

National Child Protection Inspections

Sussex 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 still abused or neglected by those responsible for their care; they sometimes need to be protected from other adults with whom they come into contact. Some of them occasionally go missing, or end up spending time in places, or with people, harmful to them.

While it is everyone's responsibility to look out for vulnerable children, police forces – working together and with other agencies – have a particular role in protecting children and meeting their needs.

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

As they go about their daily tasks, police officers must be alert to, and identify, children who may be at risk. To protect children effectively, officers must talk to children, listen to them, and understand their fears and concerns. The police must also work well with other agencies 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

Foreword	2
Summary	4
1. Introduction	7
The police’s responsibility to keep children safe	7
Expectations set out in Working Together	8
2. Context for the force	9
3. Leadership, management and governance	11
4. Case file analysis	13
Results of case file reviews	13
Breakdown of case file audit results by area of child protection	14
5. Initial contact	19
6. Assessment and help	22
7. Investigation	26
8. Decision making	30
9. Trusted adult	32
10. Managing those posing a risk to children	34
11. Police detention	37
Conclusion	40
The overall effectiveness of the force and its response to children who need help and protection.....	40
Recommendations	41
Annex A – Child protection inspection methodology	43
Annex B – Definitions and interpretations	45

Summary

This report is a summary of the findings of our inspection of police child¹ protection services in Sussex, which took place in June 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.²

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 is demonstrated in both the police and crime plan and the force's priorities. We found strong evidence that senior officers are working to improve the way the force manages the risks to children and meets the ongoing increase in demand for child protection. For instance, even while the force is facing serious financial constraints they have put more staff into specialist functions responding to vulnerable and at-risk children. This staffing increase in 2016/17 and 2017/18, made after carrying out an analysis of demand, means the force should be able to improve the current systems so that children are helped more effectively. However, there are still problems in the safeguarding investigation units (SIUs), in relation to workloads, resourcing and inconsistency, specifically in Crawley and Brighton, which the force acknowledges and understands.

Throughout the inspection we found examples of good work by individual 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. Some teams (most notably the non-specialist teams) said they were under significant pressures, despite the increase in staffing levels. Demand, capacity and having enough staff were the main issues. We found that some of these pressures are resulting in a poorer service for some children at risk.

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

² For more information on HMICFRS' rolling programme of child protection inspections, see the [national child protection inspections page on our website](#).

Sussex Police has invested a lot of time and energy into improving the health and wellbeing of its staff. It has a wellbeing strategy and is committed to the national blue light workplace wellbeing framework.³ It also assesses the health and wellbeing of its public protection staff through an annual psychological screening exercise. If an assessment identifies additional support is required, this is provided.

The force is trying harder to make staff more aware of vulnerability and of their safeguarding responsibilities. This was evident during the inspection. Staff now understand more clearly the risks faced by people who are vulnerable, including children, and how to respond when they meet them.

However, the case audits we undertook as part of this inspection highlight that some of the force's responses to children in need of help and protection require improvement. 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. Further, in a number of the cases we examined, members of staff did not record enough information on force systems. They sometimes recorded information inconsistently or did not include enough information about multi-agency protective plans.

Specific areas for improvement include:

- recording observations of children's behaviour and demeanour – for instance whether a child seems sad or happy, confident or frightened – in records, so that better assessments of each child's needs are made;
- not using the assessment 'no apparent risk' for children reported missing despite information indicating raised risk factors;
- improving staff awareness of the importance of drawing together all available information from police systems so that they can produce more soundly based risk assessments;
- ending the use of the incident and resolution centre⁴ when it is not appropriate, for instance to deal with certain cases involving sexting and grooming; and

³ The College of Policing blue light wellbeing framework provides the police service with a standard to self-assess against the unique challenges faced by the police officers and staff, such as exposure to indecent imagery and post-traumatic stress.

⁴ The force incident resolution centre is an investigation and resolution centre which manages low-level incidents and crimes.

- assessing early the need for alternative accommodation (secure or otherwise) for children detained in police custody after charge, and working with the local authority to identify the most appropriate accommodation.

Partner agencies we spoke with said that the force needed to understand better the threshold for referral to children's social care services to support a child's needs.

Another weakness is that the force's performance measures currently focus on quantity, namely the number of child protection incidents and cases, rather than 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.

During our inspection, we examined 70 cases where the police had identified children at risk. We assessed the force's child protection practice as good in 19 cases, as requiring improvement in 18 cases, and as inadequate in 33 cases. This shows that the force still needs to do more to ensure it provides a consistently good service for all children.

Conclusion

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

Throughout the inspection, we found that the officers and staff who manage child abuse investigations are committed and dedicated, often working in difficult and demanding circumstances. However, we also found that, in too many cases, practice and decision making are inconsistent. The force needs to do more to ensure that the commitment of senior officers to improving the service provided is leading to better outcomes in all cases.

We are glad that the force is acting to address gaps in service it identified in its self-audits before our inspection.

We have made recommendations that, if acted on, will also 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.⁵ The police also have a duty, under the Children Act 2004, to ensure that when carrying out their functions they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.⁶

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 for 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 also covers children 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 highest serious and organised crime risks.⁷ Child sexual abuse is also one of the six national threats specified in the *Strategic Policing Requirement*.⁸

⁵ Children Act 1989, section 46.

⁶ Children Act 2004, section 11.

⁷ [National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime](#), National Crime Agency, London, May 2018.

⁸ 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 at the time of writing, 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 to include child sexual abuse as an additional national threat. See [Strategic Policing Requirement](#), Home Office, March 2015.

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*,⁹ sets out what is expected of all partner agencies 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.¹⁰

⁹ [Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children](#), HM Government, July 2018. The inspection of Sussex Police commenced before 4 July 2018, when HM Government published the new document replacing Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015). The methodology underpinning our inspection findings is unaffected by this change.

¹⁰ Details of how HMICFRS conducts these inspections can be found at annex A.

2. Context for the force

There are about 4,524 people in the [Sussex Police workforce](#). They are:

- 2,500 police officers;
- 1,831 police staff; and
- 193 police community support officers.

