

National child protection inspection post-inspection review

**Hertfordshire Constabulary
26–30 July 2021**

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Introduction

This report sets out the findings from our 2021 assessment of the progress made by Hertfordshire Constabulary against recommendations and findings from our 2019 child protection inspection.

Our 2019 inspection

In September 2019, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspected how well Hertfordshire Constabulary keeps children safe.

In March 2020, we published our findings. We reported that the chief constable, his senior team and the [police and crime commissioner \(PCC\)](#) were committed to protecting [vulnerable people](#), including children. This was reflected in [Everybody's business](#), the PCC's community safety and criminal justice plan. One of the plan's main themes was "Putting victims at the centre". The way the constabulary was organised reflected this. Hertfordshire Constabulary had invested in a specialist command dedicated to child protection and [safeguarding](#). Its strengths included an impressive collaboration with children's social care (CSC) services to form a joint child protection investigation team (JCPIT).

Throughout our inspection, we spoke with highly motivated staff and managers who were working to help children and disrupt those who were a risk to them. Other safeguarding organisations told us about strong and effective arrangements for working together with the constabulary.

The workforce was aware of the threat of organised crime, including [county lines](#) and exposure to gang activity. It worked hard to disrupt and reduce all kinds of child exploitation. We found examples of good work by frontline officers responding to incidents involving children. But they often lacked experience or weren't fully trained.

Within the [public protection unit \(PPU\)](#), which deals with managing registered sex offenders, we found worrying backlogs in completing home visits. There were also some delays in updating risk management plans and inconsistent recording of information on offender management systems.

The cases we reviewed highlighted the need for the constabulary to improve how it responded to children who need help and protection. The recognition of vulnerability and risk, even within specialist safeguarding teams, was inconsistent. And decisions to reduce risks to children weren't always made with enough information. So too many children remained at risk because earlier opportunities to support them were missed.

Specific areas for improvement included:

- consistently speaking to children, particularly the very young, recording their behaviour and demeanour, and making sure their concerns and views are heard and inform decisions about their welfare;
- considering the wider risks posed to children when they are missing or living in homes where there is domestic abuse, to improve protective planning;
- reducing delays in referrals to CSC services and making sure that cumulative and repeat low-level risk is considered;
- recognising that to neglect a child is a serious criminal offence in itself, but that the consequences of neglect mean that children are even more vulnerable to other forms of abuse and exploitation;
- supervising investigations consistently to make sure opportunities are pursued and cases aren't unnecessarily delayed;
- reducing delays in holding [strategy discussions](#) and/or multi-agency management meetings, and recording the results;
- making sure children aren't inappropriately kept in police detention or brought to police stations as a place of safety for prolonged periods; and
- supervising the management of registered sex offenders so that risk is identified and reduced by effective referrals and enforcement.

We made seven recommendations intended to help the constabulary improve end results for children.

Our 2021 post-inspection review

During this inspection we:

- examined constabulary policies, strategies and other documents;
- interviewed senior leaders, managers and supervisors;
- held focus groups with frontline staff; and
- audited 38 child protection incidents/investigations. Of these, we found 19 cases to be good, 17 required improvement and 2 were inadequate.

Methodology for the revisit and the impact of COVID-19

We adapted our inspection because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We agreed arrangements with the constabulary for a safe and effective inspection, working within national guidelines.

Our inspection took place remotely. We used video calls for discussions with police officers and staff, and their managers and leaders, and online reviews of incidents and investigations.

Summary of findings from our post-inspection review

The constabulary has acted decisively to address the concerns we raised in 2019. Leaders have reviewed the arrangements and capability needed to respond to the risks to children in Hertfordshire.

They have increased the number of staff in the safeguarding command, who are now better trained, and most have manageable workloads. Senior managers now use a staff skills matrix to help them identify and quickly respond to any projected gaps in the various safeguarding teams capability. Supervision has improved in all the areas we inspected. Staff are mentored and supported by experienced colleagues, and supervisors provide prompt direction to keep officers focused on achieving the best end results for children.

Officers use the power to take children into police protection appropriately. They record the circumstances and make prompt referrals. But the inspectors responsible for overseeing these incidents aren't updating records with the reasons for continuing the use of the power (or stopping it).

Leaders understand changes in demand, such as increases in domestic abuse and online crime against children. They have invested in new technical equipment and have assigned extra staff and supervisors to improve their response.

Training and guidance helps all staff to understand the importance of recording the [voices of the vulnerable children](#) they find when responding to incidents. We saw that some inconsistency in recording the voices of children remained, but this was improving in the more recent incidents.

The PPU is now an effective unit. Staff are motivated and work closely with other teams to reduce the risk from those who are a threat to children.

The welfare of children in police detention is clearly a priority. Staff are trained and know what they should do to support these children.

The constabulary has improved its information-sharing arrangements with other safeguarding organisations by introducing a single referral route. But the referral system is still partially ineffective because there are delays of up to three weeks before some records are assessed. This means that some risk is unrecognised and some children remain with unaddressed risk for too long.

Conclusion

Hertfordshire Constabulary continues to have a focus on child protection matters at a strategic level.

It still needs to improve in some areas of child protection practice. For example, reducing delays in risk assessment processes would make sure that staff and officers make prompt referrals for all children at risk and consistently record children's concerns.

