

# National Child Protection Inspections

Lincolnshire Police  
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## 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 abused or neglected by those responsible for their care; or need to be protected from other adults. Some of them occasionally go missing, or end up spending time in places, or with people, that are 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, arrest perpetrators, and have a significant role in monitoring sex offenders. A police officer can take a child in danger to a place of safety, and can 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 well-being 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 effectively 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.

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
The police’s responsibility to keep children safe.....	7
Expectations set out in <i>Working Together</i> .....	8
<b>2. Context for the force</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>4. Case file analysis</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Results of case file reviews.....	15
Breakdown of case file audit results by area of child protection.....	16
<b>5. Initial contact</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>6. Assessment and help</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>7. Investigation</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>8. Decision-making</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>9. Trusted adult</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>10. Managing those posing a risk to children</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>11. Police detention</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>47</b>
The overall effectiveness of the force and its response to children who need help and protection.....	47
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Annex A – Child protection inspection methodology</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>Annex B – Definitions and interpretations</b> .....	<b>54</b>

## Summary

This report is a summary of the findings of our inspection of police child<sup>1</sup> protection services in Lincolnshire, which took place in September 2018.

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 scrutinised the treatment of children in custody, and assessed how the force is structured, led and governed, in relation to its child protection services.<sup>2</sup>

### Main findings from the inspection

We found that the chief constable, his senior team and the police and crime commissioner (PCC) are clearly committed to protecting vulnerable people, including children. This shows in both the police and crime plan and the force's strategic policing plan, *Distinctly Lincolnshire*. We found strong evidence of senior officers working to improve the way the force manages the risks to children and meets the continued increase in demand for child protection. Partners and stakeholders also told us about strong and effective joint working arrangements that are defined by good engagement from the police and an openness to constructive professional challenge.

For instance, the Head of Crime commissioned a review of his resources and structures in March 2018. This recognised the increasing demands being experienced by the public protection unit, and made a series of recommendations. These included plans to restructure the public protection unit to improve resilience and therefore outcomes for children.

Throughout the inspection we found examples of good work by frontline officers responding to incidents involving children. Officers and staff we spoke to who manage child protection investigations are committed and dedicated. They often work in difficult and demanding circumstances. However, we found most teams dealing with child protection investigations are not fully staffed. This is resulting in a poorer service for some children. The force is aware of this, and plans to have all of the vacant posts filled before the end of January 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Child' in this report refers to a person under the age of 18. See 'Definitions and interpretations' for this and other definitions.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on HMICFRS' rolling programme of child protection inspections, see: [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/our-work/child-abuse-and-child-protection-issues/national-child-protection-inspection/](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/our-work/child-abuse-and-child-protection-issues/national-child-protection-inspection/)

Lincolnshire Police has put a lot of time and energy into safeguarding the health and well-being of its staff. It has a strategy called Well-being Matters. The force assesses the health and well-being of its public protection staff through an annual psychological screening exercise and offers access to an external counselling service. All officers and staff receive an additional two days leave for well-being.

The case audits that formed part of this inspection highlight a need to improve some of the force's responses to children in need of help and protection. While we found that the force has made the protection of children a priority, and that senior leaders are clearly committed to this, decisions about children at risk are not yet consistently better as a result.

Specific areas for improvement include:

- Speaking to children, observing their behaviour and demeanour, and making sure their concerns and views are heard, to help shape decisions made about them.
- Considering the wider risks posed to children when they are missing. Although initial risk-assessments were effective, consideration of why a child has gone missing, who they were with, where they have been, and whether their absence is linked to exploitation or other forms of abuse would enhance protective planning.
- Supervisory oversight of investigations to make sure investigative opportunities are pursued and cases are not delayed unnecessarily.
- Timeliness of pursuing persons suspected of downloading and distributing indecent images of children.
- Attending to backlogs in visits to registered sex offenders.

Other areas of weakness include the force's measurement of performance. It does not know much about how effective various interventions are. This makes it difficult for senior leaders to assess the nature and quality of decision-making and to be assured that officers and staff are consistently making the best decisions for vulnerable children. This is an area that the force recognises and they are planning to implement a new performance framework.

Also, ongoing training and awareness for staff have relied on the use of email and online training packages. A large proportion of the officers dealing with child abuse investigations have had no specialist child abuse investigation training. However, the force has recognised this, and it has specialist courses already booked for officers across these teams in early 2019.

During our inspection, we examined 81 cases where the police had identified children at risk. We assessed the force's child protection practice as good in nine cases, as requiring improvement in 47 cases, and as inadequate in 25 cases. This shows that the force needs to do more to make sure it provides a consistently good service for all children.

## **Conclusion**

Senior leaders of Lincolnshire Police are clear in their commitment to protecting vulnerable children and have made it a priority to protect those in need of support.

Our inspection found that the officers and staff who manage child abuse investigations are committed and dedicated, while often working in difficult and demanding circumstances. However, in too many cases we also found practice and decision-making are inconsistent. The force needs to do more to make sure that the commitment of senior officers to improve the service leads to better outcomes in all cases.

We were encouraged to note that the force was already acting to correct the lack of specialist training and the gaps in service it had identified in its self-audits before our inspection. The force took prompt action to address many of the issues raised during the inspection. This is positive, and underlines the commitment of senior leaders continually to improve the service provided to vulnerable children.

We have made recommendations that, if the force acts on them, will help to improve outcomes for children. We will revisit the force no later than six months after the publication of this report, to assess how it is responding to those recommendations.

# 1. Introduction

## The police's responsibility to keep children safe

Under the Children Act 1989, a police constable is responsible for taking into police protection any child whom he or she has reasonable cause to believe would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, and the police have a duty to inquire into that child's case.<sup>3</sup> Under the Children Act 2004, the police must also ensure that when carrying out their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.<sup>4</sup>

Every officer and member of police staff should understand that it is his or her duty to protect children, as part of day-to-day policing. Officers going into people's homes on any policing matter must recognise the needs of the children they may meet, and understand what they can and should do to protect them. This is particularly important when they are dealing with domestic abuse or other incidents that may involve violence. The duty to protect children includes any children who are detained in police custody.

In 2018, the National Crime Agency's strategic assessment of serious and organised crime established that child sexual exploitation and abuse is one of the gravest serious and organised crime risks.<sup>5</sup> Child sexual abuse is also one of the six national threats specified in the Strategic Policing Requirement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Children Act 1989, section 46.

<sup>4</sup> Children Act 2004, section 11.

<sup>5</sup> *National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime*, National Crime Agency, London, May 2018, available at: [www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk](http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk)

<sup>6</sup> The *Strategic Policing Requirement* was first issued in 2012 in execution of the Home Secretary's statutory duty (in accordance with section 37A of the Police Act 1996, as amended by section 77 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011) to set out the national threats and the appropriate national policing capabilities needed to counter those threats. Five threats were identified: terrorism; civil emergencies; organised crime; threats to public order; and a national cyber security incident. In 2015, the *Strategic Policing Requirement* was reissued including child sexual abuse as an additional national threat. See *Strategic Policing Requirement*, Home Office, March 2015, available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-policing-requirement](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-policing-requirement)

## Expectations set out in *Working Together*

The statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*,<sup>7</sup> sets out what is expected of all partner organisations involved in child protection (such as the local authority, clinical commissioning groups, schools, and the voluntary sector).

The specific police roles set out in the guidance are:

- 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 use of emergency powers to protect children.

These areas of practice are the focus of our child protection inspections.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, HM Government, July 2018, available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2)

<sup>8</sup> Details of how HMICFRS conducts these inspections can be found at Annex A.

## 2. Context for the force

There are about 1,480 people in the Lincolnshire Police workforce.<sup>9</sup>

- 1,099 police officers;
- 281 police staff; and
- 100 police community support officers.

Lincolnshire Police has two policing areas, East and West. Specialist safeguarding resources are located at police stations within the two areas, with some centralised functions located at Police HQ in Lincoln and some at Grantham.

