

## **An inspection of how well the police and National Crime Agency tackle the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (April 2023)**

**Response from: Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire and Isle of Wight**

While Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary (HIOWC) were not a part of this thematic inspection, the learning and areas of focus will apply here in force, and I as Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) will ensure I review every recommendation where I and/or the chief constable have a key role in keeping those most vulnerable across our communities safe.

By their sheer nature, children and young people are at increased risk from those perpetrators skilled in the use of online platforms, to abuse and exploit for their own personal gain. Where children do not have the protective factors around them, these children are at even further risk of falling victim to such heinous crimes. The fast pace world of evolving technology, new online spaces for communication and picture exchange keep those not using them even further removed from the digital spaces in which children move so freely and use with such ease and confidence.

This inspection report rightly identifies the policing gaps and failings when trying to tackle online child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE). While it is important to recognise the hard work, commitment and dedication of our officers, there is still some way to go before we can be confident we are doing what is required to ensure all children at risk of online CSAE are protected, and those perpetrators are brought to justice.

As highlighted in the report, the need for a partnership approach to protecting children and young people is essential. We still hear that the lack of information sharing is a safeguarding risk, this hesitancy in sharing must end, and we cannot be held back for fear of oversharing when a child is at risk. We must nurture a culture of safe spaces for information sharing, for agencies to come together and adopt a methodology which instils this.

Policing is at the very heart of tackling online CSAE. Officer training, ensuring there is adequate resource to investigate and other operational decisions around online CSAE sit with my chief constable, and while I meet regularly to discuss the strategic delivery of local policing, it is for my chief constable to ensure the operational delivery of HIOWC is meeting the need both locally and following national direction. I will ensure each recommendation made in this inspection report is addressed and where not currently met, this is delivered upon.

Donna Jones  
Police and Crime Commissioner

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Recommendation 2**

By 31 October 2023, chief constables, the director general of the National Crime Agency and chief officers with responsibilities for regional organised crime units should make sure they have effective data collection and performance management information. This is so they can understand the nature and scale of online child sexual abuse and exploitation in real time and its impact on

resources, and so forces and the National Crime Agency can react quickly to provide adequate resources to meet demand.

OPCC response:

Being able to understand the demand of online CSAE will allow my chief constable to allocate the resources needed to investigate and protect those in need. I will review with the force to ensure they have effective data collection and performance management information for online CSAE and the measures in place to effectively and efficiently address concerns when they arise.

Recommendation 5

By 30 April 2025, chief constables should make sure officers and staff dealing with online child sexual abuse and exploitation have completed the right training to carry out their roles.

OPCC response:

I will review with the chief constable the training plan for all officers and staff dealing with online CSAE to ensure the right training is undertaken.

Recommendation 8

By 31 July 2023, chief constables should satisfy themselves that they are correctly sharing information and making referrals to their statutory safeguarding partners in cases of online child sexual abuse and exploitation. This is to make sure they are fulfilling their statutory obligations, placing the protection of children at the centre of their approach and agreeing joint plans to better protect children who are at risk.

OPCC response:

Managing risk and safeguarding concerns is an everyday process for our officers and staff, and this should not be overlooked, nor will complacency in this space be tolerated. I will seek assurances from my chief constable that he is satisfied that HIOWC are correctly sharing information and making referrals to their statutory safeguarding partners in cases of online CSAE.

Recommendation 9

By 31 October 2023, chief constables and police and crime commissioners should make sure their commissioned services for children, and the process for referring them for support or therapeutic services, are available for children affected by online sexual abuse and exploitation.

OPCC response:

As PCC, it is my role to commission local victim support services. All of the services I commission for children, and the process for referring them for support or therapeutic services, are available for children affected by online CSAE. Where HIOWC provide funding in this space, I will ensure this is also met.

Recommendation 11

By 31 July 2023, chief constables and police and crime commissioners should review the advice they publish, and, if necessary, revise it, to make sure it is consistent with the National Crime Agency's ThinkUKnow (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) material.

OPCC response:

As we move forward with any advice/support in this space I will ensure all messaging is consistent with the National Crime Agency's ThinkUKnow (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) material. I will ensure this is also followed by HIOWC.

#### Recommendation 12

By 31 October 2023, chief constables in England should satisfy themselves that their forces' work with schools is consistent with the national curriculum and National Crime Agency educational products on online child sexual abuse and exploitation. They should also make sure this work is targeted based on joint analysis with their safeguarding partners.

#### OPCC response:

We know that early education is far more effective when this is consistent and coordinated. I will work with my chief constable to see he is satisfied that the work undertaken with schools is consistent with the national curriculum and the NCAs educational products.

#### Recommendation 13

With immediate effect, chief constables should satisfy themselves that their crime allocation policies make sure online child sexual abuse and exploitation cases are allocated to those with the necessary skills and training to investigate them.

#### OPCC response:

As PCC, I provide oversight and scrutiny of policing for HIOWC. I will seek assurance that HIOWC's crime allocation policies make sure online CSAE cases are allocated to those with the necessary skills and training to investigate them.

#### Recommendation 14

With immediate effect, chief constables should make sure their force meets any existing recommended timescales for activity targeting online child sexual abuse and exploitation, and arrange their resources to meet those timescales. Then, six months after the new prioritisation tool is implemented, they should carry out a similar review.

#### OPCC response:

As PCC, I provide oversight and scrutiny of policing for HIOWC. I will seek assurance that HIOWC's meets any existing recommended timescales for activity targeting online child sexual abuse and exploitation, and arrange their resources to meet those timescales. Then, six months after the new prioritisation tool is implemented, they should carry out a similar review.

#### Recommendation 16

By 31 October 2023, chief constables should work with their local criminal justice boards to review and, if necessary, amend the arrangements for applying for search warrants. This is to make sure the police can secure warrants quickly when children are at risk. This review should include the feasibility of remote communication.

#### OPCC response:

As chair of my LCJB I will ensure this is reviewed and if necessary, amend the arrangements for applying for search warrants.