

Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2020

Report to: the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

Title of Report:	Safeguarding Children – Compliance of Essex Police with statutory duties and guidance
Classification of Paper:	Official
Agenda Number:	10.0
Chief Officer:	T/ACC Kevin Baldwin
Date Paper was Written:	25th February 2021
Version Number:	0.2
Report from:	Essex Police
Date of Meeting:	29th March 2021
Author on behalf of Chief Officer:	Megan Hiscock
Date of Approval:	12th March 2021

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is to report on the compliance of Essex Police with its statutory duties under Sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004, and with the statutory guidance set out in the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 guidance.

2.0 Recommendations

There are no specific recommendations within this report, but the board are invited to note the key areas of compliance highlighted.

3.0 Executive Summary

This report provides a broad assessment of the work being undertaken within Essex Police to ensure compliance with its statutory duties under sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004, and with the statutory guidance set out in the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 guidance.

The report provides a summary of current local multi-agency children's safeguarding arrangements in respect of Safeguarding Children across Southend, Essex and Thurrock. Providing a high-level summary of the Forces approach in the following key areas to support the safeguarding of children: resourcing; funding; leadership; voice of the child; whistleblowing; allegations concerning those working with children; escalation processes; information sharing; recruitment; knowledge, training and supervision; and, police powers.

Alongside setting out current recent areas of concern, alongside future areas of focus and development.

4.0 Introduction/Background

4.1 Legislative / National Framework

4.1.1 Children Act 2004

In legislation, under Section 13 of the Children Act 2004, amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, there is a requirement for each local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board for their area and specifies the organisations and individuals that should be represented as a Board partner, this includes, "*the chief officer of police for a police area any part of which falls within the area of the authority*".

LSCPs are responsible for improving the overall wellbeing of children in their local-authority area. They include representatives from children's services, police, district councils and NHS trusts.

The Children Act 2004 provides the legislative foundations upon which the duties and responsibilities of organisations and agencies is set out focussing on the welfare and safeguarding of children.

Section 10 of the Children Act 2004

Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 sets out the requirement for relevant partners, including the local policing body and the chief officer of police for a police area which falls within the area of the local authority, to focus on '*Co-operation to improve well-being*' of children.

Section 11 of the Children Act 2004

Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 focusses on the '*Arrangements to safeguard and promote welfare*'. This section sets out that the local policing body and chief officer of police for a police area in England, along with other specified partners, must make arrangements for ensuring that, "*their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*".

4.1.2 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

The national Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance, published in July 2018, brings together the framework and legislative requirements for the three statutory local safeguarding partners (the local authority; a clinical commissioning group (CCG) for an

area; and the chief officer of police for a police area) to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 guidance includes a focus on the legislative requirements placed on services, alongside providing a framework for the three local safeguarding statutory partners to make arrangements to work together.

4.2 Local Arrangements

Within Essex there are three individual multi-agency children's safeguarding arrangements: Southend Safeguarding Children's Partnerships (SSCP), Essex Safeguarding Children's Board (ESCB) and Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP).

The SSCP, LSCP and ESCB are statutory multi-agency arrangements which play a role in the scrutiny, quality assurance and challenge of agencies.

The purpose is to enable agencies to work in collaboration and co-ordinate the work with the aim of improving outcomes for children, by protecting them from harm, safeguarding and promoting their welfare and safety, and, ensuring the effectiveness of that work.

5.0 Current Work and Performance

Compliance of Essex Police with Sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004 and the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 statutory guidance

In the Essex Police Force Plan, there is a clear commitment to support and protect children as a priority, with one of the Force's main efforts focussed on vulnerability, specifying that the Force will work with partners to build trust and confidence and clarify our purpose and role.

5.1. Co-operate in the Making of Arrangements

Section 10(6) of the Children Act 2004 specifies that organisations must co-operate in the making of arrangements, including provision of: staff, goods, services, accommodation or other resources, alongside contributions to a fund out of which relevant payments may be made.

