

National Child Protection Post- inspection Review

Leicestershire Police
4 – 8 December 2017

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1. Background

The 2017 inspection

In January 2017, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)¹ conducted a child protection inspection of Leicestershire Police. In June 2017, we published the report of our findings.²

In the 2017 report, we concluded that the force had demonstrated a strong commitment to prioritising the protection of children and to developing a culture of continuous improvement. This was particularly evident among the chief officer team and senior officers, who had invested in officers and staff to support these specialist functions and manage the associated demands.

However, HMICFRS also identified areas for improvement. In particular, we were concerned to find that some high-risk cases of domestic abuse had been inappropriately downgraded. This potentially exposed victims and their families to ongoing and unmanaged risk, and removed opportunities for them to receive support and engagement from a wide range of other safeguarding agencies.

There were also indicators of an inconsistent approach to the protection of some children who regularly went missing from home. We concluded that the force needed to focus more on early intervention, and to develop a greater understanding of the link between children who regularly go missing and their vulnerability to sexual exploitation, in order to ensure the appropriate protective action was taken.

The force had taken some significant steps in conjunction with external safeguarding agencies to address its approach to child sexual exploitation. However, it was unable to demonstrate its ability to identify and safeguard effectively through its referral and assessment process, children at risk of sexual exploitation.

The 2017 report therefore made a series of recommendations aimed at improving police child protection practices in Leicestershire.

¹ The 2017 inspection was carried out before 19 July 2017, when HMIC also took on responsibility for fire & rescue service inspections and was renamed HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. The methodology underpinning our inspection findings is unaffected by this change. References to HMICFRS in this report may relate to an event that happened before 19 July 2017 when HMICFRS was HMIC. Citations of documents which HMIC published before 19 July 2017 will still cite HMIC as the publisher.

² *National Child Protection Inspections – Leicestershire Police*, HMIC, 2017. Available from: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/leicestershire-national-child-protection-inspection/

The 2017 post-inspection review

In July 2017, the force provided HMICFRS with an action plan setting out how it intended to respond to the recommendations in our report. Since then, HMICFRS has continued to monitor improvement activity by the force, and in December 2017 a post-inspection review was conducted to assess its progress.

The review included: an examination of force policies, strategies and other documents; interviews with officers and staff; and an audit of 32 child protection cases (chosen because they related to the areas for improvement set out in the 2017 inspection report).

Summary of findings from the post-inspection review

In January 2017 we reported that senior leaders were keen to build upon existing good practice to improve the way the force protected vulnerable children. In our post-inspection review, we found that the force continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to reviewing, improving and implementing changes to its services, and to prioritising child protection. This continuing commitment is evident in the investment and development of a children and young person's hub known as Lighthouse, which - when completed³ - will provide children with access to specialist workers, as well as technology enabling them to give live evidence remotely to the crown court.

During our 2017 inspection, HMICFRS found that officers and staff responsible for managing child abuse investigations were knowledgeable, committed and dedicated to providing the best service and improved outcomes for children at risk. We are pleased to report that this remains the case.

There remains clear evidence of strong senior leadership and oversight, coupled with a continuing investment of additional officers and staff into child protection teams. The commitment by senior leaders was widely recognised by the staff and officers spoken to, who told us they feel valued in their roles because of the investment of additional staff and the visible progression and development of their peers. They also cited examples of receiving support from the head of crime following particular incidents (such as sudden, unexplained deaths of infants), and described the detective chief inspector as visible and accessible.

The force continues to work closely with external agencies. This is particularly evident within the safeguarding hub, and during the recently-introduced daily partnership meetings, at which all children within the force area identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation are discussed and joint risk assessments are decided upon.

³ At the time of the inspection, the force anticipated the hub would be completed in February 2018.

We also found that the force has invested in an innovative solution for recording strategy discussions with fellow safeguarding agencies; these are now audio-recorded, with the sound file attached to the police system. HMICFRS found this to be an effective and efficient method, and considers it good practice.

In our first inspection, we found disparity between the results of the force's own audits of child protection cases and HMICFRS'; the force found the majority of cases examined to be of a good standard, while we found some of these to be either inadequate or requiring improvement. In the post-inspection review, we found that the current process does not place sufficient focus upon the quality of frontline investigative practice. A framework that focuses on outcomes, the recognition of risk, and the quality of decision making would assist in providing greater assurance to the force of its frontline practice and provision of service.