But the constabulary has worked to address the recommendations from our 2019 inspection and can show marked improvements in some areas as a result.

We are encouraged by the progress made and confident of the continuing commitment to making more improvements.

Leadership, management and governance

Recommendation from our 2019 inspection report

We recommend that, within three months, Hertfordshire Constabulary should carry out a skills audit to assess the training required for those undertaking specialist child protection work with no previous detective or child protection experience.

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

Leaders understand the safeguarding command's operational demand. They know what specialist skills and training are needed to effectively support safeguarding staff. They regularly audit teams and individual's performance, and monitor staff numbers and training levels.

Training and skills development are prioritised for safeguarding command staff. And continuous professional development (CPD) is incorporated into shift patterns. At times when there aren't enough spaces on formal police training courses to meet demand, local options are found for officers to develop their skills and understanding. One example of this is the multi-agency joint child protection courses organised by the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The constabulary has employed more staff and supervisors within the safeguarding command. And investment in technology helps officers efficiently and effectively investigate online offenders.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

There is strong evidence of active leadership

After our 2019 inspection, the constabulary reviewed its arrangements. It made changes to increase the effectiveness of its child protection and safeguarding activity. Governance and management processes were also restructured. This put more focus on providing support to frontline staff to help them respond better to vulnerable children's needs.

A structured approach is now in place, with clear oversight from chief officers. The strategic performance board scrutinises information and data. This gives leaders insight about the work of and level of demand for the constabulary's safeguarding teams. Senior officers also hold monthly working group meetings where they monitor their teams' activity against the constabulary's Strategic Policing Plan and the [National vulnerability action plan](#).

Leaders understand the benefits of working in strong multi-agency partnerships with other organisations in Hertfordshire. They support the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership arrangements. This well-established joint multi-agency approach makes sure that information is shared and action is taken to protect children from harm. An example is [Operation Encompass](#), which gives schools information about incidents of domestic abuse and children reported as missing from home. This helps school staff offer extra support to these vulnerable children.

Leaders closely monitor the skills and workload of their staff

There is a national shortage of fully trained detectives. Leaders act to recruit detectives and keep their staff who have the specialist skills needed for child protection investigations. The constabulary prioritises detective recruitment and training. We found that the recruitment campaign has reduced the 2019 shortfall of 130 trained detectives to 54.

Managers know that not all their staff are fully trained or have the experience to effectively investigate all complex cases. In the safeguarding command, staff workload is closely monitored to make sure that it isn't excessive. And staff have the appropriate skills and supervisor support in place so they can progress their investigations. When new or trainee staff join a team, they are assigned a supervisor. And, where possible, an experienced colleague will mentor them. A handbook explaining child protection investigations is available for all specialist investigators. Managers and on-call specialist detectives provide specialist support and advice.

A skills matrix for staff within the safeguarding command is updated regularly. Senior leaders review the staff skills matrix and safeguarding teams profile every four months. This allows managers to plan staffing changes, develop the skills of their staff and fill any vacancies in their teams. This process also benefits trainee detectives as they are given a structure and the opportunity to gain skills and experience by working on specialist teams and investigating a variety of crimes. Trainee investigators join the safeguarding command for six-month periods, rather than three-month periods for other roles. This is because the constabulary wants to prioritise developing the skills of its young detectives in this area. This is consistent with the constabulary's objective to focus on "people not property".

Formal police training and accreditation is in place, which is supported by local and specialist training

The constabulary works with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire police forces to provide mainstream specialist detective training. This includes the [College of Policing's Professionalising Investigation Programme](#) level 2 accreditation and the [specialist child abuse investigation development programme \(SCAIDP\)](#). But this arrangement doesn't always provide the number of specialist courses in time to meet the demand from Hertfordshire Constabulary's safeguarding teams. Course provision is also being affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

It is positive that when staff need training that isn't immediately available, managers are encouraged to find local courses. For example, staff can access multi-agency joint child protection courses organised by the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children

Partnership. The constabulary and its safeguarding partners also use subject matter experts and specialists to train staff as part of CPD events.

[Vulnerability training](#) is made available to all staff by including it within formal courses, CPD activity and articles on the intranet. The constabulary produced an *Officer's guide to vulnerability* handbook. And all specialist safeguarding staff must complete the constabulary's [voice of the child](#) training. This ensures they understand the importance of this in their work.

Leaders have increased staff and resources in the safeguarding command

The safeguarding command now has 125 detectives, of which 74 percent are fully qualified. Sixty percent of these detectives are SCAIDP trained and 80 percent of staff are trained in achieving best evidence when interviewing children and vulnerable adults.

All the staff in the constabulary's public protection unit who manage the risk from sex and violent offenders are fully trained.

The constabulary has employed an extra sergeant and five witness care officer staff posts in the Beacon Safeguarding Hub, which sits within its domestic abuse investigation support unit. This shows that the constabulary is responding to the increased reports of domestic abuse.

An extra sergeant and three detective constables have now joined the child online safeguarding team (COST) to investigate the increasing numbers of offenders committing online crime against children. The constabulary has also invested over £1m and employed more staff in the digital forensic investigation unit to improve infrastructure and investigations.

