

THAMES VALLEY POLICE

HMIC REPORTS

**“IN HARM’S WAY; THE ROLE OF THE POLICE IN KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE”
“ONLINE AND ON THE EDGE; REAL RISKS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD”**

COMMENTARY ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE POLICE AND CRIME

COMMISSIONER

OCTOBER 2015

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 These are separate thematic but interconnected reports. Both contain useful contextual surveys of their respective topics, noting both increased demand through increased reporting and the changing social and technological environment. Neither draw on specific fieldwork carried out in Thames Valley Police, though the challenges and themes are familiar across all forces.

2. SUMMARY OF THE REPORT : “IN HARM’S WAY”

- 2.1 This report contains no specific recommendations but its key findings include
- The police service is struggling to cope with the increasing workload in respect of Child Protection
 - There was limited evidence of the views of the child being sought.
 - Investigations and action against perpetrators were often inadequate.
 - Significant gaps existed between expected good practice and actual practice.
 - Concerns raised of lack of action following info-sharing to partner agencies.
 - The need for senior police officers to better understand operational activity.
 - Concerns about children being subjected to Criminal Justice proceedings when safeguarding would be more appropriate.
- 2.2 TVP has allocated increased and increasing resources to Child Abuse Investigation Units, which will also expand their remit, thus increasing the number of child abuse victims that can be dealt with by CP specialists.
- 2.3 Training for all frontline staff (Safeguarding, Vulnerability and Exploitation) in spring 2016 will include the importance of listening to children, seeking and recording their views, and recognising that a child is always a child first and foremost even when they are a suspect in an offence. There is ongoing Continual Professional Development for specialist staff and this will include a practical focus on placing the Voice of the Child at the heart of investigations.
- 2.4 TVP was graded “good” in the 2014 HMIC Child Protection Inspection when revisited this year. The proportion of investigations judged inadequate was very much less than the surveys of other forces published in this report. There were no actual adverse outcomes in the cases reviewed by HMIC on their revisit. The Crime Operational Command Unit is building an audit capacity to ensure consistent standards of investigation. Organisational learning from Operation Bullfinch is now well embedded across TVP through Op Safeguard

and includes a robust focus on offenders, while dedicated CSE engagement staff support victims.

- 2.5 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) are established in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, and are being implemented across Berkshire, to improve the sharing of information, and particularly to create a jigsaw that identifies hidden harm. The Audit capacity will better allow TVP to understand and feedback the impact and outcomes in the journey of the child following police referrals.
- 2.6 The system of Hub DCIs provides geographically close management to ensure frontline understanding. Detective Superintendents and Chief Superintendent make regular frontline visits. The establishment of Operational Groups for disciplines, including Child Abuse Investigation Unit and Child Sexual Exploitation, allow practical oversight and early escalation of issues.
- 2.7 The Force is developing a Strategic Governance Group for all aspects of vulnerability, recognising their interdependency, both as they occur and in addressing them to achieve better outcomes.

3. SUMMARY OF THE REPORT : “ONLINE AND ON THE EDGE” made the following key

3.1 The key conclusions of this report included the following:

- Although the protection of children is a priority for forces, they take a traditional approach to a 21st century problem which needs skills and technology to match.
- There is an increase in reported offences, while a significant proportion of offences, including online Child Sexual Exploitation, are still unreported.
- Policing must understand the prevalence of online offending, and its impact on children, to allocate resources, and develop effective responses for children.

The recommendations followed from these findings, and cover

- Prompt and effective safeguarding, investigation and supervision
- Risk assessment and allocation
- Effective technology to support investigations
- Staff wellbeing
- Inappropriate use of out of court disposals
- Evidence based approach to understanding the problem and developing better outcomes for children
- Better safety advice to children directly, rather than through parents

- 3.2 “Op Secutor” is TVP’s operational response to indecent images of children. The Force uses the (national standard) KIRAT risk assessment tool, supported by professional judgment to escalate where appropriate, and will now adopt KIRAT 2. High risk cases are investigated by fulltime specialists in POLIT (Paedophile Online Investigation Team), while low and medium risk cases are undertaken by local staff with additional training in investigation and safeguarding. These local investigators continue to receive specialist professional support from the POLIT who monitor prompt execution of warrants and safeguarding, including through the force Tactical Tasking and Co-ordinating Group processes. This approach has removed backlogs, allocates investigations and manages risk proportionately, and mainstreams understanding of online child exploitation investigation and safeguarding. It is now being considered for adoption by other forces. A Silver and Gold function provides oversight, promoting the development of good practice and providing an escalation process where necessary.

- 3.3 The Force Intelligence Bureau has created an “Open Source Team” to support investigators. POLIT has triage equipment to support early assessment, prioritisation and safeguarding. Forensic Investigation Unit is piloting a frontline digital triage service to prioritise investigations at an early stage.
- 3.4 Timescales for digital forensic examination of seized devices is a problem across forces, including TVP, due to limited resources and specialists nationally in comparison to escalating demand. The Force has reduced waiting times, through investment in better equipment, careful prioritisation and allocation of £0.5m for external service providers to carry out examinations, but some examinations still take a number of months.
- 3.5 Specialist staff are subject to annual Occupational Health assessments, and ongoing support as required. The Posting Policy states that staff should not remain in post for over five years without review from occupational health and management to confirm that there are no adverse effects.
- 3.6 The Op Secutor Silver and Gold process will review the use of any out of court disposals for indecent images of children cases. The Silver and Gold meetings include the Problem Solving Team, who can then combine their evidence based approach with the experience of operational specialists; they are developing and delivering material to children and schools, particularly relating to “sexting”. The Operational Analyst responsible for producing the CSE Problem Profile, which includes On Line abuse, attends the CSE Operational Group, and the recommendations of that Profile are managed through the group. There is a need for the College of Policing and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre to work with forces to establish prevalence and modes of offending and evidence based good practice.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The findings and recommendations of the reports reflect issues and challenges that Thames Valley Police had already identified. The scale and significance of these challenges, most importantly for their impact on children, are not underestimated. Thames Valley Police have already implemented or are developing solutions for these challenges, with proportionate governance procedures in place.