

National Child Protection Inspection

**Cambridgeshire Constabulary
5–16 July 2021**

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, though, too many children are still abused or neglected by those responsible for their care; they sometimes need to be protected from other adults with whom they come into contact. Some of them occasionally go missing, or end up spending time in places, 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 organisations – have a particular role in protecting children and meeting their needs.

Protecting children is one of the most important things the police do. Police officers investigate suspected crimes involving children and arrest perpetrators, and they have a significant role in monitoring sex offenders. They can take a child in danger to a place of safety and seek restrictions on offenders' contact with children. The police service also has a significant role, working with other organisations, in ensuring children's protection and wellbeing in the longer term.

As they go about their daily tasks, police officers must be alert to, and identify, children who may be at risk. To protect children effectively, officers must talk to children, listen to them, and understand their fears and concerns. The police must also work well with other organisations to play their part in ensuring that, as far as possible, no child slips through the net, and to avoid both over-intrusiveness and duplication of effort.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) 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 the police protect children and secure improvements for the future.

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Summary

This report is a summary of the findings of our inspection of police child protection services in Cambridgeshire, which took place in July 2021.

We examined the effectiveness of the decisions made by the police at each stage of their interactions with or for children, from initial contact through to the investigation of offences against them. We also reviewed how children witnessing domestic abuse are [safeguarded](#), and assessed how the constabulary is structured, led and governed, in relation to its child protection services.

We adapted this inspection because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Working within national guidelines, we agreed with the constabulary to carry out our inspection both safely and effectively.

We worked remotely, using video calls for discussions with police officers and [staff](#), their managers and leaders. And we reviewed incidents and investigations online.

Main findings from the inspection

We found that Cambridgeshire Constabulary is committed to protecting and providing better outcomes for children. This shows in the PCC's [police and crime plan](#) and in the constabulary's priorities. The force shows a good awareness of vulnerability and risk, and has completed a risk assessment that informs its priorities. Its vulnerability strategy aims to help all officers and staff to provide better safeguarding in the community.

The constabulary has established a safeguarding command with specialist capabilities to tackle those who are a risk to children and to investigate – with sensitivity – some of the most difficult offences.

In 2016, the constabulary introduced a programme – Transforming Lives – to tackle gang problems on an estate. One of its primary concerns is to help prevent children and young people being drawn into the criminality of older siblings or peers.

The programme started with a 12-week early intervention plan, working with local schools. Children would be taken out of school one day a week and given time and space with positive adult roles models to talk through risky situations and coping strategies.

The programme is now being rolled out to all six districts in Cambridgeshire, and involves more organisations throughout the county.

We found specialist child protection staff to be committed and dedicated, operating in an increasingly complex and demanding environment to keep children safe, yet

working to a high standard. The constabulary acknowledges that some of the frontline officers who respond to incidents of concern involving children are inexperienced.

Partner organisations (such as health and education services, and children's social care) told us they work well with the constabulary. Police representatives are present and active in meetings. They are also open to constructive professional challenge. However, some practices could be improved. For example, sharing information as soon as a risk to a child is identified in online investigations.

We saw examples of good work. Specific areas include:

- good joint investigations of child abuse, with good levels of supervision;
- officers communicate well and form positive relationships with children who have been exploited (in the community rather than online); and
- strong work with other organisations at strategic and operational levels.

Specific areas for improvement include:

- an inconsistent approach when conducting non-intimate domestic abuse risk assessments when children are involved;
- a lack of consistency in the way officers manage lower-risk offenders;
- sharing information with partners sooner in online abuse investigations; and
- accessing information from [return home interviews](#) conducted by the local authority, to inform risk assessments.

During our inspection, we examined 79 cases where the police had identified children at risk. We assessed the constabulary's child protection practice as good in 34 cases, requiring improvement in 30 cases and inadequate in 15 cases. While the number of good cases is positive, the force should do more to make sure that it gives a consistently good service to all children.

Conclusion

There is a clear commitment from the constabulary's leadership that child protection and wider vulnerability is a priority. It is committed to providing better outcomes for children.

However, senior leaders have also acknowledged that there are inconsistencies and areas for improvement in the service provided to children. They responded quickly to areas of concern identified in our inspection. We are encouraged that the constabulary already has the governance and scrutiny arrangements in place to monitor the impact of its responses.

1. Introduction

The police's responsibility to keep children safe

Under section 46 of the Children Act 1989, a constable is responsible for taking into police protection any child who they have reasonable cause to believe would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm. The same Act also requires the police to inquire into that child's case. Under section 11 of the Children Act 2004, the police must also always keep in mind the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Every officer and member of police staff should understand that it is their day-to-day duty to protect children. Officers going into people's homes for any reason must recognise the needs of any child they meet and understand what they can and should do to protect them. This is particularly important when officers are dealing with domestic abuse or other incidents that might involve violence. The duty to protect children includes those detained in police custody.

The [National Crime Agency's \(NCA\) strategic assessment of serious and organised crime \(2021\)](#) established that the risk of child sexual abuse continues to grow, and is one of the gravest serious and organised crime risks. Child sexual abuse is also one of the six national threats specified in the [Strategic Policing Requirement](#).

Expectations set out in the *Working Together* guidance

The statutory guidance published in 2018, [Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children](#), sets out what is expected of all agencies involved in child protection. This includes local authorities, clinical commissioning groups, schools and voluntary organisations.

The specific police roles set out in the guidance are:

- identifying children who might be at risk from abuse and neglect;
- investigating alleged offences against children;
- inter-agency working and information sharing to protect children; and
- using emergency powers to protect children.

These areas of practice are the focus of our child protection inspections. Details of how we carry out these inspections are in Annex A of this report.

2. Leadership, management and governance

The chief constable and senior leaders have invested in resources that prioritise safeguarding vulnerable people

Safeguarding [vulnerable people](#) is a priority for the chief constable and the [PCC](#). In May 2021, they made a substantial investment to increase the number of staff in the safeguarding command.

Projects such as vulnerability focus desks and domestic abuse early intervention desks have had a positive impact. The desks have reduced the average length of time a child is missing and provide oversight in domestic abuse cases. They make subject matter experts available to support frontline officers. This helps officers make sure that the children they meet are safeguarded, as well as helping the children to access support from other organisations such as health services.