Initial contact

Recommendation from our 2019 inspection report

We recommend that, within three months, Hertfordshire Constabulary should make sure that children's concerns and views are obtained and recorded, including noting their behaviour and demeanour. This will help influence decisions made about them.

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

The constabulary has made specialist safeguarding advice and guidance more available to frontline staff.

Vulnerability training, including sessions led by experienced child protection officers, is provided throughout the workforce. This means that staff understand both the importance of capturing the voice of the child and how to do it.

Force control room (FCR) staff prompt responding officers to use body-worn video and to record the voice of the child.

We saw improvements in recording the voice of the child in the more recent cases. But there is more work to do before leaders can be sure that the entire workforce fully understands the importance of speaking with children at incidents and recording their feelings and demeanour.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

The constabulary has made safeguarding advice and guidance more available to frontline staff

The constabulary is prioritising its responses to help vulnerable people and children, and to prevent harm. Vulnerability training is included in formal courses and increasingly within CPD events for staff in all departments. Detective sergeants from the safeguarding command hold sessions to improve awareness, and confidence, among frontline staff in recognising and responding to vulnerability. For example, we were told they had trained FCR call handlers about the voice of the child. This helps them understand what the term means and what they need to record.

The FCR now has an inbuilt voice of the child prompt for staff to record details about children's welfare and vulnerability. We also saw cases where FCR staff prompted responding officers to record the voice of the child.

Officers and staff have access to guidance on all devices, which include desktop computers, laptops and mobile hand-held devices. The guidance includes PowerPoint presentations, a simplified flowchart and a section in the safeguarding handbook. A voice of the child tab on the constabulary's intranet site provides information and guidance to help staff when dealing with incidents that involve and affect children. The intranet also has helpful guides and information about child protection and safeguarding topics such as child neglect, taking children into police protection, [adverse childhood experiences](#) and children in police detention.

Advice and guidance from specialist safeguarding officers are always available to frontline staff. Between 8.00am and 10.00pm, staff from the joint child protection investigation team (JCPIT) provide this support. And, overnight, a detective sergeant and safeguarding detective constable are available. We saw evidence of this being used in several of the cases we audited.

There is still inconsistency in the workforce's understanding of the voice of the child, how to record it and what action should follow

Frontline officers told us they understood what voice of the child meant and how to record and share it with other departments and organisations. They said they knew what they were expected to do when they found children affected by domestic abuse, vulnerable to exploitation or missing from home. They also knew when and how to use powers of police protection to safeguard children. And they told us about their responsibility to make referrals to CSC services when they arrested children.

The JCPIT's child protection investigations are of a high quality. This should be expected as the team comprise detectives who are trained in interviewing children and multi-agency working. Since our 2019 inspection, the team's focus on getting the best end results for children has improved. This improvement reflects the constabulary's investment in training and supervision.

Case study

The constabulary commissioned an independent audit of 18 child protection cases, involving 31 children in total. The aim was to understand if its specialist staff were focused enough on children. The independent auditor feedback was that "There was good evidence of children's views being sought and recorded as part of the child protection process."

But, in the cases we reviewed, we found inconsistency in the quality of how the voice of the child was recorded. In some incidents, it was clear that officers spent time with the children; talking to them and recording their accounts, demeanour and wishes. These officers acted to protect the children, sought specialist advice and made prompt referrals. In other incidents, we saw no records of officers seeking out the children or speaking to them to check on their welfare. It meant that the risk to these children wasn't fully understood or assessed and might potentially leave them at risk.

In several of the domestic abuse incidents we reviewed, there wasn't a record of responding officers speaking to children. The constabulary needs to make sure that all officers understand the importance of speaking to children affected by domestic

abuse incidents. This would mean that they clearly record children's wishes and act to protect them. This is vital because frontline officers' initial assessments of domestic abuse vulnerability determine how referrals to CSC and other safeguarding organisations are prioritised.

School staff are informed, through Operation Encompass referrals, when their pupils are present during domestic abuse incidents. Currently, officers aren't given any feedback on the quality or the results of their referrals. Such feedback would provide a better understanding of the benefits and end results for children from the operation.

Although frontline staff were inconsistent in recording the voice of the child (with examples ranging from no record to brief to excellent), overall, the most recent records were better. This is encouraging and shows that the training is effective.

The constabulary has introduced better systems to help its staff record the voice of the child

Leaders have invested £600,000 in new equipment and infrastructure to make sure that body-worn video (BWV) is issued to all frontline staff. A policy decision requires staff to use BWV to record incidents where children are present. Camera footage is uploaded to police systems so it can be seen by investigators and quality assured by supervisors. We saw in a recording of an incident that the response officer was professional, empathetic and child-centred when talking to a frightened teenager.

New referral forms are now included on the constabulary's Athena system. These have a voice of the child section, which officers must complete.

In May 2021, 94 staff in the custody teams received voice of the child training. The superintendent in charge of custody created a message page on the intranet site, giving guidance and instruction about the importance of recording the voices of children who are in police detention. A prompt has been added to the custody record system for staff to record the voice of the child. Supervisors review current custody records and complete monthly audits. This is to check that staff are complying with the constabulary's policy for children in detention. In the cases we saw, staff consistently recorded the voices of children in custody.