Sussex Police provides policing services to the areas of East and West Sussex and the city of Brighton and Hove. There are three policing divisions and six local policing areas. The police force area covers 1,460 square miles, including approximately 150 miles of coastline, in the south of England.

Although there are some poorer areas, Sussex is generally affluent. Most of its roughly 1.7 million people live in the towns, especially along the south coast. This includes the city of Brighton and Hove together with the towns of Bognor Regis, Hastings, and Eastbourne. University students, and the very large number of people who visit or travel through the area each year, increase the permanent population.

There are three upper-tier local authorities within the Sussex area: East Sussex, Brighton and Hove and West Sussex. Each authority has a local safeguarding children board (LSCB).¹¹

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

Local authority	Judgment	Date published
East Sussex	Outstanding	September 2018
Mid Sussex – Brighton and Hove	Requires improvement	June 2015
West Sussex	Requires improvement	January 2016

¹¹ LSCBs have a statutory duty, under the Children Act 2004, to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

There are four established multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs)¹² in Sussex. Each local authority area has one MASH except for East Sussex, which has two (Eastbourne and Hastings). A range of partners are represented within the MASHs to ensure information is shared effectively.

An assistant chief constable (ACC) is responsible for child protection throughout the force area. A chief superintendent, who is the head of the public protection department, and two detective superintendents, who oversee specialist teams responsible for protecting children and adults, support the ACC.

¹² A multi-agency safeguarding hub is a location in which public sector organisations with responsibilities for the safety of vulnerable people collaborate. These organisations work alongside each other, share information and co-ordinate activities.

3. Leadership, management and governance

Protecting vulnerable people is a priority for both the force and the PCC. The police and crime plan 2017–21, the force priorities, the chief constable’s vision for 2020 and the operational delivery plan 2017/18 all reflect this. During our inspection it was obvious that staff understood clearly this commitment to protecting vulnerable people, including children.

Senior officers from the force public protection department attend the three local safeguarding children boards and the force sends representatives to several sub-groups that support the work of the boards. These sub-groups include one for missing children and child exploitation. Throughout the inspection, organisations working with the police, and other groups with an interest in the work, said that they had good professional relationships with the police and worked well with them. They said that this made for effective joint working, and meant that they felt able to criticise the force constructively where necessary. However, there are some weaknesses in the partnership arrangements. For example, we found that the force does not always press the local authority hard enough to provide accommodation for children arrested and detained in police custody after charge (which the local authority is legally obliged to provide).

We found evidence that the whole workforce is aware of the wider context in which child abuse occurs. The force also understands the importance of a comprehensive and overarching plan to tackle all the different features of abuse and exploitation of children. As a result the force has introduced police-led operations, such as Kite¹³ and Rattle,¹⁴ to reduce threat and harm to children.

A joint Sussex Police and Surrey Police strategic assessment summarises what the two forces understand about the main threats to achieving their goals. This includes the goals relating to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). However, while Sussex Police produces a quarterly CSEA report providing quantitative analysis, it has not yet developed detailed local profiles explaining in detail what kind of child abuse and exploitation exists in their area, and how many children go missing and why. Such profiles could give the police, and the organisations with which they work, a common understanding of the problems they face. Profiles could enable them to focus on gathering the intelligence that is necessary to safeguard children.

The force recognises that collecting information and intelligence jointly with other organisations, and sharing it with them, helps it to build a richer picture of the risks to and vulnerabilities of children. It has therefore recently created a partnership

¹³ Operation Kite is a police initiative to tackle child sexual exploitation across Sussex.

¹⁴ Operation Rattle is a police initiative in East Sussex to tackle criminal exploitation of children being drawn into criminality to distribute drugs.

intelligence form as a way of making it easier to gather such information in a consistent and useable format. While this is a positive step, the form was not yet in use when we inspected and we cannot therefore comment on its effectiveness.

Sussex Police holds daily management meetings about both public protection and local policing. We found these are well attended and provide good, structured oversight of risk and significant cases or investigations. Chaired by a senior officer, they focus clearly on safeguarding and vulnerability, and provide an effective response to issues of immediate concern.

The force has structured governance arrangements for addressing vulnerability and child protection. These include a vulnerability board, a local policing board, a police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) board and an organisational reassurance board. Performance management information is scrutinised, but the force does not have enough information to understand thoroughly how it is helping children at risk of harm.

The force does not undertake routine internal safeguarding audits to assess what it does in practice when trying to help vulnerable children, and how well it does this. As a result, senior leaders cannot be certain that officers and staff are consistently making the best decisions for such children. The force needs to do more to check that the decisions personnel make about children are in line with what its leaders expect. This would sharpen the existing focus on making children safer and less vulnerable. It would also improve the way the force uses the system of 'operational competence', previously called 'earned autonomy', which allows officers who are assessed as competent to finish their own investigations without supervision.

4. Case file analysis

Results of case file reviews

For our inspection, Sussex 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 throughout Sussex.¹⁵ 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 12 as good; in 19 as requiring improvement; and in two as inadequate. We also assessed the same cases. We graded the force's practice in seven as good, in eight as requiring improvement, and in 18 as inadequate.

As part of the inspection, we also selected and examined a further 37 child protection cases. We assessed the force's practice in 12 as good, in 10 as requiring improvement, and in 15 as inadequate. The files on each type of case had certain features in common.

Cases assessed by both Sussex Police and HMICFRS

Force assessment:

- 12 good
- 19 requires improvement
- 2 inadequate

HMICFRS assessment:

- 7 good
- 8 requires improvement
- 18 inadequate

Additional cases assessed only by HMICFRS

HMICFRS assessment:

- 12 good
- 10 requires improvement
- 15 inadequate

¹⁵ The case types and inspection methodology are set out in annex A.

Breakdown of case file audit results by area of child protection

Cases assessed involving enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989¹⁶

Enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989:

- 3 good
- 2 requires improvement
- 6 inadequate

Common themes are that the files:

- include evidence of joint visits and initial action in cases;
- do not routinely include records of strategy discussions, even when these are recorded as having happened;
- do not always record further working with other authorities once the case is past its initial stage, or what the outcomes were;
- do not show that potential risk to other children within households is always considered; and
- do not always cross-reference information which appears in different records, making it difficult to see what action has been, or is being, taken.