Senior leaders show a strong commitment to child protection and providing better outcomes for children

The constabulary's corporate plan and other policies show its commitment to child protection. Some of the operational priorities in its corporate plan, such as safeguarding the vulnerable and reducing harm to communities, relate directly to better outcomes for children. And the vulnerability strategy encourages all staff and officers to 'think wide, think vulnerability' in order to improve outcomes for vulnerable victims and children.

The constabulary has also appointed an assistant chief constable (ACC) as the lead for child protection, to provide clear leadership at chief officer level.

There is good governance and strong communication at senior level through a monthly force performance board chaired by the ACC. All chief superintendents attend the meeting, which is an opportunity to discuss and act on problems which affect different areas of policing.

The constabulary is contributing effectively to partnership working arrangements

[Senior officers](#) attend the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Partnership Board. This sees the police, the local authority, NHS organisations and other agencies working in partnership to safeguard children. Policing representatives also attend several subgroups that support this board.

Throughout the inspection, the relationship with the police was described as extremely positive. Many said that the constabulary was responsive, innovative and open to professional challenge (when appropriate).

Inspectors found information sharing to be appropriate in areas such as [multi-agency risk assessment conferences \(MARACs\)](#), but required further work in areas such as online investigations of child abuse.

There is structured oversight at strategic and operational levels

The constabulary uses daily management meetings to manage and provide governance for its child protection activities. We saw good representation at these meetings from throughout the constabulary, including the protecting vulnerable people unit. The meetings help make sure that all officers and staff understand the risks posed to children.

Senior leaders chair fortnightly tactical planning meetings, which gives them the opportunity to monitor performance, continuous improvement and the quality of investigations related to child protection.

There is a culture of multi-agency working, including data sharing, to jointly understand child protection problems and demand, and review performance. For example, joint data was used in Peterborough to manage an increase in levels of violence and safeguard children.

Multi-agency working is also helpful in identifying themes for training.

There aren't enough qualified investigators for child protection investigations

The constabulary understands the training requirements for roles that have responsibility for child protection investigation. Those officers and staff should be accredited to level 2 of the [professionalising investigation programme \(PIP\)](#). Once accredited they can enter the [specialist child abuse investigation development programme \(SCAIDP\)](#).

The constabulary is committed to ensuring that child protection investigators have the right training and accreditation (i.e. SCAIDP and PIP2 qualifications). The constabulary understands the numbers of SCAIDP-trained officers and those who are PIP2 qualified (or working towards it). Some of these roles are currently filled by PIP1 investigators. However, officers are closely supported by mentors. Some have been nominated for further training but are awaiting allocation.

Police leaders are aware of difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff for specialist investigation roles. The recruitment and retention of investigators is a national problem. We made a recommendation to the Home Office to identify appropriate incentives, career progression and support for police officer and police staff investigators in our [joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape](#).

The constabulary has invested in the health and wellbeing of its staff

The constabulary recognises the importance of wellbeing for staff who work in specialist roles. It has invested in a staff welfare project called Pause Point, which allows managers to meet regularly with their staff, reflect on their wellbeing, and consider next steps. Officers and staff commented favourably on this project.

Officers also described feeling supported by their line managers, who check on their welfare regularly. They receive regular one-to-ones (individual meetings) and act on concerns.

Officers and staff are dedicated and enthusiastic

The officers and staff we spoke to supported the inspection process, and were keen to talk about their work.

Those who manage child-related investigations are committed and dedicated. Their work is often difficult and demanding. They commented positively on the level of support they receive from supervisors.

3. Context for the constabulary

At the time of our inspection, Cambridgeshire Constabulary reported a workforce of approximately:

- 1,673 police officers;
- 880 police staff;
- 40 police and community support officers (PCSOs); and
- 118 special constables.

The constabulary provides policing services to the county of Cambridgeshire. The police area covers 1,309 square miles within the east of England.

Although there are some areas where people live in poverty, Cambridgeshire is generally affluent. About 0.8m people live in the urban centres, which include the cities of Cambridge, Ely and Peterborough.

This resident population is ethnically diverse, with 10 percent from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Students studying in the area's universities increase diversity, as do the large numbers of people who visit or travel through the county each year.

The two local authorities within the county, Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council, together with the constabulary and the local clinical commissioning groups, have established new safeguarding children partnerships (replacing [local safeguarding children boards](#)) as required by the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#).

The most recent Ofsted judgments of the services for children in need of help and protection provided by the local authorities are set out below.

Local authority	Judgment	Date published
Cambridgeshire County Council	Requires improvement	January 2019
Peterborough City Council	Good	July 2018

There is one [multi-agency safeguarding hub \(MASH\)](#) for Cambridgeshire. Partner agencies are represented within the MASH to make sure that information is shared effectively to safeguard and protect children.

4. Case file analysis

Results of case file reviews

For our inspection, Cambridgeshire Constabulary selected and self-assessed the effectiveness of its work in 33 child protection cases. Under HMICFRS criteria, the cases selected were a random sample from across the county.

Our inspectors also assessed the same 33 cases.

Cases assessed by both Cambridgeshire Constabulary and us

Constabulary assessment:

- 19 good
- 9 require improvement
- 5 inadequate.

Our assessment:

- 13 good
- 13 require improvement
- 7 inadequate.

Our inspectors selected and assessed 46 more cases during the inspection.

Additional 46 cases assessed only by us

- 21 good
- 17 require improvement
- 8 inadequate.

Total 79 cases assessed by us

- 34 good
- 30 require improvement
- 15 inadequate.

Breakdown of case file audit results by area of child protection

Cases assessed involving enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989

- 9 good
- 1 requires improvement
- 0 inadequate.

Common themes shown in the files include:

- evidence of good initial action by responding officers;
- prompt joint strategy discussions with external organisations/agencies such as children's social care;
- children's demeanour and their living conditions are generally well recorded on safeguarding forms;
- investigations are well supervised; and
- supervisor reviews are comprehensive and timely.

Cases assessed involving referrals related to domestic abuse incidents or crimes

- 3 good
- 2 require improvement
- 4 inadequate.

Common themes include:

- attending officers take prompt action to safeguard victims and their children;
- investigations are usually good, with good supervisory oversight;
- body-worn video is consistently used at scenes; but
- there are some inconsistencies in risk assessments; and
- the voice of the child is not consistently sought or recorded by attending officers.