Assessment and help

Recommendation from our 2019 inspection report

Within six months, Hertfordshire Constabulary should review its referral pathways for sharing police information to ensure they are both efficient and effective.

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

A more effective and efficient single-process referral system is now in place. The constabulary has assigned a dedicated inspector and more staff to the safeguarding hub. Guidance supports frontline staff and high-risk cases are prioritised.

Operation Encompass notifications aren't delayed and now also include incidents when children go missing.

There are still significant backlogs before children's referrals are risk assessed in the safeguarding hub.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

The constabulary has introduced a single system to notify other organisations about vulnerable children

In our last inspection, we saw officers and units using several channels and systems to pass information to other safeguarding organisations. The constabulary then reviewed its processes. It has since put in place a single system within an expanded referral hub. This hub is now responsible for assessing domestic abuse risk.

The local authority still operates a [multi-agency safeguarding hub \(MASH\)](#) that covers all of Hertfordshire, with staff including two police staff researchers. But the referral hub at the headquarters carries out most of the police risk assessment and information sharing. Staff in the hub hold prompt strategy meetings with social workers and arrange joint-agency child protection investigation visits. They also provide specialist advice to support frontline officers helping vulnerable children.

While previously the detective inspector (DI) for the joint child protection investigation team (JCPIT) had a dual responsibility, a dedicated DI now oversees the MASH and referrals hub. This improvement means the inspector can focus on this vital aspect of multi-agency child protection activity and improve communication to benefit children.

Referral hub staff attend the constabulary's daily management meetings. This helps operational staff respond appropriately to high-risk vulnerability. Referral hub staff can request help from other teams when faced with high levels of referrals.

Backlogs in hub risk assessments are frequent

We were told the constabulary was aware of backlogs of unassessed referrals within its referral hub.

The increase in the numbers of referrals made for children reflects the effectiveness of the constabulary's training on vulnerability and capturing the voice of the child. Nationally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has also been a substantial increase in police reports of domestic abuse incidents affecting children.

We saw that over 700 referrals were awaiting assessment by the hub. Most of these referrals were reports of domestic abuse incidents that responding officers had initially graded as standard risk. The earlier incidents were nearly three weeks old and hub staff hadn't assessed risk.

Case study

We reviewed the 20 oldest unassessed referral cases. Children were linked to nine of these.

In eight of the cases, the record is unclear if the children were present during the incident or if officers spoke to them. In the one case where the child was seen, the officer commented simply, "child seen AIO [all in order]".

Of the nine cases involving children, we noted two cases with an escalation in the level of risk. And in another case, concerns about parental drug use, mental health vulnerability and neglect of the children were already being assessed by CSC services. But information about the domestic abuse incident hadn't yet been sent to inform the risk assessment for the children.

We were told that some of the increase in work for hub staff was because staff from other organisations, such as CSC services and in health and education, were returning to work as COVID-19 restrictions were reduced. They were then reviewing cases and making referrals.

The constabulary employed more staff in the hub. Managers told us that these extra staff would help the team when possible but that specialist skills were needed to make sure that risk assessments were accurate.

The safeguarding hub doesn't have the capability to quickly assess risk or refer concerns about vulnerable children to other organisations.

Delays in assessment and referrals can increase risks for vulnerable children

Staff are positive about their training and are better at identifying vulnerability and risk. Where children are very vulnerable, responding officers act decisively to protect them.

When children are taken into police protection due to risk from abuse, exploitation or being missing from home, referrals are made quickly. Safeguarding plans are agreed with CSC staff in strategy discussions. And we saw evidence in [sexual exploitation](#)

cases of CSC staff providing feedback to police investigators. This meant there was a clearer understanding of the child's safeguarding plan.

In child protection investigations assigned to JCPIT officers, we saw that referrals and strategy meetings were always comprehensive and prompt.

In other incidents, however, responding officers don't always immediately recognise risk. They are trained to record any concerns for children on the systems. This should allow specialists to analyse these incidents against any information on the constabulary's systems. For example, referral forms are routinely completed by officers responding to domestic abuse incidents with children in the family, which are risk assessed in the hub.

But domestic abuse referrals graded as standard risk by the reporting officer aren't prioritised by the hub for assessment. And there isn't a process to identify cases that included children. We were told, however, that the constabulary intended to create a new triage process to search its records for these children, to make sure the children can be prioritised.

Constabulary leaders understand the increased harm to children from being repeat victims or exposed to escalating risk. And there is a process to identify these cases and act. But the delays we saw in assessing risk within the hub backlog means that for those children, the process isn't yet good enough.

The number of indecent images of children on the internet and held on computers and devices such as mobile phones is constantly increasing. Police forces are expected to identify the offenders and the child victims. The constabulary has a single member of staff from its child online safeguarding team (COST) assigned as the victim identification officer role. But this responsibility was secondary to their other work. This means the constabulary can't update information on the national child abuse image database (CAID) quickly enough. Leaders told us that they were increasing the number of staff carrying out this role.

The constabulary should provide more feedback to its staff about their referrals

Effective information sharing is a vital part of safeguarding activity. Multi-agency child protection arrangements are based on organisations working together and co-ordinating their staff. It is about a team around the child making child protection plans to reduce the risk of significant harm. This needs professionals to communicate and assess progress.