Lincolnshire is a mainly rural county and has a high level of poverty, although there are some affluent areas. The force area is home to around 700,000 people. The urban areas include the city of Lincoln and the towns of Boston, Grantham, Skegness and Spalding.

The police force area is large, relative to other forces in England and Wales. It takes a comparatively long time to travel across the area by road, which increases the difficulty of providing police services.

The agricultural industry draws in part-time workers (many from Eastern Europe), and the population has been growing in recent years as some workers have settled. The permanent population is supplemented by university students, and the very large number of people who visit, or travel through the area each year.

A single local authority is responsible for the county, and there is only one local safeguarding children board (LSCB).<sup>10</sup>

The most recent Ofsted judgment of the services for children in need of help and protection provided by the local authority is set out below.

<b>Local authority</b>	<b>Judgment</b>	<b>Date published</b>
Lincolnshire	Good	January 2015

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-30-september-2017>

<sup>10</sup> LSCBs have a statutory duty, under the Children Act 2004, to co-ordinate how organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

An assistant chief constable (ACC) is responsible for child protection throughout the force area. She is supported by a chief superintendent, who is the head of the crime department, and a detective superintendent, who is head of the public protection unit (PPU) and who oversees specialist teams responsible for protecting children and vulnerable adults.

### **3. Leadership, management and governance**

#### **There is a clear commitment to child protection from the chief officer team and senior leaders**

The PCC police and crime plan for 2017–21 has four priorities, one being the protection of vulnerable people. It is supported by the force's 'Distinctly Lincolnshire' Strategic Policing Plan, which has thematic areas with a general safeguarding focus.

The force strategic assessment was last revised in January 2016. The assessment informs the force's intelligence requirement and, amongst other areas of policing, includes the requirement to capture intelligence relating to child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse.

Force governance arrangements regarding child protection were under review and developing at the time of inspection.

The force is making efforts at a strategic level to improve its ability to manage the demands arising from child protection, and across the broader crime department. The head of crime commissioned a review of resources and structures in March 2018. This recognised the increasing demands being experienced by the PPU and made a series of recommendations. These included plans to improve outcomes for children by restructuring the PPU, increasing staff resilience and making more specialists available at weekends. The ACC chairs the monthly force tactical threat and risk management meeting (TTARM – previously the tactical tasking and coordination group). She is shifting the focus in this meeting from resource allocation, to matters involving the greatest levels of threat, risk and harm, including vulnerability. Area superintendents chair local TTARMS with a similar structure and focus. Although these meetings do scrutinise aspects of child protection there is a more explicit emphasis on roads policing, theft, robbery, burglary, and anti-social behaviour. Child protection discussions are generally restricted to high-risk missing persons. This means that some areas of child protection are not given sufficient priority.

The new head of PPU has reinvigorated the monthly PPU management meeting, which is intended to provide governance for PPU issues. This now highlights areas of most risk, monitors performance and seeks to understand the demands on the department.

Daily management meetings (DMMs) are held in each area each morning, followed by a force DMM. PPU managers attend these meetings and issues relating to child protection are discussed at all DMMs.

Across the board, professional relationships, contributions to multi-agency working and engagement with partners, at both strategic and practitioner level, were described as working effectively. The force has appropriate representation on the LSCB and is involved in various sub-groups. Partners described the force's contribution to the LSCB and wider partnership as very strong, with an ability to engage and challenge the force where necessary.

## **Strategic oversight of child protection is developing**

We found evidence that the force is becoming more aware of the wider context in which cases of child abuse occur. It also understands the importance of having a comprehensive and overarching plan to tackle all the different features of abuse and exploitation of children. The force has instigated Operation Portugal to reduce threat and harm to a specific group of children vulnerable to exploitation, and is acting to tackle offenders through Operation Capparis.

The last strategic assessment of all areas of demand was published in 2016, since when the chief officer group has commissioned analysts to produce a complete thematic assessment of important areas. Where these involve children, analysts seek to use partner information to build a rich picture of risk to, and vulnerabilities of children. To supplement this the force has a 'soft intelligence' form to allow partners to report intelligence.

A strategic assessment of child sexual exploitation, child sexual abuse, grooming and indecent images of children was published in early 2017. The recommendations from this related largely to intelligence gaps, but the assessment was scheduled to be revised in October 2018. In addition, a strategic assessment of missing people (including children) was commissioned and published in March 2018.

We noted that the ethnicity of children is not always recorded. The absence of ethnicity recording was noted in the force's missing people strategic assessment in relation to COMPACT<sup>11</sup> entries and NSPIS<sup>12</sup> and is also present in Niche<sup>13</sup> records. Analysis to understand risk based on cultural background will be challenging unless this is addressed.

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<sup>11</sup> The COMPACT system is a police database that records the detail and history of missing people.

<sup>12</sup> NSPIS is a system for managing calls received, and the response to them.

<sup>13</sup> Niche is a single police information management system.

## **Performance information to understand outcomes for children requires further development**

Although a performance framework exists, it is limited to quantitative information. At the time of inspection, reporting of this data to the monthly PVP meeting had been suspended pending a review of the requirements of the meeting.

The force conducts some internal audits, and some of the audits, such as missing persons and domestic abuse, include cases related to child protection and safeguarding. These audits focus on compliance with process and recording. They are not currently undertaken to support the performance monitoring process on the quality of provision of services and outcomes for children, in line with the expectations of the force.

Consequently, senior leaders cannot be assured that staff are consistently making the best decisions for vulnerable children in all cases. The opportunity exists to use the audit function to provide senior officers with qualitative scrutiny and analysis.

## **Training for officers responding to child protection concerns is limited**

Officers and staff told us there had been a lack of training for several years. There has been a reliance on online training and information circulated by email in the force's 'routine orders'.

There has been no specific face-to-face training in child protection issues beyond initial training, or to new trainee detectives and those newly promoted.

Despite this, we found some managers had enrolled the assistance of specialist officers to give ad hoc training to their respective teams. In addition, some officers had accessed multi-agency training provided by the LSCB, and some PCSOs had received 'Signs of Safety' training from the local authority.<sup>14</sup>

Child protection investigations are mainly conducted by three teams. The child and adult protection (CAP) teams deal with abuse in family settings. The Emerald team deals with all rape and serious sexual offences, including those where a child is a victim. But it does not deal with offences committed in a family setting, or those committed against a child or vulnerable adult by a person in a position of trust. The force allocates these to the CAP teams. The force has also worked with partners from the local authority and probation services to develop a co-located multi-agency team to investigate and respond to cases of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Very few officers within these teams reported having completed the Specialist

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<sup>14</sup> A strengths-based approach to child protection casework developed in Australia in the 1990s, and since adopted in other jurisdictions in North America, Australasia and Europe.

Child Abuse Investigators Development Programme (SCAIDP). Furthermore, the force has no record of who, or how many officers have received this specialist training. Knowledge of the skills of the workforce is increasingly important if the force moves, as planned, to teams which can do everything, so that the force can allocate cases to officers with the necessary skills and training.

The force has recognised these areas of weakness and has arranged for 24 detectives to be enrolled on SCAIDP in early 2019. The College of Policing Vulnerability training<sup>15</sup> will be provided for all staff and there are plans to create a skills matrix to make sure investigations are allocated appropriately.

## **Officers and staff are dedicated, committed and feel valued by the force**

Throughout the inspection, officers and staff we spoke to who manage child-related investigations showed themselves to be committed and dedicated, often working in difficult and demanding circumstances. Some specialist officers expressed concerns about unfilled vacancies and the impact this was having on their workload. Again, senior leaders are aware of this, and plans are in place to fill these vacancies before the end of January 2019 at the latest.

The force has invested a significant amount of time and energy in the health and well-being of its staff. Its 'Well-being Matters' strategy provides support, including psychological screening (via questionnaires) undertaken by public protection staff, to assess officers' health and well-being. In addition, there is unlimited access to counselling provided by an external organisation. Officers also receive two extra days off for their personal well-being, and are encouraged to post photographs on the intranet of the time they spend for well-being. Most officers we spoke to commented on this project and said they felt valued as a consequence.