Cases assessed involving referrals arising from incidents other than domestic abuse

- 6 good
- 4 require improvement
- 0 inadequate.

Common themes include:

- information is usually shared quickly with children's social care; but
- the quality (of information shared) is inconsistent and often lacks supervisory oversight; and
- the voice of the child and wider safeguarding factors aren't always considered.

Cases assessed involving children at risk from child [sexual exploitation](#)

- 7 good
- 2 require improvement
- 7 inadequate.

Common themes include:

- clear plans to mitigate the risk to the most vulnerable children;
- supervisory reviews are timely and bespoke to each case;
- officers take prompt investigative action where serious offences are identified; but
- risks to other children – for example, peer groups – aren't always considered;
- often information isn't shared with children's social care at the time that a risk to children is identified; and
- there are missed investigative opportunities when children are harmed online.

Cases assessed involving missing children

- 3 good
- 4 require improvement
- 1 inadequate.

Common themes include:

- the demand hub (control room) makes good use of risk assessment tools and information held on Athena, the police information management system, to assess and grade the risk to a child;
- there is good supervision and actions progress well in most cases;
- planning and response are good when high-risk missing children and/or those at most risk are reported missing; but
- the response to children who are regularly missing is inconsistent; and
- there are delays attending some cases due to a lack of available resources.

Cases assessed involving children taken to a place of safety under [section 46 of the Children Act 1989](#)

- 3 good
- 4 require improvement
- 1 inadequate.

Common themes include:

- frontline officers consider the circumstances of vulnerable children and make effective decisions to remove children at risk of significant harm;
- there is effective liaison with children's social care; but
- inspectors are not consistently supervising cases or recording the end of the use of section 46 powers; and
- they don't always record decisions in relation to the use of the power.

Cases assessed involving sex offender management in which children have been assessed as at risk from the person being managed

- 2 good
- 9 require improvement
- 1 inadequate.

Common themes:

- there is a good level of investigative focus when visiting offenders;
- specialist cases are generally managed appropriately; but
- there is a lack of consistency in the way officers manage lower-risk offenders; and
- the [public protection unit \(PPU\)](#) doesn't share [intelligence](#) effectively with frontline officers.

Cases assessed involving children detained in police custody

- 1 good
- 4 require improvement
- 1 inadequate.

Common themes include:

- the attendance of [appropriate adults](#) at the custody office is generally good and children are seen by health care professionals;
- safeguarding concerns are reported to children's social care;
- custody staff understand their responsibility to seek appropriate alternative accommodation for detained children; but
- the voice of the child isn't always recorded; and
- supervisory reviews are inconsistent.

5. Initial contact

The constabulary has effective systems to identify risk and prioritise its response to the most vulnerable

Police officers and staff working in the control room, known as the demand hub, manage Cambridgeshire Constabulary's response to reported incidents. They are responsible for call handling and officer dispatch. Those working in the control room obtain relevant information from callers and search police databases to identify risk and grade responses using the [THRIVE](#) model.

The constabulary's information systems use markers known as flags to highlight information about risk or vulnerability. This helps officers and staff identify children who may be at risk. For example, those who are the subject of a child protection plan or who are known to registered sex offenders.

Case study

A 16-year-old girl was reported missing from home.

Staff in the demand hub researched the markers on police systems and informed responding officers that the child had had multiple missing episodes, when she often went to her boyfriend's house.

Officers located the girl and took her to her grandmother's house, her place of residence. A safeguarding referral outlining the risks was submitted and shared with partners at the local authority.

Case study

Staff in the demand hub quickly identified children (a 17-year-old girl and a three-year-old boy) in the family home in a domestic abuse case involving an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour by a female against her male partner.

The initial call was graded for immediate assistance. Officers arrived at the scene quickly and arrested the suspect, against whom a further allegation had been made (that he had bitten the boy).

Officers completed their risk assessments and checked the younger child for physical injuries. They spoke with him in a child-sensitive way and captured his voice. They referred the case to [MARAC](#) with [IDVA](#) support.

However, we found that the demand hub doesn't always conduct research on violent or sexual offenders before dispatching responding officers. This means that officers don't always have the full risk picture when attending an address.

We saw instances where the initial response to domestic abuse incidents was delayed because staff made appointments with callers for officers to visit them later. (The option to make appointments to respond to domestic abuse incidents was introduced to help manage demand during the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.) Although the demand hub had conducted research prior to deciding whether an appointment was suitable, this didn't always inform its initial risk assessment and response. It is worth noting that people don't always disclose, or aren't always aware of, the full detail or seriousness of what they are reporting until they are seen by the police.

The constabulary prioritises staff welfare

There are good welfare provisions in the demand hub:

- supervisors have had wellbeing training and complete regular one-to-ones with their staff;
- police staff have set lunchbreaks; and
- all staff have access to a wellbeing room.

Absence and sickness rates are low. This effective welfare provision ultimately leads to children being safeguarded more effectively.

Despite some good practice, the response to children who regularly go missing is inconsistent

In most cases, the demand hub is good at identifying the risks associated with missing children. We are encouraged that the constabulary recognises that all missing children are vulnerable, and doesn't use an absent or no apparent risk category to manage demand. Staff go to Athena and [COMPACT](#), a police database containing information on missing people, for information that will help find a child. This process is known as devising a trigger plan. However, we saw instances where demand sometimes dictated whether or not cases got an appropriate response.

Frontline officers told us they are aware of the vulnerability of children reported missing, but their ability to respond appropriately is sometimes hampered by other demands.

Case study

A 14-year-old boy on a full care order was reported missing for the seventh time from his care home. There was a 12-hour delay (due to a lack of resources) before an officer was dispatched. The child was missing overnight without any activity to locate him. When officers attended the care home the next morning, their activity was limited. (They searched his room.)

He returned home of his own accord and was seen by officers who subsequently submitted a referral to the local authority, after research was conducted.

His case notes show that he had talked to specialist officers in the past. They also document recent strategy meetings and return home interviews by the local authority. However, officers made no record of any interaction or the return home interview in this instance.

Officers understand the need to use body-worn video but do not use it consistently

How a child behaves gives important information about how an incident has affected them. This is especially true where the child is too young to speak to officers, or where there may be a risk if this happens with a parent or carer present.