But officers told us they never received feedback about the referrals they made. And that they would welcome feedback to understand the quality of their work, the results for those children and if any more action was needed.

High-risk domestic abuse cases are referred to [multi-agency risk assessment conferences](#) to plan and co-ordinate activity to safeguard victims. But information from these plans isn't included on the main systems. So responding officers can't fully understand the risk and take the most effective action if called to future incidents.

Through Operation Encompass, the constabulary notifies schools in Hertfordshire via email when pupils are affected by domestic abuse incidents or if they are reported as missing. This provides information to school staff quickly so they can support vulnerable children. The project has yet to be evaluated to understand its effectiveness and if it can be further improved.

Investigation

Recommendation from our 2019 inspection report

We recommend that, within six months, Hertfordshire Constabulary should improve child protection investigations by ensuring that:

- it provides guidance to staff that identifies the range of responses and actions that the police can contribute effectively to multi-agency strategy discussions and plans for protecting children;
- every referral the police receives is allocated to those with the skills, capacity and competence to carry out the investigation;
- investigations are supervised and monitored, with supervisor reviews clearly recording any further work that may need to be done; and
- it conducts regular audits of practice that include assessing the quality, timeliness and supervision of investigations.

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

Officers and staff in investigative roles are better trained and supported. And the quality of most child protection investigations has improved.

Managers monitor their teams' investigations and capability, and make prompt adjustments when needed so they remain effective.

Better supervision is in place, which results in better child-centred investigations. Managers audit and check the quality of investigations, and feed back to their staff.

Processes, staffing levels and work within the child online safeguarding team (COST) need to be improved.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

The constabulary has improved its investigation guidance and updated standard operating procedures

The constabulary reviewed and updated its standard operating procedures for investigation. They now contain direct references to the vulnerability strategy, including the importance of investigators recording the voice of the child.

There is a vulnerability handbook that provides information for all staff, and a handbook to guide officers on joint child protection investigations with other child protection agencies. All these documents are available on the intranet.

The safeguarding command prioritises staff training. Since our last inspection, many more officers have been trained or are in the process of being accredited. And there are structured plans to train staff who are new to their roles.

The terms of reference for some specialist units, such as the COST, have been adjusted to include all children up to the age of 18. This helps supports the constabulary be more consistent in its response to child protection investigations.

The staff skills matrix helps leaders maintain the safeguarding command teams' capability

Leaders acted to reduce the excessive caseloads of specialist officers on safeguarding teams. Extra staff and supervisors were assigned to these teams to make sure there were enough trained officers to manage the work.

Managers regularly review the capability, skills and caseloads of their staff, and can adjust numbers, arrange training and ask for extra resources to maintain their teams' effectiveness.

At team level, managers try to allocate cases to investigators depending on each investigator's skills and experience. The number of investigations that officers have assigned is fewer than it was at the time of our previous inspection. In the cases we saw, it was clear that investigators have the appropriate level of skill needed to work on those investigations.

But supervisors told us that within COST, investigations per officer were now significantly higher than during the time we previously inspected, due to more cases reaching the constabulary. New staff and a supervisor have been assigned to the team. But the current balance of staff to investigations means that there are some delays to investigations.

The workload of the digital forensics investigation unit has been reviewed and leaders provided new and extra resources to improve its capability. Processes were checked to make sure that child abuse investigations are as prompt as possible. This policy allows some cases to be provided by accredited commercial companies. This means high-risk investigations can progress more quickly. Staff from the unit are routinely available to give specialist advice and guidance to officers on investigative strategies, such as which suspect devices should be prioritised for examination.

Investigations have improved, but some teams are inconsistent in their approach to multi-agency child protection investigations

Most of the JCPIT investigations we saw contained records of victim pre-assessments. These included information about initial accounts and helped officers to decide whether the child would benefit from an intermediary. In most of the cases we saw, investigating officers considered the wider risks to children and updated information quickly, working well with social workers. This shows that investigating officers understand the benefits of multi-agency working to help children.

There is a prioritisation process for investigations where suspects who hold a position of trust are a risk to children. Referrals are made to local authority designated officers and strategy discussions are held to agree joint plans and timings for actions.

COST officers don't always work with partner organisations early enough to identify children who may be at risk from offenders. Delays in making referrals and asking for information from other organisations mean that opportunities to intervene earlier to safeguard children may be missed. CSC services and other organisations hold information that is valuable for risk assessment. For example, if a child is already being supported by an open case to social care or health, this information can be used to better understand their vulnerability and to determine the timing of the safeguarding activity.

In some of the records of COST investigations, we saw little consideration for multi-agency plans to safeguard the children once the suspects were [released under investigation](#) or on [bail](#). This means that planning to reduce risks isn't good enough for the constabulary to be fully confident that everything that needs to be done to protect children is in place. This includes officers understanding the need to speak with children to understand their views.

We did see investigators making good plans for the welfare support of the suspects. But children and families who are victims need to receive at least the same level of support from police officers and their safeguarding partners.