In terms of staffing and resourcing committed to support cooperation with partners to improve well-being of children, the Force are engaged and represented at a senior level in a number of strategic partnership boards across the three local authority areas, including Southend Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SSCP), Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) and Essex Safeguarding Children's Board (ESCB) and associated subgroups.

Following the National Police Uplift Programme and Police Fire and Crime Commissioner precept investment, the Force received an increase in funding for additional officers and staff in 2020/21, Through the Force Growth Programme, investment included additional resources to C&PP Public Protection Units (PPIU), incorporating child abuse investigations, alongside formation of a Child Sexual Exploitation Investigations Team.

In terms of operational responsibility for day-to-day managing and responding to child safeguarding, this cuts across a number of areas in the Force. Resources to support the Force's response to safeguarding of children is comprised as follows:

Local Policing Area (LPA) and Local Policing Support Unit (LPSU) Resources:

- *Local Policing Teams (LPT)* - undertake the initial response to all reported and 'live' incidents, attending the scene, conducting initial investigative actions, identifying and arresting suspect(s) where possible, alongside carrying out high visibility patrols and gathering intelligence to act on crimes in their local community.
- *Community Policing Teams (CPT)* - work closely with members of the community, local organisations and businesses to tackle and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
- *Youth Justice Team* – work alongside partners in the Youth Offending Service and can assist with any matters relating to youth justice. YOT co-ordinators offer support and guidance on all recorded crime out of court disposals to officers who investigating crimes committed by children and young people.
- *Child and Young Persons Officers (CYPs)* - safeguard and divert children and young people away from negative behaviours. The CYP officers complete referrals to partner agencies to ensure interventions are offered to young people who are at risk of: offending or becoming victims of crime or child sexual exploitation (CSE).
- *Missing Person Liaison Officers (MPLOs)* – maintain an overview of missing people, coordinating the response internally and with partners in order to reduce the likelihood of harm occurring, including to children. MPLOs liaise with other agencies to identify the person's vulnerabilities, ascertain why they are going missing and look at solutions to reduce and prevent missing episodes.

Crime and Public Protection Command (C&PP) Resources:

- *Child Abuse Investigation Teams (CAIT)* – form part of the three Public Protection Investigation Units (PPIUs) aligned to the three LPAs; North, South and West. CAIT deal with internal and external referrals and with a wide range of offences from physical abuse and neglect through to sexual abuse and child death.
- *Quest* - investigate cases of non-recent child sexual abuse where the victim is now an adult, including inter-familial abuse, peer on peer abuse within an institutional or educational establishment, and, where the suspect held a position of public prominence or had responsibility over the child.
- *The CSE Investigation Team* - went live on 13th July 2020 and investigate the most serious, complex and organised Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), proactively targeting suspects who are prolific abusers and protecting victims.
- *Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders (MOSOVO)* - are designed to prevent offenders from committing further offences by proactive policing, use of technology, partnership working and use of extensive risk assessments.
- *The Police Online Investigation Team (POLIT)* - has responsibility for investigations involving indecent images of children and paedophilia material held on a computer and provide a proactive capability by utilising systems to detect those people in Essex viewing and distributing indecent images of children via the internet.
- *Operations Centre* - consists of a number of teams, including the CSE Triage Team, Child Triage Team, Thurrock MASH and Southend MASH+. The Child and CSE

Triage Teams act as the 'front door' for all Child Abuse and CSE concerns received by Essex Police. The teams assess records, undertake multi-agency liaison and ensure concerns are recorded, graded and reviewed, with a focus including child safeguarding.

Additional Resources:

- *Serious Violence Unit* – focus on preventing and disrupting violent street gangs who cause harm to communities. Identifying those presenting the most harm and aiming to prevent young people from joining or being affiliated to gangs through active community engagement.
- *Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team* - investigate all offences identified as within the remit of serious and organised criminality and/or of a complex nature, namely offences identified as involving an organised crime group or determined as a complex investigation, containing for instance multiple victims, suspects, venues etc.

