong, policing must sharpen early identification, data recording and engagement with education partners. In Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, we will scrutinise these issues within our Constabulary and across partnership boards to ensure a consistently prompt, comprehensive response to safeguarding concerns involving children.

Donna Jones

Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Response from: Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to the identification of initial need and risk in Southampton. This was between the 19th and 23rd May 2025, the inspection was under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004.

The inspection involved the police, children's social care, education and relevant health services. The focus being on how effectively the local safeguarding partners work together at the practitioner and strategic levels and;

- how effectively the front doors of individual agencies identify and respond to initial need and risk.
- the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) (or equivalent)
- how effectively each agency contributes to the multi-agency response, including early decision-making across early help, child in need and child protection

- how effectively the local partnership, through its multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA), monitors, promotes, coordinates and evaluates the work of the statutory partners
- the impact of leaders and managers on practice with children and families in relation to the front door
- the timeliness of this work and the impact of the local area's actions to improve the multi-agency response to children in need of help and protection

The Ofsted report praised the partnership approach taken in Southampton and acknowledged that; 'A caring approach can be seen through each sector of the partnership, resulting in high quality practice'. The report acknowledges that services meet the needs of children and that multiagency working is child centred across the partnership.

There were three areas identified that require improvement and a multi-agency action plan will be submitted to Ofsted by the 24th October 2025. The areas were:

1. The timeliness of high-risk referrals by the police to the children's resource service (CRS).
2. The capacity of the health navigator role to respond to all requests for information.
3. Arrangements to share written records of strategy meetings and the outcomes of assessments, including child protection enquiries, with partners involved with the child and family.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary welcome the findings of the inspection report and recognise the challenges identified for all organisations. We are committed to working in partnership and are developing the joint action plan with other agencies to address the recommendations.

Recommendation 1 above is for policing to action and the Constabulary has already conducted an audit to assess the severity of the issue. This has provided assurance that it is only in a very small number of cases where timeliness of referrals to the CRS is not within agreed limits. This audit will be repeated periodically to review this position and built into existing audit processes conducted by child centred policing champions. Additional training has already been implemented to support progress to both officer and CPD training and the Crime Knowledge Hub has been updated and the content has been reinforced. Partners can flag any late referrals to the police and this will be acted upon.

Recommendation 2 sits with our health partners to develop.

Recommendation 3 is being addressed by Southampton Child Services team with support from relevant partners.

There were other points covered in the narrative of the report that the Constabulary will look to action, whilst these were not areas for improvement, the Constabulary will build on our existing good practice to ensure effective delivery of safeguarding services ensuring they are aligned to our force priorities; putting victims first, the relentless pursuit of criminals, and exceptional local policing.

Sam De Reya
Deputy Chief Constable, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Recommendations:

No recommendations were made in this report which are to be tracked through the HMICFRS portal.