Supervisors oversee investigation plans and dip sample cases to understand the quality of work

In most of the investigations we reviewed, clear and purposeful plans were recorded and validated by supervisors. Supervisory input is prompt and this directs activity to effectively safeguard victims and bring offenders to justice. Safeguarding command managers complete monthly audits of their teams' investigations. The results are recorded on the constabulary's systems and feedback is given to the officers and their supervisors. This works well and allows managers to understand the quality of their officers' work and identify any gaps where learning or training is needed.

There is a daily safeguarding command meeting, which feeds into the constabulary-wide daily management meeting. High-risk and high-vulnerability incidents and investigations are reviewed, and managers satisfy themselves that the right response is in place. If not, they'll arrange extra activity to bring the matters to a satisfactory conclusion. We saw this process in action and noted that managers used the forum to promote constabulary priorities and good ways of working. For example, the meetings included cases where children were taken into police protection and investigations where children were held in police detention.

COST investigations are being delayed by current ways of working

Many COST investigations begin when the unit receives intelligence from national or international law enforcement agencies about addresses where occupants are accessing indecent images of children.

We saw delays in COST acting on this intelligence. There were also delays in sharing information with, and getting it from, local safeguarding organisations to assess the impact of the intelligence on the people living at the address, and to plan multi-agency safeguarding activity.

The system for applying to magistrates for search warrants means officers face delays of between seven and ten days before they can make applications. Instead, officers are going to addresses without search warrants and attempting to arrest suspects before searching. This isn't a good way of working and can mean that suspects are alerted, evidence lost and, potentially, children remain at risk. Managers should address this immediately and work with organisations to resolve the warrant application delays.

Decision making

Recommendation from our 2019 inspection report

We recommend that, within three months, Hertfordshire Constabulary should issue guidance and take steps so that, in incidents where children are taken into police protection, designated officers take an active responsibility for overseeing activity, ensuring:

- the voice of the child is sought, and their wishes and concerns are listened to;
- strategy discussions are held and records are made of all relevant information; and
- police stations aren't improperly used as places of safety for children.

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

Standard operating procedures and guidance are available. Frontline staff are trained and are now able to better help children who need protecting.

The constabulary has invested in child-friendly rooms at some of its police stations.

Incidents and records are quality assured and reviewed by specialists. This makes sure that all appropriate work is being done to protect the children.

Designated officers are still not fulfilling all their responsibilities to check that decisions are always made in the best interest of the child in police protection.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

There are new instructions and guidance on using police protection powers, which are improving the work of frontline staff

Information is available on the intranet to help and guide all staff. In June 2021, a revised standard operating procedure for police protection was agreed and published on the intranet. This clearly explains the procedures and defines the roles and responsibilities of officers involved.

There is also a new form to record incidents of police protection. This makes the recording process more efficient and prompts officers to provide more details about children's circumstances and their wishes.

Officers are further supported with information about police protection powers in the form of PowerPoint presentations, a simplified flow chart and a section in the safeguarding handbook.

Advice and guidance from safeguarding specialists are always available. And JCPIT is notified of all police protection incidents via live and daily reviews. We saw evidence in case audits that frontline officers used this communication channel effectively.

In the incidents we reviewed, frontline staff were focused on the welfare of the children. They nearly always record their wishes and demeanour well and make prompt referrals to CSC services.

But we found that officers weren't always recording on police systems the actions from strategy meetings with CSC services, and what the end results for the children were. However, our audits indicate this is now improving each month.

In June 2021, the constabulary audited incidents when children were taken into police protection. It identified themes within these cases. It then gave feedback to individuals on where they could improve and the wider themes were incorporated into training.

We also found that:

- frontline officers' responses were improving;
- there was some inconsistency in fully recording the voices of children, but this was getting better;
- the timing and recording of strategy discussions was improving; but
- designated officers weren't reviewing and endorsing records.

Training is provided but not all officers are fulfilling all their responsibilities

The constabulary trains frontline officers, staff and their supervisors on what they should do when they find children at risk of harm. This forms an important part of the formal five-weekly training.

In the cases we saw, it was clear that there were strategy discussions for every police protection incident. This is a significant and positive change since our last inspection.

Police inspectors are required by section 46 of the Children Act 1989 to promote the welfare of children taken into police protection. Separate training reinforces inspectors' responsibilities as designated officers when children are taken into police protection.

But we found that no designated officers were recording their involvement on the police protection records. This means it is unclear if they are as actively involved as they should be. Designated officers are responsible for:

- communicating with the children, local authorities and concerned adults;
- making sure that police officers are using the power proportionately and necessarily to protect the children; and
- making sure there is continuity if officers hand over to others at the end of shifts, and recording when the use of the power ends.

The constabulary knows that its designated officers aren't completing this duty properly. It has introduced oversight, with a safeguarding command detective inspector checking these cases each morning. The activity taken to safeguard the children is reviewed in the daily management meetings.

More needs to be done to make sure designated officers are fulfilling their responsibilities.

The constabulary is investing in child-friendly places of safety

The constabulary recently built a bespoke place of safety for children at Watford police station. This is a welcome development and a tangible child-focused project. A second room at Stevenage police station is also being prepared. This means that children won't have to travel as far.

Frontline staff and specialist officers are aware of the new facility and it has been publicised on the intranet.

But we saw that, in some cases, officers were still taking children to police stations where there weren't appropriate facilities. In one case, a child was at the police station for ten hours.