Nevertheless, our case file audit found evidence of some improvements:

- In January 2017, HMICFRS assessed 85 child protection cases and rated the force's practice as: good in 25 cases (29 percent); requiring improvement in 27 cases (31 percent); and inadequate in 23 cases (27 percent).
- In this post-inspection review, HMICFRS assessed a further 32 child protection cases and found the force's practice to be: good in 17 cases (53 percent); requiring improvement in 10 cases (31 percent); and inadequate in 5 cases (15 percent).

Although the sample sizes are different, this is indicative of the progress made.

In January 2017, we found the attendance of appropriate adults to support children in police detention was dependent upon the time of the child's police interview as opposed to their arrival in custody. This sometimes caused delays in the child receiving the appropriate level of support. In our post-inspection review, we found this still to be the case.

The transfer of children to appropriate accommodation when detained overnight is also still problematic; those children in the cases reviewed by HMICFRS were all kept in police detention following charge.

Overall, we found that while improvements are still needed to child protection practice in some areas, the force has taken steps to respond to the recommendations following the January 2017 inspection. As a result, it is able to demonstrate an improved standard of practice, and consequently better outcomes for some children in Leicestershire.

HMICFRS is encouraged by the progress made, and is assured of the continuing commitment of the force to making further improvements.

2. Post-inspection review findings

Initial contact

Recommendation from the 2017 inspection report

- We recommend that, within three months, Leicestershire Police should:
 - reviews its processes to ensure that staff (particularly those in the contact management department) draw together all available information from police information systems in a timely way better to inform their responses and risk assessments. This should include ensuring that the information held on Modus (in relation to domestic abuse) is accessible to contact management staff and both response and investigating officers.

Summary of post-inspection review findings

Leicestershire Police has reviewed its approach and developed new processes. As a result, it now recognises and responds to risk more effectively.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

The force has continued to invest in training for officers and staff about their roles in safeguarding, and has produced further packages to support this, including a video on the 'voice of the child' and a booklet entitled *Think Victim*. Officers and staff within the contact management department (CMD) have been provided with updated training on carrying out THRIVE (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement) assessments and use of the national decision-making model⁴ (NDM), supported by the provision of aides-memoire.

The force's CMD uses police intelligence systems (specifically, Genie and Niche)⁵ to draw together information to help inform THRIVE assessments and responses to calls. However, we found limited knowledge of information recorded within these systems on a section known as the tasking and briefing system (TABS), which holds data on matters such as missing persons and child sexual exploitation trigger plans (a plan for locating or safeguarding someone known to be at-risk more quickly) for vulnerable children, or of how this information should be used. Officers and staff from the CMD reported they did not use TABS while collating information to assist in categorising incidents, or for informing risk assessments.

⁴ Framework that is used by the police service for decision-making processes.

⁵ Genie is a search tool that enables checks to be carried out across a number of different databases used by the force to record information. Niche is a single police information management system.

Domestic abuse risk management plans that are initially recorded on a multi-agency system (Modus) following a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)⁶ are now transferred onto the police system, Niche, within the 'person reports' section. This has enabled all staff and officers to access such information to inform assessments of risk and safeguarding decisions.

Officers and staff spoken to during this post-inspection review demonstrated an understanding of force systems and of the critical reasons for being able to access a range of information. Although the depth of this knowledge varies, HMICFRS found more consistency in the risk assessments, and that the increased use of information has improved their quality. That said, the application and recording of THRIVE remains variable.

We previously reported that a nominated detective sergeant with a child protection background was available within the CMD, to provide advice and guidance to officers and staff. This approach has been enhanced through the provision of a dedicated 'triage sergeant', whose purpose is to assist officers and staff in understanding the most appropriate response to incidents involving vulnerable children and adults.

Assessment and help

Recommendations from the 2017 inspection report

- Immediately, Leicestershire Police should:
 - review its use of enhanced risk assessments for high risk domestic abuse cases. This should incorporate a review of those high risk cases previously downgraded through the use of this process.
- Within three months, Leicestershire Police should:
 - take steps to improve practice in cases of children who go missing from home. As a minimum, this should include:
 - improving staff awareness of their responsibilities for protecting children who are reported missing from home and, in particular, those cases where it is a regular occurrence;
 - improving staff awareness of the links between children going missing from home and the risk of sexual exploitation;
 - improving staff awareness of the significance of drawing together all available information from police systems, including information about people who pose a risk to children, better to inform risk assessments;

⁶ This is a locally-held meeting at which statutory and voluntary agency representatives come together and share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse.