Cases assessed involving referrals relating to domestic abuse incidents or crimes

Referrals relating to domestic abuse incidents or crimes:

- 2 good
- 4 requires improvement
- 4 inadequate

Common themes include that the force:

- assesses risk well at the beginning of a case;

¹⁶ 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.

- makes good investigation plans in respect of adult victims where it is clear a crime has been committed;
- doesn't always record the concerns and views of children, which can lead to a lack of understanding of how they are affected; and
- doesn't always keep proper records of the outcomes of referrals to children's social care services, strategy discussions and details of protective plans for a child.

Cases assessed involving referrals arising from incidents other than domestic abuse

Referrals arising from incidents other than domestic abuse:

- 5 good
- 2 requires improvement
- 3 inadequate

Common themes include that the force:

- responds well initially, and takes early action to safeguard children;
- has inconsistent recording practices, leading to an incomplete picture on intelligence systems; and
- doesn't always record the concerns and views of children.

Cases assessed involving children at risk from child sexual exploitation (CSE)

Cases involving children at risk of CSE both online and offline:

- 3 good
- 2 requires improvement
- 8 inadequate

Common themes include that:

- the control room staff use THRIVE¹⁷ processes to identify current and continuing risks when children at risk of CSE are involved in other incidents;

¹⁷ THRIVE is a risk assessment tool that considers six elements to help identify the appropriate response grade based on the needs of the caller and the circumstances of the incident, namely: threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement.

- initial responders complete SCARF¹⁸ forms;
- initial investigation is often poor; for instance, the police may not seize mobile devices that may contain evidence;
- there is an inconsistent approach to the use of CSE flags on police records;
- the police online team are making good use of software to identify potential perpetrators;
- the investigations and resolution centre is used to deal with certain cases involving sexting and grooming, for which it is not suitable; and
- workloads often cause delays in holding supervisory reviews.

Cases assessed involving missing and absent children

Children missing:

- 1 good
- 1 requires improvement
- 5 inadequate

Common themes include that:

- the initial response to locate a child classed as missing is often the right one, but long-term inter-agency planning can sometimes be ineffective;
- assessment of risk focuses only on the most recent missing episode, rather than the cumulative history; and
- staff use 'no apparent risk' for children reported missing, even when information indicating raised risk factors suggests a higher classification would be justified in some cases.

¹⁸ A single combined assessment risk form (SCARF) is used by Sussex Police to complete an assessment of vulnerability and make a referral to external safeguarding organisations.

Cases assessed involving children taken to a place of safety under section 46 of the Children Act 1989¹⁹

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

- 3 good
- 1 requires improvement
- 2 inadequate

Common themes include that personnel:

- consider the circumstances of vulnerable children and make effective decisions to remove children;
- liaise early and effectively with emergency children's social care services; but
- do not always record properly the reasons for decisions to take children into police protection.

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:

- 1 good
- 1 requires improvement
- 5 inadequate

Common themes include:

- local police prevention teams do not help with monitoring registered sex offenders;
- there is a good active risk management system (ARMS)²⁰ completion rate; and

¹⁹ Under section 46 of the Children Act 1989, the police may remove a child to suitable accommodation if they consider that the child is at risk of significant harm. A child in these circumstances is referred to as 'having been taken into police protection'.

²⁰ 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.

- there is a backlog of risk management plans awaiting signing off by a supervisor.

Cases assessed involving children detained in police custody

- 1 good
- 5 requires improvement
- 0 inadequate

Common themes include:

- 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 for a solution;
- the force carries out reviews of ongoing detention remotely without the child being consulted or seen in person; and
- officers do not always submit SCARF forms when people are arrested.

5. Initial contact

Sussex Police has allocated resources to a range of vulnerability and child protection training for its frontline and specialist officers and staff, to teach them about their roles in safeguarding. We found that officers and staff are now more aware that a child they meet may be vulnerable. The policing approach has become child-centred and as a result, the consideration of whether and how a child may be vulnerable is more apparent – even where they are suspected of committing an offence.

We saw some good examples of officers responding quickly to specific concerns about children. Officers attend promptly and carry out effective preliminary tasks such as ensuring the immediate safety of children and assessing how best to proceed. We saw evidence that, where appropriate, officers complete a single combined assessment of risk form (SCARF) to make a referral to children's social care services. We also found that officers undertake good initial enquiries and use their powers to arrest or protect when necessary.

Staff at a children's nursery contacted the police when a mother came to collect her four-year-old son. She was drunk and aggressive towards staff. There was a good response by the police, which resulted in the arrest of the mother. The officers considered the immediate safeguarding concerns about the child, and arranged for the boy to be placed with his grandmother following appropriate checks. They referred the case to children's social care services, followed by discussions regarding the incident. There was good supervisory input and oversight. The mother subsequently received a police caution.

A member of the public called the police late at night after finding a five-year-old girl alone in a car. The member of the public removed the child from the car, at which point a man, who appeared intoxicated, arrived stating he was a relative.

The police responded well, but when they arrived at the location the child and car were gone. Officers quickly undertook intelligence searches, which resulted in them locating the car outside an address which they then entered. They found and spoke to the child, while noting the home conditions in terms of cleanliness, hazards and the suitability of the two adults caring for the child.

The police arrested the two adults and took the child into police protection to safeguard her. The police held an emergency strategy discussion with children's social care services. They identified a suitable foster placement where the child could stay. A detailed referral document, including the inspector's (designated officer) comments regarding the use of the emergency police protection power, was completed and shared with children's social care services. This resulted in a joint investigation.

Police staff working in the force contact, command and control department (FCCCD) manage Sussex Police's response to reported incidents. They are responsible for call handling and officer dispatch. The call-handling process uses the national decision model²¹ and the THRIVE risk assessment tool to assess each incident. The staff receive structured lists of questions to ask when dealing with different types of incident.

The investigations and resolution centre (IRC) manages low-risk and non-critical incidents that do not require either an immediate or a prompt response. The team is a mixture of police officers and police staff. We found that the IRC dealt with some cases involving indecent images of children and adults. We sampled some of those cases, which involved both boys and girls between 11 and 16 years old. The centre submitted a SCARF for most incidents. Nevertheless we were concerned to find that, in many cases, the police had seized no devices containing images. In others, the police did not pursue lines of enquiry to identify perpetrators or other children who might have been affected. Sometimes there was no evidence that intelligence had been passed on.