Officers have a good understanding of the need to use body-worn video to record the voice of the child and living conditions at domestic abuse incidents. However, in the cases we reviewed, we often found that they hadn't spoken to children or recorded their concerns, behaviour and demeanour. This means that children's voices are not being heard consistently.

Staff in the demand hub receive regular training

The demand hub has its own training team. Training days are held regularly and built into shift patterns.

The hub can make requests for child protection content which the training team responds to quickly, either creating new or adapting existing material. The training team dip samples and audits incidents for training opportunities. In the past, it has given call-takers and dispatchers extra briefings on vulnerability topics such as online grooming and child rescue alerts. Supervisors also research and bring training in to help their team develop continuously.

A recent review of the demand hub by the constabulary showed that 97 percent of their staff had attended training, with the remaining 3 percent being the result of planned absences.

Recommendations

- We recommend that, within six months, Cambridgeshire Constabulary acts to make sure that children's concerns and views are consistently obtained and recorded (including noting their behaviour and demeanour).
- We recommend that Cambridgeshire Constabulary immediately reviews the application of the diary appointment system used within the demand hub (control room) in domestic abuse incidents. The is to ensure children are appropriately safeguarded.
- We recommend that, within six months, Cambridgeshire Constabulary reviews its missing persons arrangements and practices to ensure that there is an effective response to vulnerable children throughout any incidents involving missing children.

6. Assessment and help

There is a clear process for sharing information with safeguarding partners, although it isn't always timely

Statutory guidance within [Working together to safeguard children 2018](#) states:

Everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe. No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances and, if children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.

Agencies must work together effectively to keep children safe. The MASH in Cambridgeshire has representation from a range of partners, including statutory and non-statutory agencies, to support effective information sharing, joint decision making and planning. There is a clear, well-established process for making referrals to the MASH to share concerns with partners.

The children's commissioner's [2019 childhood vulnerability report](#) estimates that 2.3m children are growing up with a vulnerable family background in England. The report also highlights a yearly increase in police referrals to children's services from 2014 to 2018. When there are concerns about a child's vulnerability, police officers must have a good understanding of the referral process and the need to ensure the safeguarding of children.

When an officer has a concern for a child, they should submit a 101 form (a safeguarding form). We found that response officers routinely submit 101 forms with a good level of detail. But the paedophile online investigation team (POLIT) officers, who respond to and investigate online child abuse cases, don't always submit 101 forms in a timely manner. Sometimes, they don't submit them at all, meaning that safeguarding of children is delayed, as pertinent information is not shared with local safeguarding partners.

The constabulary's domestic abuse risk assessment form incorporates the 101 form, which prompts officers to see and speak to children and record their lived experience. We found that they explained the risk to the children well and recorded their lived experience on the forms. However, the forms aren't always shared with the MASH in a timely manner.

Strategy discussions are prompt

When the police or the other safeguarding partners consider that a strategy discussion should take place – typically to agree whether a joint investigation between the police and children’s social care is needed – it usually takes place quickly. We saw evidence of contributions from relevant agencies which resulted in decisions about whether a joint investigation was required or not. Those decisions were clearly recorded, and the case promptly allocated to the appropriate team to carry out the agreed enquiries.

The constabulary has created two types of service desk to support frontline officers and improve its response to domestic abuse

The constabulary recognises that vulnerable adults and children could be at risk from domestic abuse including stalking, harassment, so-called honour-based violence and [forced marriage](#). It also recognises missing children as a priority.

In response, it has invested in two types of service desk:

- vulnerability focus desks; which support frontline officers in all matters of vulnerability, including investigating domestic abuse; and
- early intervention domestic abuse desks, which gives officers research information to be aware of at scenes of domestic abuse.

Vulnerability focus desks are a central resource for frontline officers. They provide guidance and support but not research – officers are expected to retain and progress initial investigations. However, officers told us that they value the support the desks provide.

The desks have improved officers’ knowledge of the use of [DVPNs](#) and [DVPOs](#) to safeguard victims of domestic abuse. This has led to more successful applications in May 2021 than in the whole of 2020.

The desks also support the constabulary’s domestic abuse perpetrator panel by completing research for the panel, and progressing actions from panel meetings. The vulnerability focus desks can also refer perpetrators for consideration by the panel. This focus on domestic abuse perpetrators, and the risk they pose, means that children are better safeguarded from continuing harm.

Officers from the vulnerability focus desks attend operational meetings throughout the constabulary, which helps frontline officers to focus on priorities. Officers from the vulnerability focus desks provide a link between operational and strategic meetings. They monitor actions taken following operational meetings and provide updates on behalf of other officers in strategic meetings. They provide a bridge from the meetings, monitoring actions and providing updates back to strategic meetings on behalf of officers.

The constabulary has also very recently introduced early intervention domestic abuse desks. Based in the demand hub, staff members are available from 6.00am to 12.00am, seven days a week. These desks are intended to fill a gap identified by the constabulary – that frontline officers don’t have enough research available to make informed safeguarding decisions.

The desk team intends to:

- support frontline officers attending domestic abuse incidents graded immediate, priority and prompt;
- provide research packs to help officers make informed risk assessment and safeguarding plans; and
- build a catalogue of research packs that are updated by the officer on the scene following each attendance.

Their priority is to identify all children and ensure that officers take the time to see and speak with them, record their living conditions and submit a detailed 101 form to the MASH.

We were unable to fully assess the impact the early intervention desk has had on children in Cambridgeshire, because it was still new at the time of our inspection. However, on police systems there is no way to notify officers of the existence of a research document from the desk. Athena's limitations prevent a word document being updated with additional research in the way the desk intended. This means that although additional and useful information from the desk could be available, it isn't easily accessible.

The constabulary's approach to domestic abuse risk assessment is inconsistent

The [College of Policing](#) advises that, when investigating a domestic abuse incident, it is the responsibility of the attending officer or first responder to carry out a primary risk assessment at the first opportunity, usually at the scene. However, the constabulary only uses the widely recognised [DASH risk assessment tool](#) for intimate partner violence and not for all forms of domestic abuse. There is no alternative risk assessment for non-intimate domestic abuse. Officers are expected to use their professional judgment, training and experience as response officers. As a result, children are receiving an inconsistent service.