- ensure that all relevant information can be accessed on a single database, or made available to inform the assessment of risk; and
- arrangements for assessing performance should include a sample of missing cases to ensure that risk is properly assessed, risk factors are addressed and actions identified to break the cycle of children who go missing repeatedly.

Summary of post-inspection review findings

Leicestershire Police has reviewed its approach to the downgrading of the level of risk faced by some victims of domestic abuse initially assessed as at high-risk. Such cases can now be downgraded only on the authorisation of an inspector.

The force has also continued to invest in training officers and staff about their roles in safeguarding. This has included improving the awareness of officers and staff of the link between children who regularly go missing from home and their vulnerability to child sexual exploitation, to support taking preventative action.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

The possibility of inappropriately downgrading the level of risk faced by some victims of domestic abuse initially assessed as at high-risk, has reduced greatly. Although cases can still be downgraded, this can only be done on the authorisation of an inspector.

This change, and the resulting increase in MARAC cases, has led to higher workloads in the domestic abuse investigation unit (DAIU). The force has responded by increasing the number of officers and staff in the unit, and those spoken to within the DAIU reported that this has helped. The force also intends to extend the engagement of participants in the MARAC process, by seeking non-police representatives to share the role of chairing conferences.

We are also pleased to note that all the high-risk cases downgraded under the previous process have been reviewed. Consequently, 37 such cases were heard at an extraordinary meeting of the MARAC.

The force has taken steps to improve the processes in relation to children who regularly go missing from home, and to increase officers' and staff awareness of the vulnerability of these children to child sexual exploitation.

A 16-year-old girl at risk of sexual exploitation was reported missing. There was a good response by the police and identification of risk. The child subsequently returned home, following which a strategy meeting, joint investigation and visit to the child was undertaken with children's social care. This resulted in co-ordinated support being provided to the child by a number of agencies including the police.

Case audits demonstrated a good response to - and active investigation of - high-risk cases, including strategy discussions and compliance with force guidance (requiring that three missing episodes within a 90-day period should prompt the conduct of a review). However, examination of medium-risk cases indicated less active investigative activity by the force to trace and locate those missing.

In November 2017, the force established two new teams to respond to missing children and adults. An engagement team was set up to co-ordinate external multi-agency safeguarding partners, to increase opportunities for working together to reduce the risks to repeat missing children. The operational team is responsible for reviewing levels of risk and locating missing children. Although this is a promising development, it is at present too early for us to comment upon the effectiveness of the teams in improving outcomes for vulnerable children.

Investigation

Recommendations from the 2017 inspection report

- Within three months, Leicestershire Police should:
 - take action to improve child protection investigations, paying particular attention to:
 - ensure investigations are supervised and monitored regularly and, at each check, the supervisor reviews the evidence and any further enquiries that need to be undertaken; and
 - review the type of cases being held within the force investigation unit to ensure those staff are adequately trained to undertake those investigations.
 - take action to improve the investigation of child sexual exploitation, paying particular attention to:
 - ensuring a prompt response to any concern raised (including the timely arrest of suspects);
 - undertaking risk assessments that consider the totality of a child's circumstances and risks to other children; and

- improving the oversight and management of cases (to include auditing of child abuse and exploitation investigations to ensure that standards are being met).

Summary of post-inspection review findings

Supervisory oversight of cases within the child abuse investigation unit (CAIU) is generally conducted in a timely manner. Investigations are structured effectively and actions are recorded. However, this was less evident in those cases dealt with by the child sexual exploitation team of the neighbourhood investigation unit (NIU, previously referred to as the force investigation unit). We found the quality of reviews was inconsistent; many lacked detail and, in some cases, did not appear to progress investigations effectively.

There has been a significant investment of time and resource into improving the force's approach to child sexual exploitation. The referral and assessment process now provides the force with an effective system through which to identify and manage risk arising from child sexual exploitation concerns. However, poor application of the process and inappropriate decision making means that some children at risk are not always sufficiently safeguarded.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

The multi-agency safeguarding hub, where representatives from police, local authorities and other agencies (such as health and children's social care services) exchange information, has a positive environment and is regarded as a good place to work. The former child referral desk has been reconfigured and is now the child referral team (CRT), with a greater headcount. This has increased the capacity of the CRT to respond to requests for police information, and has removed some of the administrative burden from sergeants (who are now able to focus upon carrying out strategy discussions). The majority of strategy discussions, including those regarding domestic abuse, now take place in the CRT. The aim is for this team to conduct all child-related strategy discussions for the force, including those involving rape cases, in the near future.