The police received a report that a 16-year-old girl who was a looked-after child resident in a care home in Sussex was sending naked images of herself to an adult male in America. We saw no record of an investigation into the report. The child subsequently moved into another police force area, but there was no evidence of that force being notified of the concerns regarding her activities.

The FCCCD have a quality-assurance process in place for all staff. This includes a monthly review of work by the quality and customer service team. For officers outside their probationary period who have earned autonomy, this is two dip-checks. For those within their probation period more dip-checks are completed. Supervisors within the control room are also responsible for reviewing incidents to ensure they have been assessed using THRIVE.

The officers we met during the inspection showed a good knowledge of what to check for when attending child protection incidents. They also told us that body-worn video cameras are compulsory for domestic abuse calls, so that all interactions and observations are recorded. They explained that, while it was not mandatory, they would also use video cameras at potential child protection incidents. Officers could tell us what signs they would look for that might indicate children were being neglected, such as the cleanliness of the house and whether it contained such items

²¹ The national decision model is the primary model used by the police in the decision making and assessment process.

as food, clothing and toys. They clearly understood the need to record details on the SCARF, and the reason for this, namely that information shared with partner agencies can make protective planning easier and more effective.

However, despite this, in the cases we reviewed we found that the police had not recorded consistently the concerns, behaviour and demeanour of a child. A child's behaviour 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 a parent's presence might present a risk. The police should watch how the child behaves to inform both the initial assessment of their needs and the decision as to whether to refer them to children's social care services.

In West Sussex, the force has piloted sharing information with schools about children affected by domestic abuse incidents ('Operation Encompass'). They pass on the information the same day a child or young person has been involved in or exposed to such an incident. This approach supports multi-agency working and the sharing of information to help safeguard children. It provides early support for those who are exposed to domestic abuse. Working with partners, the force is currently trying to expand the operation across the rest of Sussex.

Force information systems use electronic markers known as '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.

Recommendations

- Sussex Police should immediately undertake, and then act on, a review of which child protection cases are taken by the investigations and resolution centre, and consider whether it would be better to deal with any elsewhere. The review should cover whether they are being managed effectively and whether the staff are appropriately trained to undertake child protection investigations.
- Sussex Police should take action within three months to ensure that its officers always record their observations of children's behaviour and demeanour, so that their needs can be assessed better.

6. Assessment and help

Sussex has four established multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs): the local authority areas of West Sussex and Brighton and Hove have one each, and East Sussex has two (Eastbourne and Hastings). Each MASH includes a different range of partners, from both statutory and non-statutory agencies. These make it easier to share information effectively and to make joint decisions and plans. When safeguarding concerns are raised or requests for early help are received, the hubs act as a single place for all contact with and referrals into children's social care.

The police role in the MASH varies between areas, with different hub teams adopting different processes. Where the agencies identify children as being at immediate risk of harm, police and social care practice managers hold prompt strategy discussions.

Different MASHs work in different ways and refer different levels of cases to children's social care. For example, some hubs refer cases to early-help providers for assessment once they have examined and discussed them, even if they may not meet the statutory threshold.²² Other hubs do not share all referrals that officers submit, or check them against partners' databases. When this happens, there is no opportunity to make a wider assessment of risk, or to identify additional support for a child or their family.

The force knows about these inconsistencies and is trying to achieve greater uniformity. However, it also accepts that it is difficult to make changes and influence partners across different authorities.

Partner agencies we spoke with said that the force needed to understand better the threshold for referral to children's social care services to support a child's needs. We heard that in one area as many as 65 percent of referrals did not meet the threshold for statutory assessment.

In some of the cases we audited, we found that information – particularly on strategy meetings, safeguarding plans and contact with children and families – was incomplete or missing. Although there is evidence that agencies work together, there is often no record of what happened or what was agreed at a strategy discussion or a meeting to direct activity. In other cases, information appears on a variety of different systems and therefore is not readily accessible to all staff. This means that officers dealing with a case may not fully understand the risks to a child, any current safety plans, and which agency is overseeing and coordinating the support. We also found that when strategy meetings and conferences are recorded, the information does not always include all the relevant details and actions from the meeting and therefore cannot help co-ordinated multi-agency planning.

²² Children Act 1989

The force uses the Niche records management system. All information relevant to the risk management of a victim, including details of offenders and documents such as SCARFs and strategy minutes, can be logged. However, personnel do not routinely use this master log.

The police and other frontline agencies refer domestic abuse cases assessed as high risk to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) to make longer-term safeguarding plans. Each local authority area holds a MARAC every fortnight. The police generally chair this, though Brighton and Hove has an independent chair.

Sussex Police attaches domestic abuse caseworkers to the MASHs, to research and present police information at each MARAC. A review of the MARAC minutes for each area shows that meetings are regular and well attended by police and partners. We found that, where partner agency representatives cannot attend, they send reports instead. The meetings set actions to reduce risk and these are allocated to the appropriate agency to complete.

Children who go missing from home face particular dangers. Call-takers in the FCCCD have a set list of questions to ask a caller reporting a missing child, to get information to help them determine the level of risk. They will then make an initial judgment about risk level. They send cases assessed as 'high' or 'no apparent risk' to an inspector for ratification of the risk level. They send medium and low-risk cases to response sergeants for ratification.

We are concerned about how the FCCCD makes decisions about children reported as missing. It does not necessarily consider the wider risks posed to children, with some of them classified as 'no apparent risk' or 'unauthorised absences' rather than 'missing'. Such an approach makes it more difficult to develop an appropriate plan to protect the child.

A report that a person is missing is the responsibility of the response team until the team has completed a missing record on the force system (COMPACT). The team then hands the case over to the missing person team.

We found that the police often record missing children who are in the care of the local authority as 'unauthorised absences with no apparent risk', rather than conducting a thorough risk assessment using all the available information on police systems. We saw entries such as 'is a regular and not out of character' or 'the home knows best' used on reports to justify the decisions made.