In two cases we saw, there was no record of a 101 form being completed or shared. To mitigate this, the constabulary has implemented a notification system where non-intimate domestic abuse is referred to the vulnerability focus desk when there are three cases involving the victim in 90 days.

The constabulary scrutinises its domestic abuse practice

The constabulary holds a monthly domestic abuse scrutiny panel. This is attended by representatives from throughout the workforce, the Crown Prosecution Service and Women's Aid, as well as by [independent domestic violence advisers \(IDVAs\)](#).

The panel reviews approximately 30 cases each month, identifying strengths and areas for improvement in the way in which the constabulary responds to domestic abuse. The case reviews focus on the domestic abuse victim, DASH risk assessment and safeguarding outcomes. They do not focus on outcomes for children living with domestic abuse. This may be because partners such as children's social care aren't represented on the scrutiny panel. It means that areas for improvement and actions taken to address them will only have a limited positive impact on such children.

There is a good response when children at most risk are reported missing

When a child is identified as particularly vulnerable when they are missing, there is good identification of risk, and good use of vulnerability markers by staff at the demand hub. Officers make prompt enquiries to trace them, with effective supervision.

Officers from the MET hub, the constabulary's specialist unit for ongoing support of vulnerable children at risk of exploitation, visit children when they return home to make sure they are safe and to understand any risks they were exposed to. They also proactively create safety plans. These could be to meet and talk to a group of children, or one-on-one daily contact for children at high risk of going missing. The plans are regularly updated when new information comes to light.

The response when other children are reported missing is inconsistent

When a child is reported as missing, officers begin an initial investigation to locate them. Their response should not differ between children. For example, whether they are reported as missing on a regular basis or whether the risk assessment is graded as standard.

The constabulary uses trigger plans inconsistently. Despite the excellent work of the MET hub, there is no formal process to identify children and young people who would benefit from having a trigger plan in place. The decision is left to officers within the MET hub and is based on their professional judgment. This means that the response to some children and young people might be less effective than it could be.

We also found delays in police attendance and limited activity to locate missing children in some cases due to lack of available resources (that is, if there are no response officers available, there are delays until officers become available).

The local authority and the constabulary do not effectively share information from return home interviews, which means that opportunities to understand why children go missing are being lost

A [return home interview](#) is a conversation between a trained professional and a child when they return from a missing episode. The interviews uncover information that can help protect children from going missing again, including risks they may have been exposed to while missing and risk factors in their home.

Department for Education statutory guidance requires local authorities to offer return home interviews, which must be conducted by an independent person. However, there are lengthy delays in the information gleaned from return home interviews conducted by the local authority being shared with police. Additionally, there does not appear to be a way for the constabulary to understand which interviews have been conducted and which remain outstanding. This means that important information known to the local authority, which may help to prevent escalation of risk or inform a future response, isn't known to the police.

Recommendations

- We recommend that, within six months, Cambridgeshire Constabulary improves its missing persons practices to make sure that its response is consistent with the risks identified in relation to children who are regularly missing, and that the supervision of these enquires are effective.
- We recommend that, within six months, Cambridgeshire Constabulary reviews its arrangements and practices to ensure that officers responding to domestic abuse incidents implement appropriate risk assessments, so that all children affected are seen and spoken with and their vulnerability is recorded, fully assessed and acted upon.

7. Investigation

Investigations are allocated to teams with the skills and experience to carry them out

The child abuse investigation and safeguarding unit (CAISU) is responsible for investigating all cases of child abuse that take place in a family setting or are committed by someone in a position of trust. They also manage cases involving children who are on child protection plans, or when a joint investigation is necessary.

The MET hub is responsible for working closely with partner safeguarding agencies to support and mitigate risk to those children most vulnerable to exploitation. It also carries out some investigations when children have been exploited.

There is a high standard of investigation when cases are allocated to specialist teams

When there is a clear risk to children from the outset there is a swift response and good decision making by attending officers.

Strategy discussions are prompt and agreed joint actions usually recorded, although there is some inconsistency in the amount of detail included.

CAISU staff and supervisors create good investigation plans and their initial investigations are usually of a high standard.

Case study

An eight-year-old girl told her parents that she had been sexually assaulted by a close family friend at a social function. Officers sought advice from the CAISU and made good consideration of the wider safeguarding risks posed by the alleged perpetrator to his own child.

An urgent strategy discussion was arranged with children's social care and a joint [section 47 Children's Act 1989 investigation](#) (an investigation led by children's social care) was agreed. Officers visited the victim at school with a social worker and the victim's voice was captured well in the investigation log.

Officers are following appropriate lines of enquiry in this continuing investigation. They have arranged support for the child and her family, including an intermediary. We found good evidence of supervisory oversight and input.

Investigations by non-specialist teams are not as strong

Some investigations when children are victims are allocated to response investigation teams. We saw evidence that some of these cases are managed by inexperienced officers.

Some investigations were of a good standard, with meaningful oversight from supervisors. However, we found that wider risks weren't always recognised or lines of enquiry weren't always followed in more complex cases. These tended to be sexual offences.

There is a good multi-agency response when children are at high risk of exploitation, although the initial response is inconsistent

There is a strong multi-agency response to children considered to be at risk of exploitation. MET Hub officers work with partners internally and externally to share information and intelligence to target perpetrators, identify locations of concern and protect those involved in child sexual exploitation (CSE). They conduct monthly multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) and Op MakeSafe meetings for information to be shared and actions identified and allocated.

The voice of the child is generally well recorded and investigations are carried out by the CAISU in their best interest. We were pleased to see that MET hub staff consistently offer excellent support and try to work with all children who are victims of serious sexual offences.

There is good evidence of strong links between the CAISU investigators and the MET hub staff who work with and support child victims. The CAISU manages cases requiring investigation. Its CSE investigations are well supervised. Supervisors set initial investigation plans and carry out meaningful, comprehensive, timely reviews. Children are better protected as a result.

However, on two occasions we found the initial response by response staff at incidents relating to vulnerable children at risk of CSE resulted in missed opportunities to arrest or disrupt perpetrators and safeguard vulnerable children. When these opportunities are missed, it could lead to other children being at risk of abuse.

Officers do not start investigations quickly enough, or adequately assess risk, in online child abuse cases

The constabulary's paedophile online investigation team (POLIT) investigates the sharing (peer to peer) and distribution of child abuse images online. It also receives referrals from the National Crime Agency's (NCA) [child exploitation and online protection command](#).