Although there is evidence of an emphasis by the force towards a more explicit focus on reducing risk and vulnerability for children, there has not yet been a consistent improvement in operational provision of service or decision-making. Further work is required to ensure that senior leaders can test the effectiveness of practice and make sure that standards of supervision are appropriate and effective.

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<sup>15</sup> A one-day vulnerability training package, supported by a self-assessment, equipping frontline officers and staff to identify signs of vulnerability and take effective action at the earliest possible opportunity.

## 4. Case file analysis

### Results of case file reviews

For our inspection, Lincolnshire Police selected and self-assessed the effectiveness of its practice in 33 child protection cases. In accordance with HMICFRS criteria, the cases selected were a random sample from the whole of Lincolnshire. We asked the force to rate its handling of each of the self-assessed cases. Of these 33 cases, force assessors graded the practice in 22 as good; in ten as requiring improvement; and in one as inadequate. We also assessed the same cases. We graded the force's practice in five as good, in 16 as requiring improvement, and in 12 as inadequate.

As part of the inspection we also selected and examined a further 48 child protection cases. We assessed the force's practice in four as good, in 31 as requiring improvement, and in 13 as inadequate. The files on each type of case had certain features in common.

### Cases assessed by both Lincolnshire Police and HMICFRS

Force assessment:

- 22 good
- 10 requires improvement
- 1 inadequate

HMICFRS assessment:

- 5 good
- 16 requires improvement
- 12 inadequate

### Additional cases assessed only by HMICFRS

HMICFRS assessment:

- 4 good
- 31 requires improvement
- 13 inadequate

## **Breakdown of case file audit results by area of child protection**

### **Cases assessed involving enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989<sup>16</sup>**

Enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989:

- 1 good
- 7 requires improvement
- 2 inadequate

Common themes are that the files:

- include evidence of joint visits and initial action in cases;
- often include records of strategy discussions;
- do not always record further working with other authorities once the case is past its initial stage, or what the outcomes were;
- reveal limited and ineffective supervisory oversight; and
- indicate unnecessary delays both in responding and in investigation.

### **Cases assessed involving referrals relating to domestic abuse incidents or crimes**

Referrals relating to domestic abuse incidents or crimes:

- 2 good
- 7 requires improvement
- 1 inadequate

Common themes are that the force:

- assesses risk well at the beginning of a case;
- makes good investigation plans in respect of adult victims where it is clear a crime has been committed;

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<sup>16</sup> Local authorities, with the help of other organisations as appropriate, have a duty to make enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

- usually makes prompt referrals to partners; but
- often doesn't record the concerns and views of children, which can lead to a lack of understanding of how they are affected.

### **Cases assessed involving referrals arising from incidents other than domestic abuse**

Referrals arising from incidents other than domestic abuse:

- 0 good
- 5 requires improvement
- 4 inadequate

Common themes:

- the force responds well initially;
- has limited and ineffective supervisory oversight; and
- there are often unnecessary delays in the investigation.

### **Cases assessed involving children at risk from child sexual exploitation**

Cases involving children at risk of child sexual exploitation both online and offline:

- 1 good
- 10 requires improvement
- 7 inadequate

Common themes:

- the initial response is usually good, with risk identified, but there are sometimes delays in seeing children;
- there is some evidence of effective joint working;
- other children who are not subject of the initial call are often not seen or spoken to;
- initial investigation is often poor – for instance, the police may be reluctant to seize mobile devices that might contain evidence;
- enquiries to identify and locate potential perpetrators are often not pursued; and
- there is a lack of effective supervision of cases, leading to drift and delay.

## Cases assessed involving missing and absent children

Children missing:

- 1 good
- 4 requires improvement
- 5 inadequate

Common themes:

- the force control room consistently uses THRIVE<sup>17</sup> and a structured question set to allow the FCR inspector to adequately assess and grade the risk to the child;
- the episode is often incorrectly managed on the NSPIS command and control system, rather than on COMPACT;
- prevention interviews<sup>18</sup> are either not conducted, or are cursory in nature;
- information from return home interviews is not routinely recorded; and
- the investigation stops when the child is found – failing to recognise the risk posed to them by where they were, or who they were with.

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<sup>17</sup> The threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement (THRIVE) model is used to assess the appropriate initial police response to a call for service. It allows a judgment to be made of the relative risk posed by the call and places the individual needs of the victim at the centre of that decision.

<sup>18</sup> The police have a responsibility to ensure that the returning person is safe and well. The purpose of the prevention interview is to identify any ongoing risk or factors which may contribute to the person going missing again.

## **Cases assessed involving children taken to a place of safety under section 46 of the Children Act 1989<sup>19</sup>**

Children taken to a place of safety by police officers using powers under section 46 of the Children Act 1989:

- 2 good
- 4 requires improvement
- 1 inadequate

Common themes include that personnel:

- consider the circumstances of vulnerable children and make effective decisions to remove children with appropriate use of the power;
- liaise early enough and effectively with emergency children's social care services; but
- do not always record subsequent strategy discussion outcomes and joint plans.

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

Sex offender management where children have been assessed as at risk from the person being managed:

- 2 good
- 3 requires improvement
- 5 inadequate

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<sup>19</sup> Section 46(1) of the Children Act 1989 empowers a police officer, who has reasonable cause to believe that a child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, to (a) remove the child to suitable accommodation and keep him/her there, or (b) take such steps as are reasonable to ensure that the child's removal from any hospital, or other place in which he/she is then being accommodated, is prevented. A child in these circumstances is referred to as 'having been taken into police protection'.

Common themes:

- when visits become overdue, these can be outstanding for lengthy periods;
- MOSOVO<sup>20</sup> staff are well trained and utilise their skills to conduct thorough investigative visits, identifying further offending or increased risk; and
- there is a good active risk management system (ARMS)<sup>21</sup> completion rate.

### **Cases assessed involving children detained in police custody**

Children in police custody:

- 0 good
- 7 requires improvement
- 0 inadequate

Common themes:

- custody officers and staff have a good understanding of the conditions under which the police can deny bail;
- when local authority accommodation is not available, the police do not press hard enough to find a solution;
- the attendance of appropriate adults at the custody office is timed to coincide with other events, such as interviews, rather than when the child is detained; and
- officers do not submit Public Protection Notices when children are arrested.

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<sup>20</sup> Management of sex offenders and violent offenders.

<sup>21</sup> ARMS is a structured assessment process to assess dynamic risk factors known to be associated with sexual re-offending, and protective factors known to be associated with reduced offending. It is intended to provide police and probation services with information to plan the management of convicted sex offenders in the community.

## 5. Initial contact

### **The force control room usually assesses risk well and grades the response appropriately**

The force collaborates with G4S policing services to staff and run the force control room (FCR), with operational oversight from the FCR inspector. Staff receive initial training in respect of child protection issues and other areas of vulnerability. They also receive training in the use of THRIVE and the NDM.<sup>22</sup> These risk-assessments are supported with a structured list of questions to ask when dealing with different types of incident.

Each FCR staff member receives two days additional training per year. This can be for any area of business and is at the discretion of the FCR manager.

The command and control system has a critical registration marker, which is used to alert call-takers quickly when there is a history at a specific address. That might be a child who has previously gone missing, or where there is a concern about domestic abuse.

In addition, FCR staff have access to the Niche intelligence system which has 'flags' to highlight to officers and police staff important information about risk or vulnerability. This helps to identify children who may be at risk – for example, those who are the subject of a child protection plan, or are at risk of sexual exploitation. This information helps frontline officers and staff to assess risk when dealing with an incident and to put in place safety plans to manage any risk they identify.

Most of the cases audited showed apparent use of THRIVE and structured questions where they apply. Consequently, risk is usually identified, and the level of response required graded appropriately.