Staff often appear not to understand how the presence of more than one risk factor can multiply the danger, or that assessments should be reached by a continuous process building on the history of every individual case. When we sampled reports in the category 'no apparent risk' we identified children about whom the police records showed significant relevant history. Some carried a 'risk of exploitation' flag.

The force does not record whether it uses THRIVE for these reports. Sometimes there is no record of a case review over an extended period.

The force received a report that a 14-year-old girl in the care of the local authority was missing. She had been recorded as missing on nine previous occasions, and had a police flag requesting her to be treated as missing for any future reports owing to a risk of sexual exploitation. Despite this, the force classified her as 'no apparent risk'. On a later occasion, the care home again reported her missing after she failed to return to it. That time the force graded her as 'missing (medium risk)'. The upgrade was due only to her age and not to her risk of exposure to sexual exploitation.

A 15-year-old boy living in a care home was reported as missing and was assessed as 'no apparent risk'. He had 13 previous missing incidents recorded. This child had a significant history of vulnerability. He had been a victim of a serious sexual assault, had mental health difficulties and was a drug abuser. He may also have been the victim of an organised criminal network who were using children to transport and sell drugs across county lines. He had previously been reported as having scratches to his face, and to be in possession of jewellery. The reason given for the assessment of 'no apparent risk' was that the child was going to see his girlfriend and that it was regular behaviour. However, neither the home nor the police knew who the girlfriend was or where she lived. The record showed no assessment or consideration of the potential criminal exploitation of this boy, though evident vulnerability factors were recorded on the police systems.

A better understanding of why a child has run away can provide vital information to agencies and make it possible to develop more effective risk management. It should underlie planning and decision making about future safeguarding action. Interviews with children at this stage can provide a wealth of information about the reasons why they are running away, particularly where this is becoming more frequent and/or the child is reluctant to speak to police or other agencies.

Local authorities across Sussex have commissioned an independent provider to conduct 'return home interviews' in all policing areas. The provider sends information from these interviews to the missing person coordinators, who upload it onto police systems to help the police make better decisions in future. However, owing to concerns over the provision of this service, some of the local authorities are in the process of de-commissioning the service.

Recommendations

- Sussex Police should immediately improve practice in cases of children who go missing from home. As a minimum, this should include making staff more aware of:
 - their responsibilities for protecting children who are reported missing from home, especially where this happens regularly; and
 - the importance of drawing together all available information from police systems, including information about people who pose a risk to children, so that risk assessments may be more soundly based.
- Sussex Police should, within six months, undertake a review to examine the referral processes to ensure that they identify risk to children effectively and share the necessary information appropriately with external agencies.

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.

The MASH received a report of a serious sexual assault against a 15-year-old girl by an unknown 27-year-old man. She was reluctant to support any investigation. The handling of the case showed strong evidence of good partnership activity, together with an effective investigation plan, supervisory oversight, investigative review and engagement with the child seeking her views. There was a joint strategy meeting with partner agencies, which shared information and agreed actions. Information was provided to help the child and her family to get continuing support. Items seized by the police were sent for forensic examination, and this resulted in a possible perpetrator being identified. The police officer took steps to discuss with the victim how the new forensic evidence could help them pursue the investigation. The views of the child following that discussion were recorded, highlighting that she did not wish to take any action at that point. The case was still in progress at the time of our review.

An all-Sussex procedural guide governs the multi-agency response to child protection and safeguarding across Sussex. This includes guidance on child exploitation. The force also runs Operation Kite, its own response to CSE, whose aims are to:

- safeguard children and young people who are victims of, or at risk of, CSE;
- target perpetrators of CSE and bring them to justice; and
- enhance multi-agency effectiveness to tackle CSE.

Staff across the force have a good awareness, understanding and knowledge of the signs and risk of CSE, and of referral processes. They are less well informed about children at risk of or subject to criminal exploitation.

Several units in the force handle cases involving children.

When the police identify a child as being at risk of sexual exploitation, they refer the case to the MASH. A sexual exploitation risk assessment form is completed. In most cases this is done by children's social care services alone. The danger of an assessment by a single agency, however, is that if the agency does not know that wider information (such as police intelligence) exists, and it has not been shared with them at this early stage, cases may not progress to a multi-agency child exploitation meeting (MACE) even when they should.

When the police or another authority identify a child as being at risk of exploitation, they present the case at a monthly MACE meeting or an adolescent vulnerability and risk meeting (AVRM). This agrees the level of risk. The meetings allow sharing of information between agencies, enabling them to put in place plans to reduce risk and support children.

We observed a MACE meeting in East Sussex. We found it to be well attended and to represent a range of partners. A police inspector and a local authority manager co-chaired the meeting. This generated healthy professional challenge where appropriate. There seemed to be effective multi-agency decision making and planning about the cases under consideration.

The safeguarding investigation units (SIUs), which have a wide variety of powers, investigate CSE cases only when the force knows that a crime has already been committed. They are not involved in multi-agency diversionary activity to protect potential victims from CSE.

Staff within these SIUs deal with a high volume of cases, including penetrative rape offences (for both adults and children) and child deaths, together with cases where offences against children have occurred within the family. The staff are currently carrying between 10 and 20 crimes each, and this is leading to delays in crimes being progressed.

A 13-year-old girl accused a 14-year-old boy of rape during an episode when both were missing. The initial police response to the allegation was good, and the police took steps to safeguard the victim. However, they apparently did not consider safeguarding the perpetrator or the risk he might pose to others. The danger resulting from this was even more serious because the police were also investigating him about indecent images of children and his social worker had expressed concerns about his behaviour. A review by an inspector drew attention to the risk the boy posed, but apparently no one took action. Some four months after the initial report, no one had spoken to him about the allegation. While there had been a strategy meeting, there was no record of the agreed outcomes for either child and there were no minutes attached to the police records.

In one unit, an inspector told us the staff had 280 open crime cases, with over 50 percent of the work relating to rape investigations. Staff told us that they found it extremely difficult to manage the demand. Supervisory reviews were delayed, and the unit rarely monitored or reviewed Achieving Best Evidence²³ interviews.