Managing those posing a risk to children

Recommendation from our 2019 inspection report

We recommend that Hertfordshire Constabulary should immediately review the arrangements within its public protection unit (PPU), including its supervision and management information systems, so that it is satisfied that the unit is fully effective within its terms of reference.

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

The PPU is now operating more effectively.

We found that management and supervision had improved. And managers are operating as a team to improve resilience and support and direct their staff.

Case management and recording has improved, and referrals to CSC services are prompt.

There are good examples of working together, both internally with other teams and externally with other police forces and safeguarding organisations.

But we saw inconsistency in the way risk management plans and offender assessments were completed and recorded. And there are delays in the risk management plans and risk assessments being made.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

The PPU is a strong team with better supervision and highly motivated staff

Following our last inspection, the constabulary reviewed staffing levels and the operational work of its PPU. It made changes to how staff and cases are supervised. Now, supervisors see all cases and the team's workload can be prioritised according to risk.

Supervisors are now fully trained and able to access all the unit's cases. This has significantly improved oversight and the unit's operational resilience.

The detective chief inspector, detective inspector and detective sergeants supervise their staff's cases every day. And regular one-to-one supervisory meetings between sergeants and staff are improving the quality of how they manage the risk of registered sex offenders living in the community. These supervisory meetings also include a focus on staff welfare and wellbeing.

Staff and supervisors told us that the PPU was operating as a strong team, made a valuable contribution to safeguarding in Hertfordshire, and that it was a good place to work.

Processes and ways of working are better, but change is needed to increase the speed and consistency of some offender assessments

All staff in the unit are fully trained in the management of sex and violent offenders. This includes using the active risk management system (ARMS) and grading indecent images of children.

We were told that working with probation service officers was good and we saw evidence of this in the cases we reviewed. For instance, joint home visits to registered sex offenders (nationally considered as a good way of working) are taking place.

The sergeants work as a team. This means there are no delays in updating the constabulary's [ViSOR system](#) with information about offender activity and assessments.

Supervisors make good decisions to conditionally caution registered sex offenders when they commit minor offences. This allows officers to focus on more serious risks and consider the wider implications of related work.

The unit works with other forces and they audit samples of each other's case records. This is a good way of working and staff from each force benefit from learning from this independent scrutiny.

There should be a clearly documented plan to manage offender risk. This will allow all staff to respond effectively to incidents. But some of the risk management plans (RMPs) we saw tended to be a statement from the offender manager about the level of risk rather than a plan to manage the risk posed by the offender. Actions to manage the risk weren't always recorded on the RMPs. Where actions were recorded, we saw these in the body of the RMP but not on the system's actions tab.

We saw cases when the offender manager completed an ARMS record of a visit but didn't update the RMP. And we saw other occasions when the RMP was updated but no ARMS entry was made. This is inconsistent.

We also saw that the PPU didn't always review the ARMS and RMP after a significant event. For example, when it found an extreme image on the phone of a registered sex offender at a time when his girlfriend said that she'd given birth to a child, or when a registered sex offender lost their job.

Although the ViSOR system was well managed, we found some significant delays in recording RMPs and ARMS. The PPU data for the week we inspected showed 99 overdue RMPs and 100 overdue ARMS records. This meant that the risk management plans and assessments for approximately 12 percent of Hertfordshire's 829 registered sex offenders weren't up to date.

This is worrying and managers need to take immediate action to address this. Despite the considerable progress the PPU has made, we did see cases where

concerns about risk to children from registered sex offenders weren't acted on soon enough.

Case study

During a visit with a registered sex offender, the offender manager discovered that he was in contact with children (his niece and nephew).

He was then told to disclose his conviction to his family so they could protect the children, but he didn't. The offender manager discovered that he was in closer contact with the children than he had previously said.

There was a six-week delay before a senior officer authorised details of the offender's circumstances to be disclosed the children's parents.

The PPU should have supervisory processes in place to prevent delays that potentially leave children at risk.

The PPU works with other safeguarding agencies and teams elsewhere in the constabulary to manage the risk posed by offenders

There are good [multi-agency public protection arrangements \(MAPPA\)](#) in Hertfordshire. Meetings are well attended and chaired by managers with appropriate seniority.

Monthly MAPPA level 1 meetings with the national probation service allow safeguarding agencies to discuss cases and close any gaps to reduce risk.

In the cases we reviewed, offender managers were making prompt referrals to CSC services for children at risk from registered sex offenders. This included holding strategy discussions so all the information available was used to draw up RMPs.

The PPU detective inspector makes time to provide training to staff in other units. This ensures staff know when and how to apply to courts for [sexual harm prevention orders](#) when there is a concern that an individual poses a risk.

Each of the constabulary's ten local policing team areas has an officer assigned as the single point of contact with the PPU. These officers are trained by the PPU and go with offender managers to visit and assess registered sex offenders in their areas. This is a good way of working. It improves communication and understanding between the specialist PPU staff and community-based officers.

These links are particularly strong in St Albans, where the inspector allocates registered sex offenders who are of concern to individual officers to monitor during their patrols. This has provided extra intelligence and allowed officers to act to protect vulnerable individuals.