The constabulary does not regularly review its systems to identify potential offenders. We found several cases that warranted further investigation that had not been followed up by detectives. This leaves children at risk of unknown harm.

Once an investigation is instigated (i.e. when POLIT officers are aware of a crime), POLIT carries out intelligence checks to locate suspects and understand their

circumstances. When the checks are complete, it should carry out a risk assessment. This affects how quickly officers act. However, we found that there is no risk assessment policy in place. Too often, officers rely on their professional judgment. They do not always complete, record or store risk assessments, which means it is often unclear how risk is managed amongst cases.

POLIT is not sufficiently resourced to progress all its current investigations. Some staff investigators from the POLIT team are being used in different roles as demand increases – for example, doing research rather investigating – so cases do not progress.

POLIT officers do not receive regular training. At the time of our inspection, they had not been trained on risk assessment tools. They had limited technical training generally, except for the use of specialist online child protection databases.

The constabulary doesn't share information with other safeguarding partners early enough

Officers told us that the execution of a warrant (or similar action) is what prompts a referral to children's social care. This is often because details such as the number of children connected to an individual aren't known until then. This means that referrals are often delayed by as much as three or four months, although [LADO](#) and MASH checks can still be conducted.

Waiting for a warrant (or similar) before sharing information reduces partners' understanding of the risks to children and doesn't allow them to put protective plans in place.

The constabulary has good provision for victims of sexual assault

Officers spoke highly of the [sexual assault referral centre \(SARC\)](#) which is located halfway between the two CAISUs. The SARC offers a full range of services, including medical support and counselling, as well as achieving best evidence rooms (if required).

Recommendation

We recommend that Cambridgeshire Constabulary acts immediately to improve its approach to investigations related to the exploitation and abuse of children via the internet, paying particular attention to:

- making better use of the intelligence systems available to locate offenders;
- the risk assessment process; and
- sharing information sooner with safeguarding partners.

8. Decision making

The use of police protection powers was appropriate in all the cases we audited

It is a very serious step to remove a child from a family by way of police protection. When there are significant concerns about the safety of children, such as parents leaving young children at home alone or being intoxicated while looking after them, officers handle incidents well.

The police response is generally good when a case is clearly defined as a child protection matter. We saw examples of officers and staff making effective decisions to protect children and collecting important evidence using their body-worn videos.

Case study

A woman called for police assistance as her 13-year-old granddaughter was threatening to harm herself.

The risk was identified by the call taker and graded for immediate attendance, and a unit was dispatched very quickly.

Officers spoke with all parties on arrival, including the granddaughter, to assess the risk. They used their police protection powers effectively to safeguard the granddaughter and liaised with children's social care from the scene, which is good practice. The child was given support for her immediate mental health concerns and taken to hospital. A foster placement was identified quickly, and the child transported there by police.

All activity and decisions, including the rationale to keep the power in place, were recorded while children's social care completed an assessment.

Children are taken to appropriate places of safety

When the power to take a child to an appropriate place of safety is used, the police should promptly speak to children's social care and agree what should happen.

In the cases we audited, children were usually taken to an appropriate place of safety soon after officers had spoken with children's social care. Discussion about joint investigations and agreed activity had been recorded well. We saw that information had been shared promptly.

Record keeping was often poor and not always good enough

Although we found examples where the constabulary had carried out investigations promptly, it was clear that officers and staff don't always record details of safeguarding and working with other partner agencies, or whether there has been a discussion between them, on police systems.

Authorising officers often don't record:

- when and in what circumstances the powers to remove a child from harm ended;
- the rationale or management by designated officers; and/or
- details of the long-term protective plan.

This may mean that child protection agencies aren't aware of measures to protect and support a child.

Case study

Children's social care notified the police of an allegation of assault by adults on two children aged three and one who were in their care. Officers were dispatched. They safeguarded the three-year-old by taking him into police protection and arresting the parents. (The one-year-old had already been safeguarded by children's social care.)

Officers completed the relevant safeguarding forms, including the details of the authorising officer and the time that the powers were invoked, and shared them with children's social care, which resulted in strategy discussions.

However, the rationale for the powers being authorised was not recorded, nor was the time that the powers expired. The supervisory oversight was not good enough.

Case study

A 16-year-old girl who had been reported as a high-risk missing child was located by officers at her boyfriend's house. Officers showed good judgment in deciding to take her into police protection, as she had told them she didn't want to return home and might run away again. A decision was made that her grandparent would collect her. Although officers informed the child about the decision, they did not record any details about the grandparent who picked her up.

Officers completed and shared safeguarding forms with multi-agency partners. However, there is no detail about any designated officer informed or any rationale recorded. The time that police protection started and ended was not recorded.

Recommendation

We recommend that, within six months, Cambridgeshire Constabulary issues guidance to staff in instances where children are taken into police protection. This should include:

- advice on what information they should record (and in what form) on their systems to support good-quality decisions; and
- an emphasis on the importance of ensuring that records are made promptly and kept up to date.

9. Trusted adult

It is important that children feel they can trust the police. We saw, in some child protection cases, good evidence of officers considering the impact of their actions and exploring the most effective ways to communicate with children. Such sensitivity builds confidence and creates stronger relationships between the police and the child, parents and/or carers.

Case study

In a case of high-risk domestic abuse where a mother and her 15-year-old daughter had been assaulted, the police arrived quickly and took positive action in arresting the suspect. They saw all three children but only spoke to the eldest (the 15-year-old), as the younger two (aged five and four) were sleeping. The 15-year-old girl disclosed numerous assaults that had not previously been shared.

Officers carried out detailed risk assessments and shared information with other partner agencies in a timely fashion, including making a referral to MARAC.

They agreed a joint investigation with children's social care, and a longer-term joint protective plan, which included working with other partner organisations, was put in place to support the family.

Case study

A social worker reported to police that a 17-year-old girl had made a disclosure that a man had paid her, and other, younger girls, to perform a sex act. Officers quickly gathered information on the man and prepared a safety plan.

The victim was initially reluctant to meet with police. Officers continuously supported the victim and eventually carried out a home visit, where she gave a detailed account.

