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

My Reference: OPCC/MBW/JAD

Your Reference:

15 April 2016

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DP

Dear Home Secretary

HMIC Response – West Yorkshire Child Protection Inspection

I am writing to you in response to the *HMIC West Yorkshire Child Protection Inspection*, which reported in March 2016. This response also covers the national *Missing Children: Who Cares?* report issued during the same period and which linked into the PEEL assessments.

HMIC identified that West Yorkshire Police has taken some positive steps to improve child protection practice, but its overall progress was rated at disappointing. Areas of good practice were identified including work to improve the outcomes for children at risk from harm, establishment of multi-agency safeguarding hubs, and the deployment and training of a significant number of additional staff to work on the protection of vulnerable children and adults. However HMIC also raised concerns around inconsistencies in practice across West Yorkshire, recording standards, the timeliness of medical treatment and the unnecessary detention of children.

As noted in the report, protecting our children and the vulnerable is of vital importance and remains a top priority within my Police and Crime Plan. It is an area which I regularly review with the T/Chief Constable and following on from this report I asked the T/Chief Constable to provide an update on the work and progress around implementing the recommendations and improving our child protection service. As the HMIC inspection took place in August 2015 a good amount of progress has already been made, I would like to take this opportunity to summarise a few examples of the ongoing work:

- HMIC have identified weaknesses in the way that staff recognise the importance of the child's demeanour and views in child protection matters. It is important that staff understand the importance of the child's views and record it appropriately. West Yorkshire Police have piloted a new system whereby all domestic abuse reports involving children from the previous 24 hours are reviewed in daily meetings which has been successful in ensuring the correct emphasis is reached and plans are in place to roll this out across the force. My office have been working closely with West Yorkshire Police and the research agency Ecorys to design an in depth study of the child's view/voice with a focus on young victims of sexual offences, domestic abuse and hate crime. Findings will be available in May when we will then look to

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how we can respond to meet the needs identified. The police are also developing a video briefing about the importance of recording child demeanour and a child welfare section has been added to the Domestic Abuse forms on mobile devices.

- HMIC also raised concerns around West Yorkshire Police attendance at child protection conferences; consequently a protocol has been agreed which includes a criteria to determine when police should attend and the suitable levels of involvement. Since August, a new case conference model has been piloted in two districts where the default position is to attend unless there is reason not to; this has been circulated to other districts for adoption. Attendance at these conferences is now managed locally but monitored centrally which has led to improved consistency but there is still work to be done.
- The HMIC inspection into missing and absent children raised a number of issues around the management of missing children at a national level. West Yorkshire Police have taken a number of steps to improve their practices including the agreeing a standard protocol across all five Local Authorities, the policy around children missing from home and their categorisation has also been reviewed and revised with guidance issued to staff, and additional attention has been placed on assessing vulnerability to CSE. This is an area that I will continue to work on with the police and partners and I have extended the funding for my specialist safeguarding advisor for a further 12 months, and I am pleased that a regime of joint targeted areas inspections has been agreed.

The OPCC, police and partners within West Yorkshire remain committed to improving child protection standards and will use the recommendations and findings in this HMIC report to guide our work. However I would like to raise the delay between the inspection and the release of the report; policing and safeguarding is an ever-changing arena and much has developed within this time meaning that some of the value is inevitably lost. I do appreciate that efforts have been made to improve communication with HMIC and some initial feedback is available through hot debriefs, but would urge HMIC to consider the timeliness of their reporting going forward. Secondly I would like to reiterate the need for inspections into areas such as child protection (which require a multi-agency response) to be inspected in a way which reflects the full partnership efforts and not just those of the police in isolation. I have raised this on a number of occasions and whilst we have seen some progress by the way in which some of the PEEL assessments consider joint working, I still feel that this report would have been more helpful and meaningful if it had reflected the wider safeguarding work in West Yorkshire for all concerned.

Yours sincerely



Mark Burns-Williamson
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire

Copied to:

T/Chief Constable Dee Collins
West Yorkshire Police