Sergeant reviews within the CAIU are generally meaningful and conducted in a timely manner. We found these investigations to be structured effectively, with good recording of the activity undertaken. There is, however, less supervisory input for cases investigated by the NIU. The NIU retains investigations that take place within its locality, such as medium-risk child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse cases, the purpose being to provide more effective local knowledge, clear lines of responsibility for enquiries, and improved support to victims. Unlike its former remit, the NIU no longer holds cases which require specialist investigators, such as those identified as high-risk, as well as from the CAIU or rape team (Signal).

Since the 2017 inspection, Leicestershire Police has invested both time and resources in improving its approach to child sexual exploitation. This has included a review of processes and management structures to raise the standard of investigations. The referral and assessment process provides the force with an effective system by which to identify and manage child sexual exploitation concerns. However, poor application of the system and inappropriate decision making based on incomplete information means that some children at risk are not always sufficiently safeguarded.

Within the cases examined as part of this post-inspection review, it was apparent that governance processes in relation to children reported to be at risk of child sexual exploitation are neither sufficiently detailed nor robust. We found some cases where at-risk children had not been detected by the child sexual exploitation team supervisors, and/or the initial response to incidents was poor.

The grandmother of a 12-year-old boy attended the police station to report her suspicions that her grandson was being groomed by a male in his thirties (having given him a laptop); the child's school supported the grandmother's concerns. An officer attended after three days to take details, and failed to speak with the child at that time. The suspect was not arrested until a month later, despite there being evidence of a continuing risk to the child.

The child sexual exploitation referral and assessment system is primarily victim-focused, with limited attention given to suspects and perpetrators at all stages of the process. In addition, wider risks to children by persons suspected of posing a child sexual exploitation risk are not always considered.

Decision making

Recommendation from the 2017 inspection report

- Within three months, Leicestershire Police should
 - take steps to ensure that all relevant information is properly recorded and is readily accessible in all cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children. Guidance to staff should include:
 - what information should be recorded (and in what form) on systems to enable good quality decisions;
 - meetings where actions are allocated and decisions made should be minuted to ensure a comprehensive audit trail; and
 - the importance of ensuring that records are made promptly and kept up to date.

Summary of post-inspection review findings

The force has introduced an innovative and effective process to record strategy discussions, outlining both the information shared and associated decisions made with external safeguarding partners.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

In 2017, we reported that in some of the cases examined there was no evidence that a strategy discussion had taken place; if this was recorded, there was often no detail of the information that had been shared. Such information is now recorded, and the force has also invested in an innovative solution relating to strategy discussions with fellow safeguarding agencies: these are now audio-recorded, with the sound file attached to the associated record on the police system, Niche. HMICFRS found this to be an effective and efficient method by which to record the detail and content of such meetings, and considers that it represents good practice. The benefits of this approach are that the joint plan to investigate a case and safeguard the children involved is recorded, as are important details which are crucial to effective decision making.

The mother of a five year-old girl contacted children's social care to report that her daughter had disclosed that a 14 year-old-boy had sexually assaulted her. There was a good response by the police when the incident was reported, supported by a strategy discussion with a joint investigation plan and interview undertaken promptly. The boy was arrested in a timely manner and the wider safeguarding of all the boys siblings were appropriately considered.

The force's recently produced *Think Victim* booklet sets out the expectations of supervisors in terms of the provision of a quality service, responsibilities, and conducting proportional and focused investigations.

Trusted adult

Recommendation from the 2017 inspection report

- Within three months, Leicestershire Police should ensure that:
 - staff record the views and concerns of children;
 - staff record the outcome for the child at the end of police involvement in a case; and
 - staff inform children, as appropriate, of any decisions that have been made about them.

Summary of post-inspection review findings

Leicestershire Police has reviewed its approach in order to improve the recording of the views of, and decisions and outcomes for children in need of help and protection. As a result, it has developed and made available both a training video and booklet to help inform officers and staff of the need to listen to and record the concerns of children.

Detailed post-inspection review findings

A bespoke training video (entitled Child's Voice) has been developed and provided to officers and staff. This explains the need to listen to and understand a child's concerns, and to record his or her views, and the outcomes for that child. It also explains the need to keep children informed of decisions made about them.