The man was then arrested, and a strategy meeting convened quickly. A longer-term joint protective plan to support the family was put in place with children's social care.

Senior leaders have acknowledged that [adverse childhood experiences](#) have an impact on children and that enforcement isn't always the most appropriate way to deal with a troubled child. They support the principle that the child is a victim first, an offender second. Officers' mindsets and language are changing, with many

more considering alternative case disposals for children who offend, such as [restorative justice](#).

The constabulary works well with children in the community

In 2016, the constabulary introduced a programme – Transforming Lives – to tackle gang problems on an estate. One of its primary concerns is to help prevent children and young people being drawn into the criminality of older siblings or peers.

The programme started with a 12-week early intervention plan, working with local schools. Children would be taken out of school one day a week and given time and space with positive adult roles models to talk through risky situations and coping strategies.

The constabulary tracked progress over a year in the form of qualitative updates from teachers on the behaviour of pupils participating in the programme. Results showed improved interactions in school and a reduction in risk-taking behaviour.

The programme is now being rolled out to all six districts in Cambridgeshire, and involves more partners throughout the county.

The constabulary also supports the National Volunteer Police Cadets (NVPC) programme. The purpose of the NVPC is to encourage good citizenship and inspire young people to participate positively in their communities. There are currently approximately 80 volunteer cadets in Cambridgeshire (reduced from 100 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic). Cadets support local community events such as Armed Forces Day, manning cordons, firework displays and the remembrance parade.

10. Managing those posing a risk to children

The team that manages those who pose a risk to children is understaffed

The constabulary has a [management of sex offenders and violent offenders \(MOSOVO\)](#) team, known as the public protection unit (PPU). It manages [multi-agency public protection arrangements \(MAPPA\)](#).

At the time of our inspection, there were 931 registered sex offenders (RSOs) being managed in the community in Cambridgeshire by 14 officers. This is an average ratio of 70 RSOs to one officer, which is higher than is considered reasonable (approximately 50:1 is considered reasonable). Those officers are also responsible for managing other offenders, which increases their workload significantly to approximately 80–85 offenders per manager.

Frontline officers are not receiving proportionate information about RSOs in the community

Not all intelligence on [ViSOR](#), a national database that records details of people who pose a serious risk of harm to the public, is also recorded on Athena, the constabulary's system. PPU officers use ViSOR, and frontline officers use Athena. This means that if an offender moves to another police area, the intelligence would not necessarily move with them.

Our audits showed that there is often little or no intelligence on RSO records on systems (including Athena). This makes it difficult for frontline officers to research and identify the risks they pose in their area or to be aware of their risk if they had interactions with them.

As the numbers of registered offenders increases, the constabulary should prioritise how it collects and shares intelligence about them, and appropriate management of them.

Supervisory oversight is good

The PPU recently became part of the constabulary's protecting vulnerable people department. This is positive. The department has a dedicated detective inspector who provides oversight and ensures consistency of operations throughout the constabulary's north and south divisions. The unit was previously dispersed throughout neighbourhood teams.

We found that officers managed offenders well, despite of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant, for instance, some of the more regular visits were temporarily suspended.

The constabulary should improve its risk assessment and reactive management processes for registered sex offenders

When the police become the lead agency for managing an RSO they should complete an [ARMS](#) risk assessment within 15 days (ARMS is a structured risk management process). Offender managers should develop a risk management plan that sets out how they will manage the risk posed and what actions they will take. For example, they might schedule regular visits to the offender's house by officers.

Although we generally saw good understanding of the ARMS process, it was not used to manage risks from other forms of harm, such as risks posed by those subject to sexual risk orders.

There was also inconsistent use of reactive management, an approach to managing RSOs that was introduced in 2017. Reactive management is considered for offenders who have not reoffended and are consistently assessed as low risk for at least three years. Offenders under reactive management don't receive home visits, although they are still monitored and subject to annual [notification requirements](#) at a local police station. Any intelligence, or changes to their circumstances, triggers a review of the risk assessment with the potential for their level of risk to be increased or for home visits to be reintroduced.

A dip sample of cases showed:

- a lack of regular checks;
- some RSOs received visits while on reactive management; and
- several cases did not have an updated record or relevant flags.

The lack of updates and relevant flags means that there are reactive management cases (or low-risk cases) that frontline officers are unaware of. And they wouldn't be alerted or made aware on Athena if they had to interact with an RSO.

Recommendation

We recommend that Cambridgeshire Constabulary immediately reviews its public protection unit (PPU) arrangements and capabilities to ensure that appropriate information about risk from offenders in the community is shared consistently with frontline officers.

11. Police detention

The constabulary works with others to divert children away from custody or reoffending

In our conversations with the [out-of-court disposal](#) team, we heard that the constabulary has a child-centric approach aimed at diverting children away from the criminal justice system. The force works with other partner organisations that scrutinise cases where an out-of-court disposal has been applied and say when an alternative option for a child could or should have been made. This leads to improved end results outside the criminal justice system for children who are at risk and may pose a risk to others.

Prioritising the welfare of children in custody needs to improve

Healthcare practitioners are present 24/7 at Cambridgeshire's two custody suites, Thorpe Wood and Parkside. When officers are concerned about a young person's health, they refer them to these practitioners.

Practitioners from the [liaison and diversion](#) scheme provide cover in Thorpe Wood and Parkside custody from 8.00am to 8.00pm. However, we saw that officers do not always refer young people to the scheme.

It was positive to see that 101 forms were completed in most of the cases we reviewed. (A 101 form is safeguarding form that officers complete when they have a concern for a child.) However, most of the detail was in the summary of investigations. Children were not spoken to and there were other gaps. For example, parents weren't often contacted to gain consent and/or to gather their views. Circumstances at home weren't always described and, ultimately, understood.

Although there might be some concerns about speaking to a child who has been detained for an offence, details about their demeanour or comments they volunteer may be helpful, especially to other safeguarding partner organisations that the force works with.

Post-custody work with other partner organisations to support the welfare of young people who are regularly brought into custody, or to prevent them from being detained again, was not recorded.

Staff understand the process of requesting alternative accommodation from the local authority

The local authority is responsible for providing suitable alternative accommodation for a child charged with offences and denied [bail](#). Only in exceptional circumstances would this not be in their best interests. For example, if bad weather made it impossible to transport them. In rare cases, such as when a child is at high risk of causing serious harm to others, secure accommodation may be needed.