Funding:

In terms of the funding contribution to the three respective local authority area children's partnership arrangements, at the time of writing, this matter is being reviewed by Chief Officers with reporting to the Office of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner due in Q4 2020/21. As such this paper does not intend to provide any further specific detailed analysis of the Force's position in this regard. Suffice to highlight, each partnership board receives funding from the commissioning budget of the Office of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner, however, the funding distribution is not currently 'equitable' across the three safeguarding arrangements in Southend, Essex and Thurrock.

5.2. Improve Well-being; and, Safeguard and Promote Welfare

Section 10(2) of the Children Act 2004 specifies that arrangements are made with a view to improving the well-being of children relating to five specific areas, these include: physical and mental health and emotional well-being; protection from harm and neglect; education, training and recreation; the contribution made by them to society; and, social and economic well-being.

The Working Together 2018 guidance sets out key roles for organisations and agencies to deliver effective arrangements for safeguarding, in particular the three statutory local safeguarding partners, which includes the local policing body and chief officer of police for a police area. The guidance highlights the critical need to ensure the commitment and promotion of local safeguarding children' arrangements are strongly led in particular by chief officers and Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner's.

The guidance goes on to set out the organisational responsibilities for respective organisations and agencies aligning to Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, alongside a number of explicit policing responsibilities, specifically:

Leadership:

“a clear line of accountability for the commissioning and/or provision of services designed to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and, senior board level lead... to take leadership responsibility for the organisation’s... safeguarding arrangements” –

The Force have good oversight and governance, the ACC for C&PP and Criminal Justice oversees safeguarding of children within Crime & Public Protection Command. The ACC lead holds a quarterly Public Protection Programme Board attended by Crime & Public Protection Command who report on activity, risks and issues. The Head of C&PP Command is a Detective Chief Superintendent supported by two Detective Superintendents leading on Proactive & Partnerships and Investigations. Through this structure the safeguarding of children is championed throughout the organisation.

Listening to Children:

“a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings, both in individual decisions and the development of services”,

“Children who are encountered as offenders, or alleged offenders, are entitled to the same safeguards and protection as any other child and due regard should be given to their safety and welfare at all times. For example, children who are apprehended in possession of Class A drugs may be victims of exploitation through county lines drug dealing.”

“...police officers should be aware of the effect of other incidents which might pose safeguarding risks to children and where officers should pay particular attention... An officer attending a domestic abuse incident should be aware of the effect of such behaviour on any children in the household.” –

The child’s voice launched in Force in 2018 with a video with a child victim who shared her experiences with the Force to enable Essex Police to learn and improve our services. This clip was shared with the wider policing family and partner organisations to seek to improve quality of service to child victims. For a period of time the Force were able to utilise Active Citizens to speak to child victims and parents of child victims, but considerable and insurmountable issues in relation to sharing personal data resulted in the progress of this strand stalling.

However, further opportunities to engage with listen to children have been created through officers in Southend working with the YMCA and engaging in the Youth Independent Advisory Group (IAG) aimed at providing young people with an opportunity to voice their views about policing in their area and enables the Force to hear and learn about issues affecting children first-hand. Colchester IAG includes youth representation and works alongside Community 360 and African Families to address youth concerns.

Dedicated Children and Young People (CYP) officers also work with vulnerable young people through engagement with education, youth clubs and social care to identify support networks for young people and create referral pathways to divert potential victims of exploitation. The focus is on building self-confidence, respect for self and others, and making a contribution to society.

Essex Police have a Youth Strategy setting out how the Force engage with children and young people, including a key focus around effective partnership working to ensure all C&YP receive appropriate help and safeguarding. CYP officers complete referrals to partner agencies to ensure interventions are offered to young people at risk of offending or becoming victims of crime or CSE.

Force procedure sets out in respect of CSE Networks that officers investigating must be aware that children may be hidden from view and may show loyalty to those exploiting them and in cases of trafficking involving children a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) form must be completed and forwarded to the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC).