### **The initial assessment doesn't always result in appropriate deployment**

There were several cases when deployment was delayed because the FCR inspector had not reviewed the incident, or there was a lack of resources to deploy. Sometimes, the matter was allocated to a specialist department to follow up, and the incident log closed without anyone having seen the child.

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<sup>22</sup> College of Policing – Authorised Professional Practice on National Decision Model, College of Policing, December 2014. Available from: [www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/national-decisionmodel/the-national-decision-model/?s=NDM](http://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/national-decisionmodel/the-national-decision-model/?s=NDM)

Incidents which can be resolved without the need to despatch a patrol are forwarded to the Incident Resolution Team, which is led by a sergeant. Incidents referred to this team are appropriate; child protection issues are not allocated to them.

The force also operates a diary system which creates an appointment for callers to attend one of 16 police stations to see an officer. There is currently no review system for this process. Instead, FCR managers rely on response patrols to highlight any cases incorrectly placed in the diary. Inappropriate use of the diary system was evident in some cases we audited, and frontline staff also reported this to us.

A report was received from a care home support worker that a 15-year-old girl, who was looked after by the local authority, was possibly a victim of child sexual exploitation (CSE). She was at risk from a 36-year-old man she worked with. The force control room completed checks to identify the child and a THRIVE assessment identified the risk of CSE. However, they decided no attendance was necessary, and the incident was closed, with the information passed to the public protection unit. No-one spoke to the child until three days later, during which time she was at risk from this man.

## **The force uses additional expertise and quality assurance to enhance the control room response**

FCR staff are supported by an intelligence support officer at all times, providing access to research in more complex incidents. This enhances the FCR inspector's ability to make decisions based on all the information available.

A mental health practitioner is also present in the FCR from noon until 8pm – this is an encouraging project. The practitioner has access to health records of adults and children. They can make contact over the phone with those displaying mental health concerns, and give advice to officers.

The FCR supervisors carry out quality assurance checks of calls taken and resulting despatch activity. This includes checking whether vulnerability was correctly identified. These qualitative checks are used to identify areas of learning for individuals. They do not currently form part of a broader audit regime to identify themes across the practice of the force.

## **We saw some good examples of officers responding quickly to clear and specific concerns about children**

When the concern is clear and specific, officers often attend promptly. They are effective in carrying out preliminary tasks, such as ensuring the immediate safety of children and assessing how best to proceed. We also found officers to be good at making initial enquiries and using their powers to arrest or protect when necessary.

A 14-year-old girl was reported missing by her mother. There was a history of concerns and it was believed the girl might be pregnant. The investigation to find her was well led by the FCR inspector with help from the intelligence support officer, recognising the risk to this girl. Officers quickly attended an address where she was believed to be staying. The girl was found safe and well within four hours of being reported missing. Officers used police protection powers, and informed children's social care. A strategy meeting was held within two hours and a detailed record of the meeting was recorded. Flags were placed on the intelligence system highlighting all the concerns in relation to her, and those posing a risk to her. A Child Abduction Warning Notice was also served on a person believed to pose a risk to her.

## **Children are often not spoken to and their behaviour and demeanour not recorded**

In the cases we reviewed, we often found that the police had not spoken to children consistently, recorded their concerns, or the children's behaviour and demeanour.

How a child behaves provides 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 for this to happen with a parent present might present a risk. The police should watch how the child behaves, to inform both their initial assessment of the child's needs and the decision as to whether to refer the child to children's social care services.

Body-worn video is a helpful tool in recording this, and the officers we spoke to were aware of its importance to capture evidence, specifically in domestic abuse incidents. But some were frustrated that the equipment is unreliable, often runs out of charge, or the previous user has sometimes not removed footage, which hampers its effectiveness.

Police were called when a man assaulted his female partner at their home, causing a head injury. Their four children aged between one and eight were present in the house. Although positive action was taken in respect of the offender, and support was offered to the victim, officers did not see or speak to any of the children. Therefore, it was not known how the incident had affected the children, and the police missed an opportunity to intervene. The matter was shared with children's services, but as there was no evidence of the children suffering harm, no further assessment was made.

## **Recommendations**

- Immediately, Lincolnshire Police should review its processes regarding incidents relating to child protection, paying particular attention to the response decided upon by the staff in the FCR.
- Within three months, Lincolnshire Police should act to make sure that officers obtain and record children's concerns and views (including noting their behaviour and demeanour), to help influence decisions made about them.

## 6. Assessment and help

### **Supervision differs depending on the type of risk a child is exposed to**

An officer attending a domestic abuse incident is expected to submit a DASH<sup>23</sup> Public Protection Notice, including details of children present or in the family. In cases where the officer has assessed the risk to the victim as 'high', an inspector must review the PPN and ensure that officers have taken the correct action. When the risk to the victim is graded as medium or standard, a sergeant reviews the PPN by for the same reason.

When an officer submits a PPN relating to a concern for a child not connected to domestic abuse, there is no requirement for a supervisor to review this. The central referral unit reviews the form later. The central referral unit operates from Monday to Friday, which means that the unit might not review these reports for several days, and might not attend to risks.

### **Strategy meetings are held promptly and well documented when risk is clear**

The central referral unit acts as a conduit for information-sharing with other organisations. There are no partner organisations within this team. Police staff assess information recorded and submitted by frontline officers, and decide whether to share the information with relevant bodies, such as children's social care.

Where it is evident that a child is at significant risk of harm, a detective sergeant within the team will contact children's social care and health colleagues, and strategy discussions will take place over the phone.

We found that the details of the strategy discussion and the outcome in these circumstances are usually clearly documented on the Niche system. This means that officers dealing with subsequent incidents can make decisions based on a full understanding of the current risks and in line with joint protective plans.

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<sup>23</sup> DASH is a checklist to assist professionals to identify the level of risk a victim of domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and 'honour-based' violence faces.

## **Information-sharing in domestic abuse cases is based on risk to the victim, not risk or harm to the child, resulting in missed opportunities to intervene**

High-risk DASH PPN are forwarded to the force's domestic abuse officers, who provide support to victims. If children are in the family, they share the report with the children's social care 'screening desk' which makes an assessment about whether the incident meets their threshold for intervention.

If the risk to the victim is graded as medium or standard and there are children in the family, the CRU shares the reports with children's social care administrators. This is on the understanding that if there are three reports of domestic abuse within 12 months, a social care assessment will be considered.

This means that assessment of risk to children who are exposed to domestic abuse is based on the perceived risk to the victim. It also means that should the risk to the victim be graded as medium or standard, the risk to the children might not be considered until there have been two further incidents in a year – or not at all, if the third incident is outside of 12 months.

As officers do not consistently speak to children, and do not record their behaviour and demeanour, the force is missing opportunities to take early action to support children experiencing domestic abuse.

At the time of inspection, senior leaders were talking to partners about reviewing this model. The force recognises the challenge of effecting change and influencing partners to achieve greater consistency. It will take time.

## **MARAC<sup>24</sup> is effective when cases are referred, however the force does not consistently apply the correct referral criteria**

The police and other frontline organisations refer domestic abuse cases assessed as high-risk to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) to make longer-term safeguarding plans. These are held every two weeks in Lincolnshire.

Lincolnshire Police domestic abuse officers refer cases to MARAC and prepare and present the police information. We reviewed MARAC minutes and found the meetings are regular and well-attended by police and partners. The meetings set actions to reduce risk and these are allocated to the appropriate agency to complete.

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<sup>24</sup> A MARAC is a locally-held meeting of statutory and voluntary agency representatives to share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse, at which any agency can refer an adult or child whom they believe to be at high risk of harm. The aim of the meeting is to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase an adult's or child's safety.

However, one of the referral criteria for MARAC is for potential escalation. Cases of three police call-outs to domestic abuse in 12 months should prompt the consideration of a MARAC referral.

Lincolnshire Police do not consistently apply this criterion, and knowledge of it was mixed. Therefore, a further opportunity to offer multi-agency support to children is being missed in some cases.