The messages in the Child's Voice video have been supplemented with the production of the Think Victim booklet. This sets out the expectations of supervisors, officers and staff, including the responsibility for, and allocation and standards of investigations. The booklet makes specific reference to child victims, stating that a child's welfare is paramount, and instructing that children should be listened to and their views and concerns recorded, while also being kept informed of decisions taken in relation to them.

Referral documents are also completed for concerns relating to children. This process is well-established within the force's information systems, and the documents provide a reference to details of incidents, referrals and case histories. This enables police staff and officers to access all relevant information when assessing risk and deciding on interventions.

Police detention

Recommendation from the 2017 inspection report

- Within six months, Leicestershire Police should:
 - in conjunction with children's social care services, review how it manages the detention of children. As a minimum it should:
 - assess at an early stage the need for secure or other accommodation⁷ and working with children's social care services to achieve the best option for the child;

⁷ Under section 38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, a custody officer must secure the move of a child to local authority accommodation unless: he or she certifies that it is impracticable to do so; or, for those aged 12 or over, no secure accommodation is available and local authority accommodation would not be adequate to protect the public from serious harm.

- review the provision of both secure and alternative accommodation;
- ensure that custody staff comply with their statutory duties by completing detention certificates and custody record entries to the required standard, if children are detained in police custody for any reason; and
- secure adequate appropriate adult⁸ support in a timely manner.

Summary of post-inspection review findings

In 2017, HMICFRS found that attendance of appropriate adults was dependent upon the times of police interviews, sometimes leading to unacceptable delays. In our post-inspection review, we found this still to be the case.

The transfer of children to appropriate accommodation when detained overnight is still problematic; those children in the cases reviewed by HMICFRS were all kept in police detention following charge. However, the force has undertaken further work to improve practice in the completion of detention certificates (which outline to a court the reason for the child being kept in custody).

Detailed post-inspection review findings

The results of the case audits (carried out during both the original inspection and the post-inspection review) indicate that assessments for determining the need for secure or other accommodation for children likely to be remanded after charge continues to take place after decisions to charge have been made (and as a result, often late in the evening). This continued weakness significantly limits the opportunity for the transfer of a detained child to local authority accommodation. Of the six cases examined as part of this post-inspection review, all those children remained in police detention following charge.

There is inconsistent adherence to force policy that requires the duty inspector to be informed when a child is to be detained but not transferred (so that he or she can seek a resolution or escalate the matter where required). This policy should help to enhance work with the local authorities (who have a legal duty to provide accommodation for children) to improve the current position. Moreover, although there is a quarterly meeting between the force and local authority - to discuss police decisions to detain children after charge - currently this meeting is not used to examine with the local authority the reasons that no alternative accommodation was available for children. Nor did we find evidence to indicate that a review of both

⁸ An appropriate adult is a parent, guardian, social worker or, if no person matching this description is available, any responsible person over 18. In England and Wales, an appropriate adult must be called by the police whenever they detain or interview a child or vulnerable adult. They must be present during a range of police processes, including intimate searches and identification procedures, to safeguard the interests of children detained or questioned by police officers.

secure and alternative accommodation has been carried out since our 2017 inspection.

In all but one of the cases audited there were delays in attendance of appropriate adults, even though we were told they were readily available. We found that appropriate adults are arranged to attend the police station for the child's interview, rather than to ensure their rights and entitlements and to safeguard their general welfare. We were told that for those children arrested in the early hours of the morning, a pragmatic approach was taken by custody staff of refraining from calling out an appropriate adult, which would necessitate waking the child during their period of rest. However, we saw no evidence to suggest that appropriate adults were then called at the earliest opportunity in the mornings.

A 16 year-old boy (who was a 'looked-after' child) was arrested at court. An appropriate adult attended six hours after his detention was authorised and just prior to interview. The child had been in custody for almost 24 hours by the time he was charged, and thereafter he was detained in police custody. The local authority was contacted but was unable to provide accommodation; yet there was no consultation with the duty inspector (as per force policy) when the child had failed to be moved to alternative accommodation.

Detention certificates (which outline to a court the reason for a custodial remand) were completed in all but one of the cases reviewed. An analyst in the force provides a monthly spreadsheet on those children remanded in police detention after charge, to check compliance with juvenile detention certificates. However, this process is quantitative rather than qualitative, and therefore does not provide assurance to the force on the standards of certificate completion.