²³ Achieving best evidence in criminal proceedings are the guidelines for interviewing children where allegations of abuse are being investigated.

The force had flagged a 13-year-old girl as being at high risk of CSE and frequently going missing. Research indicated that she had previously posted images of herself on Instagram and engaged in sexualised conversation with an unknown person. At the time of the inspection, personnel had not spoken to the child regarding the images. The force had, however, recorded what they had done to try to identify the perpetrator, who might pose a risk to other vulnerable children.

The investigations teams manage lower-level cases such as sexting and grooming. These teams are responsible for investigating a wide range of cases such as arson, criminal exploitation, sexual assaults and burglary. They also deal with some cases that the safeguarding units do not have capacity to respond to.

Support to CSE victims and capacity for rapport building and diversionary work within the local policing vulnerability CSE and missing teams is affected by poor reporting. If personnel record information poorly and it is also spread across several different systems and logs, the processes become even more difficult.

In some areas, supervision is not strict enough. Officers do not always make clear why they have taken decisions, and supervisors do not consistently examine and challenge the progress of investigations. As we have said above, auditing cases would allow senior leaders to reassure themselves that the decisions officers and staff make about children are in line with what they expect. It would also provide an opportunity to develop a more reflective supervision approach and encourage staff to fulfil their potential.

The complex abuse unit deals with the more complex, protracted or high-profile investigations, particularly historical and institutional abuse involving children or vulnerable adults. These investigations receive better supervision and managerial oversight. Sampled cases showed that the unit regularly records clear, documented, investigation plans, supervisor reviews and updates from other agencies on force systems. It conducts initial safeguarding interventions jointly with the other relevant agencies. It refers and deals appropriately with safeguarding concerns as they change, and holds strategy meetings and maintains continuous liaison with partner organisations. When it deals with cases in this way, the force takes account of the needs and voices of the children.

Child abduction warning notices are an effective way of disrupting contact between a vulnerable child and an adult where there are concerns that the child may be at risk of harm, including exploitation. These notices should be considered as part of an effective investigation and safeguarding plan. At the time of inspection, the force had issued 58 such notices in 2016/17 and 33 in the first six months of 2017/18.

Sussex Police uses intermediaries – specially trained individuals – to help vulnerable victims and witnesses to give complete, coherent and accurate evidence. This is

particularly useful in helping the police to communicate effectively with child victims. Before interviewing any child, personnel should consider using an intermediary to support and help the child to give the best possible evidence and ensure that they hear its views. In one case examined, we found delays in obtaining the services of an intermediary. This is a national problem, and one that we have found in previous inspections.

The police often hold a wealth of information that may be directly relevant to the assessment of risk. Valuable information could be lost if the police cannot provide a report, or are not present to take part in discussions or challenge decisions regarding a child's welfare, or regarding planning decisions such as child coming off a plan or ongoing need. It is therefore important that the police are consistently involved in child protection cases.

The force employs dedicated case conference staff who attend all initial child protection conferences, but apparently do not attend later reviews. While these conferences are not recorded consistently, the information that is available suggests that the number of people attending varies. The force gave us information for 2017. This shows that in East Sussex 359 invitations were issued, resulting in 226 attendances (63 percent) and in Brighton and Hove 268 invitations resulted in 254 attendances (95 percent). In cases where the police do not attend, the force told us that it was the practice to send a report to the conference. Police told us that some requests from partners, however, did not allow much time to prepare such reports or to arrange attendance.

Recommendation

- Within three months, Sussex Police should produce a plan to improve its child protection and exploitation investigations, paying attention to:
 - undertaking risk assessments that consider the whole of a child's circumstances and risks to other children; and
 - improving the oversight and management of cases (to include auditing child abuse and exploitation investigations to ensure that standards are being met).

8. Decision making

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.²⁴ In the cases examined, decisions to take a child to a place of safety were well considered and made in the best interests of the child, despite some deficiencies in recording information about the use of powers.

The children's social care service contacted the police informing them of an early birth in hospital of a baby girl where concerns existed for her safety. Due to the early birth, the social care service asked the police to take the child into police protection to prevent removal from hospital, while they made an application for a court protection order. After an emergency strategy discussion the police made the child subject to police protection. The agencies involved dealt with the matter sensitively, ensuring both the mother and wider family were aware of what this meant and what the next steps would be. The inspector (designated officer), oversaw the case well, and the reasons for decisions were properly recorded. Throughout, the agencies involved communicated effectively and, as a result, the children's social care services obtained an emergency protection order for the child from the courts.

Officers we spoke to who had used the emergency power by taking children into police protection told us that sometimes they had to take them to the nearest police station. When this happened officers had to stay with them while waiting for the local authority to find accommodation.

Record keeping is not always good enough. Although we found some examples where the police had carried out investigations promptly and effectively, staff do not always record details on police systems about safeguarding and joint work with other agencies. Neither do they consistently record detailed information about the protective plans. Sometimes they do not record the concerns and views of the child

²⁴ 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.

in sufficient detail to make them easy to understand. This creates a gap in the information available and may mean child protection agencies do not put the right measures in place to protect and support children.

A mother took her 12-year-old daughter to hospital, disclosing that her father had assaulted her, causing injuries. A strategy meeting took place and the decision was made that children's social care services would continue the enquiries, as the mother said she had stopped access to the child by the father. The police did not carry out an investigation, and therefore no-one spoke to the child or examined her injuries, or interviewed the suspect. There was no record of enquiries being made to find out whether the father had access to other children or to confirm whether access to the child he assaulted had stopped.

Recommendation

- Within three months, Sussex Police should take steps to ensure that it records all relevant information properly and makes it readily accessible in all cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children.
Guidance to staff should include:
 - guidance as to 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.

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 better 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.

The parent of a 17-year-old daughter reported that she was at risk of being trafficked for prostitution by her 19-year-old boyfriend. The police initially responded well, which resulted in the arrest of the suspect. The police took the child into protection. They then held an urgent strategy discussion with children's social care services. A foster place was available, but the child did not want to go to it. Following further discussions and assessment of risk, the child returned home in accordance with her wishes. Support from children's social care services continued. At the time we reviewed this case, the investigation was still live.

