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Office of the
**Police & Crime
Commissioner**
West Yorkshire

My Reference: OPCC/MBW/NF

Your Reference:

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Dear Home Secretary,

HMICFRS Joint Inspection Report: The Multi-Agency Response to Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment

I am writing in response to the recent joint-inspection report on inter-familial child abuse. Can I thank the Inspectors for this informative report on how criminal justice, health and social care partners are responding to this disturbing crime. As the report points out, it is a challenge to build the awareness and skills amongst the public and practitioners to recognise perpetrators and support their victims.

Recent years have seen an understandable degree of attention focussed on child sexual and criminal exploitation; HMICFRS's recent report on County Lines from earlier in this year is a further reflection of this. In West Yorkshire, the police with partnership support, have identified a number of victims of non-recent child sexual exploitation leading to complex investigations. Dedicated investigation teams have managed these cases, resulting in successful court outcomes. One example is Operation Tendersea, a pro-active investigation that resulted in a grooming gang receiving combined sentences exceeding 220 years.

This national level report highlights a series of relevant findings for police services, although the police and partner response in West Yorkshire was not directly inspected on this occasion. Our partnerships' effectiveness in carrying out investigations, preventing offending, and making the right safeguarding decisions to fully supporting child victims are all issues I will want to keep under review in the months ahead.

My ongoing personal commitment to child safeguarding is evidenced in my decision to appoint a specialist Child Safeguarding Advisor during my first term as West Yorkshire's Police and Crime Commissioner, to help achieve my vision for closer co-ordination between the police and partners in their work against child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). Since then I have also appointed a Victims and Witnesses Service Advisor to my office to work with our partners to develop support for child and adult victims across the county. These appointments were in addition to making available to West Yorkshire Police significant extra local investment into developing specialist safeguarding investigation teams to pro-actively manage complex demand.

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Through the Advisors' work, we have made a good deal of progress in partnership to build awareness of CSEA amongst our communities, and invest further in prevention strategies and support services for victims or children at risk of harm, including:

- The establishment of a West Yorkshire Children's Risk and Vulnerability Strategic Group which supports local partner agencies by building common working arrangements, promoting training and development opportunities, and supporting intelligence gathering and analysis.
- The establishment of a West Yorkshire Safeguarding Communications Group to collaboratively develop and promote safeguarding campaigns, and support for West Yorkshire Police's long-running 'Know the Signs' CSEA awareness raising campaign¹.
- Funding victim support services including Rape Crisis Centres, and a new Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) which includes a Child Sexual Assault Assessment Service (CSAAS), in collaboration with NHS England.
- Supporting PACE Parent Liaison Officer posts in West Yorkshire with grants from my Partnership Executive Group Fund. PACE is a national charity based in Leeds providing a link between statutory agencies and families in order to maximise the ability of all parties to safeguard children who could be at risk.
- Continuing to support the wide range of community-based projects helping to safeguard children through my Safer Communities Fund, which provides grants for up to £6k using Proceeds of Crime (POCA) monies to local organisations and voluntary/third sector groups.

West Yorkshire Police have provided me with a review of their ongoing work to improve processes and build capacity in their Safeguarding Central Governance Unit, which I have included as an annex to this letter.

Outside our normal bilateral arrangements, I will hold the Chief Constable to account on WYP's safeguarding work through two oversight mechanisms; my Delivery Quarterly meetings, and my Community Outcome Meetings. The results of these meetings are published through reports which members of the public are free to access through my website.

As someone who has long advocated for a greater number of joint-inspections which evaluate the work of criminal justice agencies and victim support systems as a whole, I welcome this report and will review West Yorkshire Police's response to its recommendations in due course.

Yours sincerely



Mark Burns-Williamson
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire

¹ Further information at: <https://www.westyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/campaigns/child-sexual-exploitation>

Annex 1: Information supplied by West Yorkshire Police's Safeguarding Central Governance Unit.

Improving Decision-making with Partners:

The report refers to observations made by the Children's Commissioner that most children who are identified as suffering child sexual abuse are also subject of child protection plans. West Yorkshire Police are currently looking at how we can improve on the identification of children who are placed on Child Protection Plans. This is an area where we could improve our understanding, not just in terms of decision-making when attending incidents, but also to assist in adopting a trauma informed response for those children who maybe suffering child sexual abuse within the family environment.

West Yorkshire Police is committed to continuous improvement through its Safeguarding Central Governance Unit. The department works to ensure staff are appropriately trained, to promote good practice, and provide quality assurance through audit work which goes beyond that of established MAPPA requirements.

Recent audits of child protection investigations have covered the quality and timeliness of investigations, the quality of decision making, and multi-agency plans for safeguarding children. These audits are scheduled to continue throughout the year, with the findings shared at WYP's Local Accountability Meetings within each policing district. These meetings are chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable who holds safeguarding leads to account.

Preventative Work and the Management of Offenders:

Activity to assist in the use of civil orders to help manage those offenders who are already known to the police was instigated following an event held in October 2018. West Yorkshire Police, in company with the National Working Group for Child Exploitation, arranged a regional event on perpetrator disruption. Subsequent work with North Yorkshire Police's Civil Orders Team assisted West Yorkshire Police in forming their own civil orders unit which has been in place since 2019.

The report refers to the management of those who we know pose a risk of sexual harm. At the start of the notification requirement or release into the community of a registered sex offender (RSO), WYP's ViSOR unit assign supervision of the subject to the district Public Protection Unit. Upon allocation, arrangements are made for a joint risk management assessment (ARMS assessment) of the RSO which is followed by an initial home visit within seven days. West Yorkshire has the 2nd highest ARMS completion rate nationally with a combined Police and Probation assessment completion rate of 95.9%.

Forensic Examination of Digital Equipment

West Yorkshire Police's Digital Forensic Unit (DFU) is in the process of increasing the number of staff in the department, which has enabled the department to restructure. The objective over the next 3 years is to reduce the average turnaround time for an Indecent Images of Children case from the present position to 1 month, and eliminate all but specialist outsourcing.