When a case is heard at MARAC a Niche flag is placed on the record of those involved. However, the joint actions to mitigate risk are recorded on a separate system, called Modus. Officers and staff do not have access to this system, therefore those attending future incidents may have to make decisions based on incomplete information.

## **We saw examples of good assessment of risk and subsequent enquiries when children go missing and greater risk is recognised**

When children have been reported missing and greater risk is recognised, there are examples of timely and effective work being done to trace them. This highlights the positive outcomes that can be achieved for children.

FCR call-handlers use a proforma when making their THRIVE assessments of people who go missing. Critical registration markers are also used to highlight addresses where children have previously gone missing.

The FCR inspector assesses risk and grades the missing person accordingly, or can decide to treat the episode as an absence. Good use is also made of trigger plans<sup>25</sup> when they are available, which are clearly visible in COMPACT.

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<sup>25</sup> A trigger plan is a plan to locate a child quickly when they go missing.

A 15-year-old boy who had been missing previously had barricaded his bedroom door and climbed out of his bedroom window. He had taken a bag of clothes and other items and left a note saying that he was going away and not coming back. The critical registration marker advised on the required response. Officers made prompt early enquiries. It was established that the boy was associating with a 23-year-old man in Louth. Officers searched the man's home, and found the boy's clothes. The man was arrested for grooming offences and for child abduction. The boy was found a short time later. The officers dealing with the child made efforts to try to understand why he had gone missing, and what he had been doing during the intervening time. He said there had been no sexual activity, but officers took the child into police protection and quickly held discussions with children's social care to make sure the ongoing well-being of the child would be managed.

## **We found that despite the assessment of risk being correct when children go missing, often the response wasn't good enough**

There were several examples of a lack of appropriate activity to trace children who had been reported missing. There were often entries on incident logs indicating that officers had not been available to attend an address that a child had been missing from, or to conduct the appropriate enquiries required to trace the child.

At 7.00pm a 17-year-old boy with learning difficulties was reported missing after a minor argument with his mother. The THRIVE assessment and proforma identified the risks to him, and that this should be treated as a priority incident. However, there was no-one available at the time to attend his address to take a report from his parents. This did not take place until 6.00am the next morning, by which time the boy had been missing for 11 hours. The FCR inspector graded the risk as medium yet there was very little work to trace the child for a significant period of time.

## **Opportunities to understand why children have gone missing and the risk they were exposed to are being missed**

When a child is found or returns home, a prevention interview is not conducted on all occasions. However, when interviews do take place, little information is recorded.

A better understanding of why a child has run away can provide vital information and make it possible to develop more effective risk management plans. Interviews with

children at this stage can provide important information about the reasons why they are running away, particularly when this is more frequent.

The absence of this information suggests officers may not fully understand the link between children being missing and them being exploited or exposed to other risks.

'Return home' interviews<sup>26</sup> are completed by the local authority. The process of sharing this information amongst partners is currently under-developed in Lincolnshire. The missing people unit (MPU) reports that they see some information from these interviews, but these are not formally reviewed. In the cases we audited we saw no reference to the interviews taking place or of the information informing future decision making. Therefore, intelligence which would inform trigger plans, reports of crimes or other intelligence, could be being missed.

## **Record-keeping and information-sharing with children's social care is poor in respect of children who go missing**

Except for high-risk cases, when a child is reported missing, the incident is supposed to be managed on the command and control system for two hours, then transferred to COMPACT. This is not happening on all occasions, and some episodes are managed for longer periods on the command and control system. These incidents do not generate an automatic notification to children's social care, which is a feature of COMPACT, and there was no evidence in the cases reviewed of PPNs being submitted instead.

The missing people unit carries out a daily search of incident logs, and puts these cases onto a spreadsheet, but the information is not available to all staff. This makes it very challenging to establish when a child was previously missing and the risk they have been exposed to. Consequently, future assessments of risk will not be based on the full information known to the force.

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<sup>26</sup> The local authority is responsible for conducting interviews with children within 72 hours of them returning. They provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing, or from risk factors in their home.

A 16-year-old boy who had been missing several times previously was reported missing by his mother. She had not seen him for four days. Although the proforma and THRIVE assessment were completed, there was no indication that this was reviewed by the FCR inspector. The officer allocated to this investigation was already dealing with a detainee, so enquiries to trace the boy were delayed. The child was found safe and well at a friend's house. However, there was nothing recorded about where the child had been over the previous four days or what risk he may have been exposed to. In addition, there had been recent concerns about his friend which had prompted multi-agency intervention. A public protection notice was not submitted. A COMPACT record was not created, despite him being missing for four days and not found until four hours after the initial report.

The force recognises that the current missing people policy is not compatible with their expectations. A new policy has been drafted and is to be published before the end of 2018.

## **We found good contribution to long-term multi-agency safeguarding plans**

Lincolnshire Police employs dedicated staff to research for and attend child protection conferences.<sup>27</sup> We were told that they attend virtually all initial child protection conferences to discuss and agree long-term safeguarding plans. When a child is made the subject of a child protection plan, this is flagged on Niche, so staff attending incidents are aware of the risks to the child.

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<sup>27</sup> A child protection conference brings together family members, the child (where appropriate), and those professionals most involved with the child and family, to make decisions about the child's future safety, health and development. *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, HM Government, July 2018 (latest update). Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2)

## Recommendations

- Immediately, Lincolnshire Police should improve practice in cases of children who go missing from home. As a minimum, this should include a review of how missing episodes are recorded, and making staff more aware of:
  - their responsibilities for protecting children who are reported missing from home, especially where this happens regularly;
  - the importance of investigating where a child has been, and who with;
  - their responsibilities for conducting and recording prevention interviews when children return home; and
  - the importance of sharing information with partners.
- Within six months, Lincolnshire Police along with its partners should undertake a review to examine its referral processes and supervisory oversight, to make sure that risk to children is identified effectively and the necessary information shared appropriately. Particular attention should be paid to:
  - cumulative risk to children experiencing domestic abuse; and
  - children going missing from home or care.

## 7. Investigation

### **We found some good examples of investigating officers using an appropriate mix of investigative and protective approaches**

This combined approach is necessary to make sure that the force keeps the safeguarding of children at the heart of its efforts, while at the same time pursuing opportunities to investigate crime.

A nine-year-old boy reported that his grandfather had caused bruising to his face. There was a timely response to the report, with a strategy discussion held involving all relevant partners. They agreed that a joint investigation was required, and a social worker and a police officer visited the child. He was given an opportunity to explain what had happened, how he felt and what he wanted. He did not want his grandfather to get into trouble and did not wish to be medically examined. Officers conducted an interview with the grandfather, who denied deliberately causing any injuries to the child. Enquiries revealed that the family were grieving following the loss of the child's mother and grandmother within a short space of time, and the family were under a great deal of stress. It was agreed that the police should take no further action, and children's social care put appropriate support in place for the family.

### **Reduced staff numbers and poor supervision are resulting in delay and a poor service for children in many cases**

As previously noted there are several separate teams dealing with child protection investigations. The Emerald team deal with all rape and serious sexual offence cases, including cases where children are victims. But it does not deal with offences committed in a family setting, or those committed against a child or vulnerable adult by a person in a position of trust. This team ought to have ten detective constables, but at the time of inspection we were informed that only six were available to be deployed.

When children are victims of abuse within the family setting, the child and adult protection (CAP) team deals with the investigation. There are teams in both the West and East areas; at the time of inspection, each team had two detective constable vacancies.

When a child is a victim of sexual exploitation, the matter will be allocated to the CSE team. This team combines resources from the local authority, probation and police officers. When it is identified that a child is vulnerable to CSE a support worker

from the local authority will offer support and build rapport with the child to encourage reporting of offences.

The police officers in the team deal with offences of grooming, both online and offline, and the CSE offences which the Emerald team is not dealing with. This team should have ten detective constables; however, at the time of inspection only six were available to be deployed.

Additionally, the team does not currently receive analytical data that would highlight hotspots where children may be at greater risk, nor similar analysis of those people who pose a risk to children. This means the team are unable to specifically target such areas or people.