The force has an initiative called Operation Stepping Stone. This seeks to reduce the criminalisation of children and young people while ensuring the police understand children's circumstances, including any vulnerabilities, before they make decisions that may affect their future. In support of this approach, the force is running several programmes including:

- An intervention programme designed to work with those children identified as being at significant risk of becoming involved in criminality. Currently (to March 2018) 62 children have been enrolled on the programme, of whom 33 have not re-offended.
- The appointment of 120 youth ambassadors who are a mixture of police officers and police staff. Their purpose is to improve and develop how well the force understands and engages with children, identifying vulnerability using the principles of threat, harm and risk. In support of their role, they receive inputs and updates on best practice, legislation changes and new processes, which they then share at briefings and team meetings. They also act as a single point of contact for advice and guidance.
- The appointment of 20 prevention youth officers (previously known as neighbourhood school officers) based within local prevention teams across six hubs in Sussex. Their priorities include working with young people to improve understanding of topics such as online and digital safety, developing and

maintaining relationships with schools and helping them to manage incidents themselves rather than using the police to deal with them.

- The use of Snapchat, which has been piloted with the aim of using social media to get information and messages on issues such as online safety and sexting, to children and young people on a platform they are comfortable with. The force told us that the response has been good. They are finding the views per snap are increasing during each campaign, with children and young people engaging and using the platform to report concerns and ask questions.

The force also has a children and young person's strategic oversight group. Its purpose is to scrutinise the overall engagement with children and young people so that the police can identify areas of risk and vulnerability.

10. Managing those posing a risk to children

Sussex Police has a violent and sex offender register (ViSOR) team dedicated to multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA).²⁵ It also has a paedophile and online investigation team which is a proactive team investigating 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. A referral unit that provides an intelligence and research function to assist in the development of cases supports the team.

At the time of inspection, there were 1,566 registered sex offenders (RSOs) in Sussex being managed in the community. Of these, 172 were graded as high risk and three as very high risk.

In January 2017, the National Police Chiefs' Council 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 assessments (ARMS). National practice for police ARMS assessments is to complete them at least every 12 months or where 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 represents 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, approximately 86 percent of offenders had received an ARMS assessment as required. As a result, the force had moved 173 RSOs to reactive management.

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

The force 'flags' RSOs on its police records management system (Niche) but not on the command and control system which is used to manage incidents. The effect is that officers attending apparently unrelated incidents at addresses of RSOs will not

²⁵ 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 agencies may become involved; for example, the Youth Justice Board will be responsible for the care of young offenders.

know that they have offended previously. As a result, the force may not notice that an offender should be moved from reactive to active management and miss the chance to take action.

We found that links between the ViSOR and prevention teams on divisions are not yet good enough throughout the force area. The force does not routinely inform local officers about the RSOs living in their areas. Staff in prevention teams play a vital role in the development of community intelligence, and so the force may be missing opportunities to gather information about people posing 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.

At the time of our inspection, there were about 60 RSOs to one manager, which is only slightly higher than what is considered reasonable (approximately 50:1).

As numbers of registered offenders increase, collecting and spreading intelligence about them, and managing them appropriately, becomes increasingly demanding. Although the ViSOR team is well resourced, offender managers reported that they had limited capacity to be proactive. There was also a backlog of risk management plans waiting for a supervisor to sign them off.

We found some examples of the force providing an effective response, but others that showed the police missing early safeguarding opportunities.

A high-risk sex offender released from prison failed to attend his probation appointment. He also did not comply with his notification requirements, sometimes known as the 'sex offenders register', which requires anyone convicted of a sexual offence to go to a police station to provide personal details. Police and probation responded quickly and formulated a joint risk management plan, identifying that this individual was high risk, had not complied with the requirements and was homeless. The police responded swiftly, and found and arrested him three days after his release.

An unsuccessful visit to a registered sex offender resulted in the discovery that he was in contact with an unknown 20-year-old female. Despite a request from the police, the sex offender refused to provide her details. The police began an investigation. This resulted in the female being identified, and a disclosure that she was aware that he was a sex offender and that he had had contact with her younger sister, aged nine. The police tried to speak to the mother of the child but did not make contact until over a month later, at which point they made a referral (SCARF) to children's social care services. The delay in submitting the referral to inform children's social care services that a sex offender had been in contact with a child resulted in a missed opportunity to safeguard at an early stage. The police should have made the referral immediately they became aware of the contact between the RSO and child. Although there was reference to children's social care services on the police (ViSOR) system, there was no recorded outcome following the referral regarding any decisions about the child and her family or any potential further contact by the RSO. The force confirmed that children's social care services were in contact with the family and a safeguarding plan was in place.

It is encouraging to note that the force uses civil orders (sexual harm prevention orders and sexual offences prevention orders) to protect the public and restrict RSOs by making it difficult for them to commit further offences. There are currently 766 offenders in Sussex who are the subject of such civil orders.

Recommendation

- Within three months, Sussex Police should review its approach to providing appropriate information on registered sex offenders to response and prevention team officers.

11. Police detention

Many children brought into police custody have complex needs and are likely to be vulnerable and in need of safeguarding support. We found that, in most cases, children received the timely support of an appropriate adult to speak for them. Children who are detained can also get support from the liaison and diversion practitioners between 8am and 8pm. Out of hours, the custody sergeant can ask for a nurse or doctor to be called out to make an assessment.

Often a child being detained should be referred to children's social care services. This is the responsibility of the investigating/arresting officer and not the custody staff. However, we found that officers are not consistently submitting referral forms for children in custody.

The force reviews a sample (both adult and children) of 20 custody records each month for each custody facility. A specific section within the reviews examines juvenile detainees. It shares the findings from these reviews at a monthly custody meeting. The findings have included information about juveniles being kept in custody overnight and compliance with the concordat on children in custody.²⁶

The decision to detain someone in custody should be reviewed regularly and this should be done in the presence of the detainee.²⁷ When we examined custody records, we found that reviews of ongoing detention are in most cases done remotely without the children being consulted or seen in person. While reasons for this were recorded (these included, for example, 'impracticable to attend as covering all custody suites across the force') we found there was no record to show that the children were told that the reviews had taken place or that they were reminded of their rights and entitlements. This was despite the reviews recording that this was to be done.