PPU staff use constabulary systems and the daily management meetings to brief and update the wider workforce about the activities and risks of offenders they are most concerned about.

Police detention

Recommendation from our 2019 inspection report

We recommend that, within three months, Hertfordshire Constabulary should carry out a review to satisfy itself that its management of children in police detention is appropriate and reflects the standards of current national best practice. This should include:

- the knowledge and understanding of custody staff about how to promote the welfare of children;
- recording the voice of the child;
- making child protection referrals; and
- understanding the requirement for the provision of alternative accommodation.

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

Custody staff and investigating officers are trained and have guidance about their responsibilities to safeguard children while in police detention.

Officers are recording the voice of the child and making prompt referrals. But some children still wait too long before they are seen by [appropriate adults](#).

The constabulary better understands when and how to request alternative accommodation for detained children. But this provision doesn't meet demand.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

Training and guidance have been provided so that staff understand their duty to safeguard children who are in police detention

Training to improve the way the constabulary supports children in custody was given to 94 custody staff during continuous professional development sessions in May 2021. Managers have promoted the need to promote the welfare of children in custody to all staff. This includes a section on the intranet called "Safe to stay", which provides guidance about the importance of seeking and recording the voice of the child.

The custody intranet section includes the message:

"They're not 'streetwise' – they're exploited."

The superintendent responsible for custody arrangements uses the intranet to reinforce the importance of recording the voice of the child.

In the cases we reviewed, we found that the training and messages had improved how all staff responded to children while they were in custody. We saw evidence of staff prioritising child detainees, recording vulnerability and making plans specifically to care for each child. We saw good records of the voices of these children.

When children arrive in custody, they are assessed without delay and any vulnerability is noted on the custody record. Children in custody are always seen by healthcare professionals. It is policy to assign female staff to assist with the welfare needs of girls while they are detained. A similar practice extends to boys, who are assigned a dedicated member of staff for welfare needs while in custody. Welfare visits and cell checks are regularly completed and recorded by the custody staff.

Officers make prompt referrals so that most children receive help and support without delay

The constabulary instructs investigating officers to make referrals for children in custody. A new declaration form focuses officers' attention on recording the voice of the child and making meaningful referrals. A section of the form asks, "Has a referral been submitted? If yes, who to?" If the answer is no, there needs to be a recorded rationale for why this wasn't done.

Most children who aren't being investigated by safeguarding command officers are dealt with by prisoner handling teams. Detective sergeant case directors oversee these investigations. All their staff are trained to make referrals. And there is a morning review of all child detainees to assess if referrals have been made or are needed.

In most cases, we saw that appropriate adults were called and saw the child as soon as was practical. The constabulary recognises that there are some gaps in appropriate adult attendance for children detained during the night. These children are likely to be particularly vulnerable and would benefit from this support. In December 2020 the constabulary and its partners from The Appropriate Adult Scheme and Hertfordshire Youth Justice Service introduced a new night-time appropriate adult service for detained children.

Managers told us that they were monitoring the cases where this had happened. And that they had raised this problem with the appropriate adult scheme to find a solution.

Custody managers dip sample live custody records and complete monthly audits to check compliance with standard operating procedures and the quality of the care children receive. Children in custody overnight are reviewed in the daily safeguarding management meeting.

The constabulary has better arrangements to tackle the number of children in custody overnight and the end results they receive

There were 161 overnight child detentions in Hertfordshire for the 12-month period up to the 30 June 2021. Of these, 30 children remained overnight in police detention after they were charged with criminal offences.

Bi-monthly meetings between the police and the local authority review these cases to identify problems and what lessons can be learnt. Staff get feedback on the quality of their work.

Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire police forces share a procedure for young persons in custody overnight. This outlines how and when police should ask the local authority for alternative accommodation. It includes children in custody but not yet charged, and those who have been charged but refused bail. The procedure helps officers understand whether to ask the local authority for secure or non-secure accommodation, and who they should contact.

The cases we saw between February 2021 and June 2021 showed that the constabulary made three requests to the local authority for non-secure accommodation and two children were accommodated.

Nine requests for secure accommodation were made, but it was only provided for one child. One child was offered accommodation in Manchester, but the police declined this because of the amount of travelling time involved. No secure accommodation was available for the other detained children.

The lack of suitable alternative accommodation continues to be a problem for Hertfordshire Constabulary. Nationally, other police forces report a similar situation. The problem should be escalated for further discussions within the children's safeguarding partnership arrangements.

Next steps

Hertfordshire Constabulary has made good progress in response to our 2019 recommendations. But it still needs to improve in some areas to provide consistently better end results for children. Specifically, it still needs to:

- make sure all its staff consistently record children's concerns, behaviour and demeanour;
- reduce delays in risk assessments, so referrals for all children at risk are made promptly;
- make sure that risk assessments for online child abuse referrals are prompt and include information from other safeguarding organisations so interventions aren't delayed;
- make sure that designated officers take responsibility for children who are in police protection;
- improve the quality of its public protection unit assessments and risk management plans; and
- conduct further work with the local authority to provide more appropriate alternative accommodation for children detained in custody after being denied bail to court.

As part of our routine monitoring of all police forces, we will continue to evaluate the constabulary's performance in relation to these recommendations and instigate closer scrutiny if necessary.

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