Because of reduced capacity the team is also unable to carry out awareness-raising in the community, or with those professions, such as taxi drivers, who might be able to provide important intelligence.

There is also a lack of regular tasking and briefing of frontline staff, which misses an opportunity to gather further intelligence and so inform policing activity.

A 13-year-old girl disclosed to her mother that the mother's ex-partner had entered her bedroom, exposed his penis and made inappropriate comments to her. There was an initial poor response, with an appointment being made to see the girl a week after the call. This failed to recognise the wider safeguarding issues posed by the perpetrator. A day later a referral was received from the NSPCC in relation to the case. This generated a strategy discussion, and a joint investigation was agreed. There was a further delay in conducting a joint visit due to staffing issues in the CAP team. There were then further delays in conducting a video recorded interview. There was a lack of effective supervision to drive the investigative activity.

A 14-year-old girl disclosed to a school key worker that she had been raped two days earlier by a man she had been talking to on Snapchat. The incident was immediately brought to the attention of the Emerald team for specialist rape investigation and attendance. The initial evidence-gathering was good; however, there was a significant delay in tracing the suspect. Initially the identity of the man was not known to the girl or to the police. It took two months to identify a name, place of work and telephone number for him. There was no activity for a further two months, for which no explanation was recorded. The offender was invited, by letter, to attend the police station for interview, which provided him with the opportunity to dispose of any evidence. Officers did not search his address, and missed opportunities to recover evidence from, for example, mobile devices. There was limited supervisory input evident throughout the investigation.

## **Officers often miss investigative opportunities when dealing with CSE**

We saw several cases when the police had responded to reports of children who had been targeted by people inciting them to share indecent images of themselves. In these circumstances officers take steps to safeguard and advise those children identified in the initial report. However, when it becomes clear that the same person has approached other children, enquiries to be sure those children are safe are often lacking.

In addition, officers are reluctant to seize mobile devices belonging to victims. Examination of these devices could provide opportunities to identify offenders, but this is often not done.

An 11-year-old girl was part of a group chat on Facebook that had potentially 40 participants of a similar age. It was reported that a man suggesting he was 16 years of age from Washington DC had somehow been invited in to the group. He asked the children for indecent images from them and had been seen masturbating whilst online. No enquiries were conducted with the other children in the group, and no investigation mounted to identify the man responsible, where he lived, or if he had access to other children.

A 13-year-old girl had been using her mother's Snapchat account. Her mother looked at the phone and saw a conversation with a man who was asking for indecent images of the girl. Officers took some limited screenshots of the conversation, but examination of the device might have revealed more conversation, as well as allowing enquiries to identify the suspect. The same man was believed to have contacted other children, but officers did not interview them. It appeared the suspect had bought gift vouchers for the child as an inducement, but officers made no further enquiries about his identity.

## **There is significant delay in investigating some suspects who have downloaded, shared or distributed indecent images of children online**

The force has a paedophile and online investigation team (POLIT), which investigates the sharing and distribution of indecent images of children online. This team also deals with referrals from the National Crime Agency's child exploitation and online protection command (CEOP).

When CEOP refers a case to the force, a risk-assessment is carried out. Using police information and that of partner bodies, the force establishes

whether the suspect works with children, or if children live with the suspect. Those assessed as high-risk cases are given priority.

Cases graded medium and low are left unallocated until the high-risk cases are investigated. Should the team get to the end of the medium-risk cases, they will move on to the low-risk. The force periodically reassesses cases graded low and medium risk, but does not take account of the length of time that has passed since the matter was referred to the force to investigate.

We were concerned to find that at the time of inspection there were 65 unallocated cases. The oldest medium-risk case had been referred to the force in May 2016. This case had initially been graded as high-risk, but subsequently was reassessed as medium-risk, in October 2017. The last time the risk-assessment was reviewed was January 2018.

The oldest low-risk case had been referred to the force in December 2015. The last time the risk-assessment was reviewed for this case was January 2018.

Although the risk-assessment and research may identify if a suspect lives or works with children, there is often no indication of whether the suspect has other access to children. Therefore, children may be at risk from suspects in these cases for lengthy periods of time.

The force received a CEOP referral in May 2018 identifying an address linked to downloading of indecent images of children and communication with children. From this information the force identified a suspect in June 2018. They established that the suspect had previous history of possessing indecent images of children. At the time of inspection, four months after the referral was received, the suspect had not been arrested or his premises searched. A supervisor was aware of the delays but gave no direction to expedite the investigation.

## **Recommendations**

- Immediately, Lincolnshire Police should review its approach to risk-assessment and allocation of cases relating to those suspected of viewing, downloading and distributing indecent images of children.
- Within three months, Lincolnshire Police should improve its child protection and exploitation investigations, paying particular attention to:
  - improving staff awareness, knowledge and skills in this area of work;
  - ensuring a prompt response to any concern raised;
  - 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.

## 8. Decision-making

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

We found that when the force clearly defines a case as a child protection matter from the outset, the police response is generally appropriate. We saw examples of officers and staff making effective decisions to protect children. When there are significant concerns about the safety of children, such as parents leaving young children at home alone, or being drunk while looking after them, officers handle incidents well. They use their powers appropriately to remove children from harm's way. It is a very serious step to remove a child from a family by way of police protection. In the cases examined, decisions to take a child to a place of safety were well-considered and were made in the best interests of the child.

Officers responded to a call by the ambulance service. An adult male had been stabbed by his partner, and the couple's two-year-old daughter was present. The victim was taken to hospital and the offender arrested. Officers made enquiries with grandparents, but they were unwilling to look after the child. They decided to exercise their protective power, safeguarding the child. A prompt discussion with the emergency duty team of children's services followed, and a foster placement was found for the child within two hours.

### **Record-keeping following the use of police protection powers was often poor**

Although we found some examples where the police had carried out investigations promptly and effectively, personnel do not always record on police systems details about safeguarding and joint work with other organisations in these circumstances, or the fact that a discussion has taken place. Authorising officers often do not record when and in what circumstances the power has been rescinded, or what the long-term protective plan is.

An officer was making enquiries at an address and discovered a one-year-old child home alone. The officer rightly exercised their protective power. A duty inspector orally authorised this, and shortly afterwards the child's mother was traced and arrested. However, the decision by the inspector was not recorded. There was no evidence of a strategy discussion having taken place, although one must have taken place, because the child was later made subject of a child protection plan.

## **Recommendation**

- Within three months, Lincolnshire Police should take steps to ensure that all relevant information is recorded properly and made readily accessible in all cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children.

Guidance to staff should include:

- what information they should record (and in what form) on their systems to enable good decision-making; 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 can trust the police. We found that in some (though not all) child protection cases, officers consider carefully how best to approach a child and/or the parents or carers and explore the most effective ways in which to communicate with them. Such sensitivity builds confidence and creates stronger relationships between the child and/or the parents or carers and police. We found that the force works well with external organisations, family members and other people to protect children when they need immediate safeguarding. In the cases where this happens, the force's carefully considered and sensitive approach enables effective safeguarding outcomes for vulnerable children.

A mother had reported concerns that her 12-year-old son was associating with a 22-year-old man. The matter had been allocated to the CSE team. They (among other measures) issued a Child Abduction Warning Notice. They also made efforts to engage with the child, but he did not report any offences.

The mother then reported that she believed her son was again with this man. The police response was timely and effective. The child was found and safeguarded, and officers captured early evidence. The suspect was arrested.

The child was upset when he was taken home, and he refused to speak to the police. Once calm he talked openly to his mother about abuse he had suffered. Staff from the CSE team visited him and he was able to repeat to them what he had told his mother.

The sensitive approach taken, and the trust built with the child, led to him being able to talk about his experiences and resulted in the man being convicted of rape.

### **The force is engaging well with children in the community**

The force along with its partners is making efforts to improve and develop the way it engages with children. Through the 'Stay Safe' programme, sessions are provided to schools across Lincolnshire, with the aim of reducing risks to children and helping to prevent them becoming victims of crime and disorder.