The local authority is responsible for providing somewhere suitable to stay (alternative accommodation) for children charged with offences, denied bail and detained. Only in exceptional circumstances (such as during extreme weather) would the transfer of the child to such accommodation not be in the child's best interests. In rare cases – for example, if a child presented a high risk of serious harm to others – secure accommodation might be necessary.

²⁶ The concordat on children in custody provides guidance for police forces and local authorities in England on their responsibilities towards children in custody. Last updated June 2018.

²⁷ [College of Policing: Authorised Professional Practice Detention and Custody August 2018](#)

We found that custody officers and staff understand clearly the conditions under which they can deny bail. They also understand that the police have a responsibility to ask for, and the local authority to provide, appropriate accommodation if the police consider bail is inappropriate.²⁸ However, when the local authority fails to find appropriate alternative accommodation, the police do not always question this or press for a resolution. This results in the unnecessary detention of children in police custody.

The police arrested a 15-year-old girl for assault. She received early access to an appropriate adult and health care practitioner. While she was detained, the police reviewed her position remotely from another police station, rather than in her presence. They explained this as being due to operational demands. Despite early engagement with children's social care services to identify alternative accommodation, and requests from the police, no accommodation was available. This resulted in the police continuing to detain the child in custody.

In 2017, the police brought 1,949 children into police custody. In 27 cases, they refused bail following charge. They needed secure accommodation for 14 children and non-secure for 13. In only five cases did the relevant local authority find a placement, and all were non-secure. In the first two months of 2018, 26 children were charged, were refused bail and found suitable for transfer to local authority accommodation. For 23 of those cases no accommodation was available.

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 the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. We found these certificates, where they are required, are not always completed or attached to custody records. The result is that important information, such as the justification for detaining the child in police custody overnight, is not being recorded or shared with the court.

²⁸ Under section 38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, a custody officer must secure the move of a child to local authority accommodation unless he certifies it is impracticable to do so or, for those aged 12 or over, no secure accommodation is available and local authority accommodation would not be adequate to protect the public from serious harm from him.

Recommendation

- Within six months, Sussex Police should undertake a review (jointly with children's social care services and other relevant agencies) 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 custody staff record properly the decisions made and action taken while children are detained; and
 - 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.

Conclusion

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

Senior leaders in Sussex Police are committed to making sure that child protection and safeguarding the vulnerable is a priority. We found that the force is committed to improving its services for children. Sussex Police has also invested funding to provide more public protection posts to manage the increases in demand.

It was clear from what the staff said to us, and the training they had received, that the force had made great efforts to improve the workforce's awareness of vulnerability and wider child safeguarding responsibilities.

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

The force engages well with partners from across the local authorities, specifically in the referral and assessment process within the MASHs. These work co-operatively despite the volumes of SCARFs, strategy discussions and meetings they are managing.

Senior leaders, many of whom were new in post as lead responsible officers for thematic areas of child protection, know that there are some inconsistencies and areas for improvement in the service provided to children. We welcome the response of the force, its engagement with us and its evident 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. We also found specialist child protection staff to be committed and dedicated, working in an increasingly complex and demanding environment to keep children safe. That said, in our review of cases we found that there are inconsistencies and areas for improvement that 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 Sussex Police immediately undertake, and then act on, a review of which child protection cases are taken by the incident and resolution centre, and consider whether it would be better to deal with any elsewhere. The review should cover whether they are being managed effectively and whether the staff are appropriately trained to undertake child protection investigations.
- We recommend that Sussex Police immediately improve practice in cases of children who go missing from home. As a minimum, this should include making staff more aware of:
 - their responsibilities for protecting children who are reported missing from home, especially where this happens regularly; and
 - the importance of drawing together all available information from police systems, including information about people who pose a risk to children, so that risk assessments may be more soundly based.

Within three months

- We recommend that, within three months, Sussex Police takes action to ensure that its officers always record their observations of children's behaviour and demeanour, so that their needs can be assessed better.
- We recommend that, within three months, Sussex Police produces a plan to improve its child protection and exploitation investigations, paying attention to:
 - undertaking risk assessments that consider the whole of a child's circumstances and risks to other children; and
 - improving the oversight and management of cases (to include auditing of child abuse and exploitation investigations to ensure that standards are being met).
- We recommend that, within three months, Sussex Police takes steps to ensure that it records all relevant information properly and makes it readily accessible in all cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children. Guidance to staff should include:
 - guidance as to 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, within three months, Sussex Police should review its approach to providing appropriate information on registered sex offenders to response and prevention team officers.

Within six months

- We recommend that Sussex Police should, within six months, undertake a review to examine the referral processes to ensure that they identify risk to children effectively and share the necessary information appropriately with external agencies.
- We recommend that, within six months, Sussex Police undertakes a review (jointly with children's social care services and other relevant agencies) 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 custody staff record properly the decisions made and action taken while children are detained; and
 - 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.

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.

Sussex Police should also provide an action plan within six weeks of the publication of this report to specify how it intends to respond to our other recommendations.

Subject to the update and action plan being received, we will revisit Sussex 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 agencies are set out in the statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*. The specific police roles set out in the guidance are:

- the identification of children who might be at risk from abuse and neglect;
- investigation of alleged offences against children;
- inter-agency working and information-sharing to protect children; and
- the exercise of emergency powers to protect children.

These areas of practice are the focus of the inspection.

Inspection approach

Inspections focus on the experience of, and outcomes for, children following their journey through the child protection and criminal investigation processes. They assess how well the police service has helped and protected children and investigated alleged criminal acts, taking account of, but not measuring compliance with, policies and guidance.

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

Methods

- Self-assessment – practice, and management and leadership.
- Case inspections.

- Discussions with officers and staff from within the police and from other agencies.
- 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 in need of help and protection, e.g. children being neglected;
- information-sharing and discussions about children 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.

Term	Definition
Child	person under the age of 18 years
multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)	mechanism through which local criminal justice agencies (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 wellbeing; agencies that attend vary, but are likely to include the police, probation, children's, health and housing services; over 250 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 about 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