Data on the number of requests made by the constabulary to the local authority for young people to be transferred to alternative or secure accommodation is not automated or routinely monitored. Children are not always transferred appropriately to local authority alternative accommodation and oversight is limited.

We reviewed nine cases where young people were eligible to be transferred to local accommodation after charge. Two of those cases involved 'less serious' offending where alternative (rather than secure) accommodation provided by the local authority was appropriate. In the remaining seven cases we reviewed, children had been detained for serious offending, including rapes, robberies, and attempted murder. We generally found that officers understood the process of correctly requesting the appropriate provision, although their recording was not always complete.

Appropriate adult provision is timely

Guidance under the [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984](#) (PACE) states that once an appropriate adult is identified that person should be asked to come to the custody centre as soon as possible.

In the cases we reviewed, the appropriate adult had been contacted promptly. Also in most cases, the appropriate adult attended custody in a timely way. However, the constabulary is unable to collate average attendance time of appropriate adults as it is not easily available on Athena.

The constabulary makes financial contributions to the YMCA appropriate adult service to help make sure that all children have the support of an appropriate adult. This is good practice, and shows an understanding of the importance of this support.

The constabulary should do more with performance data to understand outcomes for children in custody

Performance data relating to custody is collated and monitored on a quarterly basis. The constabulary is also seeking to reduce the amount of time young people spend in custody, through their custody scrutiny panel. This is positive.

However, at the time of inspection, there was no routine audit, dip sampling or monitoring of custody records relating to young people. This would allow the constabulary to collate feedback for individuals, the wider organisation and its partners on issues and themes, including the availability of local authority accommodation.

The office of the police and crime commissioner (OPCC) co-ordinates a programme of scrutiny of custody through the [Independent Custody Visiting Association](#).

However, we were told that there is no scrutiny panel involving other partner organisations for custody management, and that meetings with other partner organisations the force works with had lapsed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Custody officers and staff should improve their understanding of safeguarding responsibilities

Staff working in custody receive regular safeguarding training through a monthly continuous professional development training day. External organisations have presented on these days. Presenters have included:

- liaison and diversion services;
- local mental health service providers;
- [Railway Children](#), a charity that protects street children; and
- Rescue and Response, a London-based programme that responds to [county lines](#) cases.

However, more training is needed to ensure staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, such as the importance of completing juvenile detention certificates, and recording the role the appropriate adult plays.

When young people are arrested and brought into custody, it is important that their welfare and vulnerabilities are considered. Records should be kept up to date with vital information such as personal circumstances. Poor record keeping means it isn't always clear why decisions have been made, or why there are lengthy delays in children entering custody.

The constabulary is over-reliant on templates, which means that custody log entries don't always record circumstances pertaining to an offence or child. Supervisors' reviews often rely on the comment that the inspector was satisfied that the investigation was being conducted diligently, without reference to the young person or investigation they were part of.

It was recognised that reviews should be conducted in person. However, we saw that they were completed over the phone or while a young person was sleeping. And the young people weren't always informed about their review on waking.

Recommendations

- We recommend that, within six months, Cambridgeshire Constabulary reviews the monitoring and effectiveness of arrangements for children in police detention with its safeguarding partners.
- Within six months, the constabulary should strengthen its working practices with local authorities to ensure that children charged and refused bail are moved to appropriate alternative accommodation and not held in custody overnight.
- Within six months, the constabulary should improve its programme of [vulnerability training](#) for staff working in custody to improve;
 - the recording of information within custody logs to reflect the individual circumstances of a child and the investigation of the offence they have committed;
 - a rationale for the action they have taken to detain, and continue to detain, a child; and
 - how to capture and record the voices of children by speaking to them and recording their wishes and demeanour.

Conclusion

The overall effectiveness of the constabulary and its response to children who need help and protection

There is a clear commitment from the constabulary's leadership that child protection and wider vulnerability is a priority. It is committed to providing better outcomes for children. Its vulnerability strategy intends to help all officers and staff to provide better safeguarding in the community. And the impact of vulnerability on children is understood and being tackled in innovative ways.

The constabulary has established a safeguarding command with specialist capabilities to tackle those who are a risk to children and to investigate – with sensitivity – some of the most difficult offences.

We found specialist child protection staff to be committed and dedicated, operating in an increasingly complex and demanding environment to keep children safe, yet working to a high standard. The constabulary acknowledges that some of the frontline officers who respond to incidents of concern involving children are inexperienced.

Senior leaders have also acknowledged that there are inconsistencies and areas for improvement in the service provided to children. They responded quickly to areas of concern identified in our inspection. We are encouraged that the constabulary already has the governance and scrutiny arrangements in place to monitor the impact of their responses.

We have made 11 recommendations that will help improve outcomes for children if the constabulary acts on them.

Next steps

Within six weeks of the publication of this report, we require an update of the action the constabulary has taken to respond to the recommendations that we have asked it to act on immediately.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary should also provide an action plan within six weeks of the publication of this report, specifying how it intends to respond to our other recommendations.

Subject to the update and action plan received, we will revisit the constabulary no later than six months after the publication of this report to assess how it is managing the implementation of all 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 organisations 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*](#). 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 focus on the experience of, and outcomes for, children following their journey through the child protection and criminal investigation processes. They assess how well the police service has helped and protected children and investigated alleged criminal acts, taking account of, but not measuring compliance with, policies and guidance.

The inspections consider how the arrangements for protecting children, and the leadership and management of the police service, contribute to and support effective practice on the ground. The team considers how well management responsibilities for child protection, as set out in the statutory guidance, have been met.

Methods

- Self-assessment of practice, and of management and leadership.
- Case inspections.
- Discussions with officers and staff from within the police and from other organisations.
- 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 in the service about the strengths and weaknesses of current practice (this forms the basis for discussions with HMICFRS); and
- initiate future service improvements and establish a baseline against which to measure progress.

Self-assessment and case inspection

In consultation with police services, the following areas of practice have been identified for scrutiny:

- domestic abuse;
- incidents in which police officers and staff identify children who are in need of help and protection (for example, children being neglected);
- information sharing and discussions about children who are 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 'at risk');
- sex offender management;
- the management of missing children;
- child sexual exploitation; and
- the detention of children in police custody.

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