During the last academic year, 40 mainstream secondary schools (73 percent of the total) received at least one 'Make a Difference' day. These days include inputs about anti-social behaviour, alcohol awareness, saying safe online, and healthy relationships.

The force is engaging with younger children through its 'mini police' scheme, a project aimed at 9–11 year olds to engage them with their community through

police-supervised tasks. The force engages with older children aged 13–18 through the police cadet scheme, which involves children in aspects of law, police procedures and specialist policing units.

The force is working hard to prevent children in care entering the criminal justice system. Through the Joint Diversionary Panel, they helped to reduce those entering the criminal justice system by 49 percent in 2017.

The force also report that the number of children arrested in Lincolnshire has reduced by 59 percent since 2011.

## 10. Managing those posing a risk to children

### Staffing levels in the team dedicated to managing those posing a risk to children are at reasonable levels

Lincolnshire Police has a team – management of sex offenders and violent offenders (MOSOVO) – that is dedicated to multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA).<sup>28</sup>

At the time of inspection, there were 797 registered sex offenders (RSOs) in Lincolnshire being managed in the community. Of these, 101 were graded as high-risk and seven as very high risk.

There was a ratio of about 57 RSOs to one manager, which is only slightly higher than what is considered reasonable (approximately 50:1).

In January 2017, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) issued guidance that forces may use either active or reactive management approaches for RSOs. Active management requires visiting the offender. Officers receive training in the use of active risk management (ARMS) assessments. National practice is for officers to complete police ARMS assessments at least every 12 months, or when something happens which may result in a major change to the current overall assessment and risk management plan for the offender.

The force may move individuals from active to reactive management. This can be done if an ARMS assessment suggests that an RSO presents a low level of risk, and the offender manager is satisfied that the offender has not committed offences or presented any risk for a three-year period. At the time of our inspection, 81 percent of offenders had received an ARMS assessment as required. As a result, the force had moved 24 RSOs to reactive management.

The use of both active and reactive management, effectively carried out, should allow the force to focus on those RSOs posing the greatest risk. It may also ease demand to a limited extent by allowing reactive management for those RSOs who fit the criteria.

At the time of inspection, the force 'flagged' RSOs on its police records management system (Niche) but not on the command and control system (NSPIS) used to manage incidents. This meant that officers attending apparently unrelated incidents at addresses of RSOs would not necessarily know that the RSOs are

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<sup>28</sup> Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are in place to ensure the successful management of violent and sexual offenders. Agencies involved as responsible bodies include the police, probation trusts and prison service. Other organisations may become involved; for example, the Youth Justice Board will be responsible for the care of young offenders.

known offenders. As a result, the force might not notice that an offender should be moved from reactive to active management, and miss the chance to act.

We are pleased to report that when this was brought to the attention of the force, they immediately acted to flag offenders under reactive management on the command and control system.

## **We saw several good examples of offender management, with staff displaying initiative, tenacity and good investigation**

Offender managers received information that an RSO was using a mobile phone, in breach of a court order, and was using it to contact a child he had previously groomed. When they visited him, he denied having a phone saying he only used his wife's phone. Offender managers examined his wife's phone and questioned her about a number stored. She confirmed it was that of her husband's phone, which she handed over to the officers. The man was arrested, and the phone was found to contain indecent images of children. He is now serving a lengthy custodial sentence for several offences and was made the subject of a lifetime sexual harm prevention order.

It is encouraging to note that the force uses civil orders such as sexual harm prevention orders to protect the public and make it difficult for RSOs to commit further offences.

## **Better briefing of neighbourhood police teams will enhance intelligence gathering**

As the numbers of registered offenders increase, collecting and sharing intelligence about them, and managing them appropriately, become increasingly demanding.

We found that links between the MOSOVO and neighbourhood teams on divisions were under-developed throughout the force area. Offender managers task and brief neighbourhood teams on an ad hoc basis to gather intelligence about specific individuals, but information about RSOs is not routinely shared in briefing material, and intelligence collection does not form part of day-to-day duties reported by staff.

Staff in neighbourhood teams play a vital role in the development of community intelligence, and so the force might be missing opportunities to gather information about people who pose a risk to children. These teams could be particularly helpful in supporting ongoing risk-assessments and identifying when to move an offender between reactive and active management. The force could improve how it allocates tasks to different teams, to help to learn more about specific RSOs or to follow up on concerns.

## **We found too many visits to registered sex offenders were overdue**

Although the MOSOVO team is well-resourced, we were concerned to see that at the time of inspection of the force, 165 visits to sex offenders, including those assessed as high-risk, were overdue. In some cases, the visit was overdue by several months. This means that some offenders posing a risk to children were not being managed effectively.

A registered sex offender assessed as posing a very high risk should have been visited at home every month. There had been previous concerns about his risk to children. He had last been seen at home in February 2018. There had been seven attempts to see him at home since March 2018, but these had all been unsuccessful. The RSO breached his notification requirements in April 2018 by notifying late for his periodic notification. He was invited to the police station for interview, as opposed to being arrested, in relation to this, in May 2018. There was no update on this investigation at the time of inspection. Subsequently an offender manager was in telephone contact with the RSO and it was established he had got a job. But it was not clear what this job was and whether there were any people at risk because of this employment.

This case was referred to the force for review and the offender was visited the following day with a further assessment carried out.

## **Management oversight of the MOSOVO team was limited**

The detective inspector with responsibility for the MOSOVO team also has responsibility for the Emerald team, both of which are individually demanding roles.

At the time of inspection, the detective inspector did not have access to, or training in the use of, ViSOR, which is the database used nationally for the management of offenders. He relied entirely on his sergeants for performance and risk information. Consistent oversight of risk is therefore absent. In addition, performance data in respect of RSOs is not currently reported to senior leaders, although this is to be addressed through the PPU monthly meeting.

## **Recommendation**

- Immediately, Lincolnshire Police should act to reduce the number of outstanding visits to registered sex offenders, and within three months:
  - review its approach to providing appropriate information on registered sex offenders to response and neighbourhood officers; and
  - ensure there is adequate management oversight of performance and risk.

## **11. Police detention**

### **We found delays in the attendance of appropriate adults to support children in custody**

We found a consistent weakness in safeguarding children in police custody because they are not receiving early support from appropriate adults. Guidance under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) states that once an appropriate adult is identified, officers should ask that person to attend the custody centre as soon as practicable. In some of the cases we examined, there was evidence of long delays in the attendance of appropriate adults. Their attendance generally coincided with the interview of the child, rather than providing early support of their overall welfare needs, rights and entitlements. This can lead to significant delays in a child seeing someone other than the police. Custody officers reported that this was a problem after 10pm.

### **Detained children with complex needs are not referred to children's social care**

Many children brought into police custody have complex needs and are likely to be vulnerable and in need of safeguarding support. In many cases a referral to children's social care services is warranted. However, in our review of case files we found no recorded evidence of referral forms submitted for children in custody.

### **There is an understanding of the need to find alternative accommodation, but this is not escalated when none is available**

We found that custody officers and staff have a good understanding of the conditions under which bail can be denied. They also understand the responsibility of the police and local authority to seek, and be provided with, appropriate alternative accommodation in those cases where bail is considered unsuitable.

Juvenile detention certificates, which outline to a court the reason why a child should be remanded in custody, are essential to ensure that the police are accountable. They also enable forces to monitor how well they are discharging their responsibilities under PACE. We found these certificates, where they have been required, were usually completed. However, when the local authority fails to find appropriate alternative accommodation, this is not always challenged or escalated to seek a resolution. Consequently, senior leaders within children's social care were not aware of any difficulties in finding alternative accommodation. This results in children being detained unnecessarily in police custody.

A 17-year-old boy was arrested for theft and fraud. Efforts were made to contact a person known to him to act as appropriate adult. This person was unable to attend. The custody officer then contacted the emergency duty team of children's social care. By the time an appropriate adult attended the police station, the boy had been detained for almost ten hours. He was later charged, his bail refused, and alternative accommodation sought. It was reported that none was available and although a juvenile detention certificate was completed, there was no evidence to suggest the matter had been escalated.

### **Recommendation**

- Within six months, Lincolnshire Police should undertake a review (jointly with children's social care services and other relevant organisations) of how it manages the detention of children. This review should include, as a minimum, how best to:
  - ensure that children are only detained when necessary, and for the absolute minimum amount of time;
  - ensure that appropriate adults attend the police station promptly;
  - ensure officers consider the needs of the child and make referrals to children's social care when necessary;
  - assess, at an early stage, the need for alternative accommodation (secure or otherwise) and work with children's social care services to achieve the best option for the child; and
  - when alternative accommodation cannot be found, escalate the issue to seek a resolution.

## Conclusion

### **The overall effectiveness of the force and its response to children who need help and protection**

Senior leaders in Lincolnshire Police show a clear commitment to making sure that child protection and safeguarding the vulnerable are priorities. We found that the force is committed to improving its services for children.

Lincolnshire Police has put a lot of time and effort into understanding the demands on the public protection unit and to increasing capacity for that demand. However, the lack of effective supervision has led to:

- unnecessary delay in investigations;
- opportunities being missed to gather evidence and pursue offenders;
- unacceptable delay in pursuing those sharing indecent images of children; and
- a backlog in overdue visits to registered sex offenders.

It was clear from what the staff said to us that the workforce is committed and dedicated, but there has been little provision for training or continuous professional development. Those in specialist roles are expected to conduct enquiries which are complex and challenging, but many have not received the appropriate training.

It is important that senior leaders can test the nature and quality of decision-making, and its effects on children. Current processes for assessing performance do not emphasise this sufficiently. A framework that focuses on the outcomes for children who need protection would help the force to improve its understanding of results and ensure that service provision is in line with leaders' expectations.

The force engages well with local authority partners, specifically with the LSCB, the Community Safety Partnership and through the CSE team. Efforts are currently being made to improve co-ordination so that the force is better able to identify and safeguard children at risk of sexual exploitation.

Senior leaders – many of whom are new – know that there are inconsistencies and areas for improvement in the service the force provides to children. We welcome the response of the force, its engagement with us, and its willingness to act quickly to address areas of concern identified through the child protection case audits carried out during this inspection.

As we highlighted earlier, we found some examples of good work by individual frontline officers responding to incidents of concern involving children. However, in our review of cases, we found that there are inconsistencies and areas for improvement which the force needs to address, to make sure that it safeguards all children appropriately.

Our recommendations aim to help the force make improvements in these areas.

# Recommendations

## Immediately

- We recommend that Lincolnshire Police should immediately review its processes regarding incidents relating to child protection, paying particular attention to the response decided upon by the staff in the FCR.
- We recommend that Lincolnshire Police should improve its practice in cases of children who go missing from home. As a minimum, this should include a review of how the force records missing episodes, and making staff more aware of:
  - their responsibilities for protecting children who are reported missing from home, especially where this happens regularly;
  - the importance of investigating where a child has been, and who with;
  - their responsibilities for conducting and recording prevention interviews when children return home; and
  - the importance of sharing information with partners.
- We recommend that Lincolnshire Police review its approach to risk-assessment and allocation of cases concerning those suspected of viewing, downloading and distributing indecent images of children.
- We recommend that Lincolnshire Police act to reduce the number of outstanding visits to registered sex offenders and, within three months:
  - review its approach to providing appropriate information on registered sex offenders to response and neighbourhood officers; and
  - ensure there is adequate management oversight of performance and risk.

## Within three months

- We recommend that Lincolnshire Police should act within three months to make sure that officers obtain and record children's concerns and views (including observations of their behaviour and demeanour), to help influence decisions made about them.

- We recommend that Lincolnshire Police ensure that it accurately records all relevant information and makes it readily accessible in all cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children. Guidance to staff should include:
  - what information they should record (and in what form) on their systems to enable good-quality decisions; and
  - an emphasis on the importance of ensuring that records are made promptly and kept up to date.
- We recommend that Lincolnshire Police should improve its child protection and exploitation investigations, paying particular attention to:
  - improving staff awareness, knowledge and skills in this area of work;
  - ensuring a prompt response to any concern raised;
  - undertaking risk-assessments that consider the full range of a child's circumstances, and risks to other children; and
  - improving the oversight and management of cases.

## **Within six months**

- We recommend that Lincolnshire Police, along with its partners, should review its referral processes and supervisory oversight, to make sure that risk to children is identified effectively and the necessary information shared appropriately. Particular attention should be paid to:
  - cumulative risk to children experiencing domestic abuse; and
  - children going missing from home or care.
- We recommend that Lincolnshire Police should undertake a review (jointly with children's social care services and other relevant organisations) of how it manages the detention of children. This review should include, as a minimum, how best to:
  - make sure that children are only detained when necessary and for the absolute minimum amount of time;
  - make sure that appropriate adults attend the police station promptly;
  - make sure officers consider the needs of the child and make referrals to children's social care when necessary;

- assess, at an early stage, the need for alternative accommodation (secure or otherwise) and work with children’s social care services to achieve the best option for the child; and
- when alternative accommodation cannot be found, escalate it to seek a resolution.

## **Next steps**

Within six weeks of the publication of this report, HMICFRS requires an update of the action the force has taken to respond to those recommendations that we have asked to be acted on immediately.

Lincolnshire Police 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 Lincolnshire Police 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*.<sup>29</sup> 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.

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<sup>29</sup> *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, HM Government, March 2015, available at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2)

## 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, e.g. 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.

## Annex B – Definitions and interpretations

In this report, the following words, phrases and expressions in the left-hand column have the meanings assigned to them in the right-hand column. Sometimes, the definition will be followed by a fuller explanation of the matter in question, with references to sources and other material which may be of assistance to the reader.

child	person under the age of 18 years
child abduction warning notice	non-statutory notice issued when the police become aware of a child spending time with an adult who they believe could be harmful to them; a notice is used to disrupt the adult's association with the child, as well as warning the adult that the association could result in arrest and prosecution
multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)	mechanism through which local criminal justice organisations (police, prison and probation trusts) and other bodies dealing with offenders work together in partnership to protect the public from serious harm by managing sexual and violent offenders; established in each of the 42 criminal justice areas in England and Wales by sections 325 to 327B of the Criminal Justice Act 2003
multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)	locally held meeting of statutory and voluntary agency representatives to share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse; any agency can refer an adult or child whom they believe to be at high risk of harm; the aim of the meeting is to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase an adult or child's safety, health and well-being; organisations that attend vary, but are likely to include the police, probation, children's, health and housing services; over 250 MARACs currently in operation throughout England and Wales

multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)

working location in which public sector organisations with responsibilities for the safety of vulnerable people collaborate; it has staff from organisations such as the police and local authority social services, who work alongside one another, sharing information and coordinating activities, to help protect the most vulnerable children and adults from harm, neglect and abuse

Office for Standards in Education,  
Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)

non-ministerial department, independent of government, that regulates and inspects schools, colleges, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, education and training in prisons and other secure establishments, and the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service; assesses children's services in local areas, and inspects services for looked-after children, safeguarding and child protection; reports directly to Parliament

police and crime commissioner (PCC)

elected entity for a police area; responsible for securing the maintenance of the police force for that area and securing that the police force is efficient and effective; holds the relevant chief constable to account for the policing of the area; establishes the budget and police and crime plan for the police force; appoints and may, after due process, remove the chief constable from office; established under section 1, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

registered sex offender (RSO)

person convicted or cautioned for a sexual offence as set out in Schedule 3 to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, or who has otherwise triggered the notification requirements (for example, by being made subject to a sexual offences prevention order), who is required to provide personal details to the police, including details of movements (for example, if going abroad) and, if homeless, where they can be found; registered details may be accessed by the police, probation and prison service