The Op Encompass pilot launched 2nd January 2020 in Thurrock, creating a referral pathway for officers to directly inform the relevant school that a child has been present, or ordinarily resides at an address, where a medium risk domestic abuse incident occurred. The Encompass referral is made directly to a trained 'key safeguarding adult' at the child's school to enable silent or overt support dependant on the needs and wishes of the child. The aim is to reduce the harmful adverse impact of domestic abuse on children and their emotional wellbeing. Providing schools with a greater understanding about why a child may presenting in a particular way, allowing them to provide early support and care or apply reasonable adjustments for children in the aftermath of domestic abuse incidents. The pilot provided significant learning for the Force and following agreement with the Southend, Essex, Thurrock children's boards, social services and education partners, it was agreed Op Encompass would be extended countywide. Op Encompass was launched with schools in the Southend and Thurrock Districts from 2nd December 2020 and the second phase for the remainder of schools that come under the jurisdiction of Essex County Council launched in 2021.

Whistleblowing:

"clear whistleblowing procedures... referenced in staff training and codes of conduct, and a culture that enables issues about safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children to be addressed" –

The Force have a specific 'Reporting Wrongdoing' procedure, owned by the Professional Standards Department (PSD), within which circumstances concerning whistle blowing and associated legislation are contained. There are numerous methods of reporting concerns, clearly identifiable through the Force PSD intranet page, this includes confidential and anonymous reporting mechanisms.

The College of Policing in its role as the professional body for policing produced the Code of Ethics, defining the expectations and standards of behaviour for everyone who works in policing. The Code sets out nine policing principles on which to base decisions and actions, supported by ten standards of professional behaviour. The Code of Ethics is placed at the heart of policing in Essex, ensuring that all officers and staff feel able to always do the right thing.

The Force also have an Ethics Committee, chaired by the Head of Professionalism, providing a forum to enable all officers and staff to raise organisational issues, themes, principles or ethical dilemmas, openly and anonymously via online submission forms. The Ethics Committee was established to officers and staff in decision-making and support the

challenge of perceived unfair or unethical culture or practices in an open and transparent way, providing an opportunity to challenge and change cultures.

Allegations concerning those working with Children:

“Organisations and agencies ... should have clear policies for dealing with allegations against people who work with children. Such policies should make a clear distinction between an allegation, a concern about the quality of care or practice or a complaint.” -

The Force have a Professional Standards Department (PSD) responsible for investigating public complaints and officer and staff misconduct. All complaints and investigations are conducted in line with Force policy and procedure and national guidance, with complaints made against officers and staff being overseen and adjudicated by the nominated Appropriate Authority for each respective command area within the Force. As with all Force policies and procedures these are published on the Force intranet and are subject to regular reviews.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) oversees the police complaints system, setting the standards by which the police should handle complaints and investigating the most serious matters.

Escalation processes:

“clear escalation policies for staff to follow when their child safeguarding concerns are not being addressed within their organisation or by other agencies” –

The Force Child Abuse Investigation procedure specifically directs staff to the partnership SET procedures developed in response to the Working Together 2018 guidance 2018. SET Procedures set out what should happen in any local area when a child or young person is believed to be in need of support, including the escalation process.

The SET Procedures are well embedded across the organisation and form a central part of compliance and practices within the daily operations within the C&PP Command. SET Procedures are clear regarding agencies responsibilities for ensuring staff are competent and supported to escalate concerns and disagreements appropriately about a child's wellbeing within and between organisations, ensuring they escalate concerns if they remain dissatisfied. SET Procedures also set out the process for capturing professional disagreements made at a child protection conference.

Information Sharing:

“arrangements which set out clearly the processes for sharing information, with other practitioners and with safeguarding partners”,

“The police will hold important information... They should always share this information with other organisations and agencies where this is necessary to protect children. Similarly, they can expect other organisations and agencies to share information...” –

Under Section 17 (child in need) and Section 47 (child suffering/likely to suffer significant harm) of the Children Act 1989 officers have a responsibility to refer a child to Children's

Social Care when it is believed or suspected that the thresholds have been met. It will be determined by discussion with Social Care if the referral reaches the threshold for Section 47 (Children's Act 1989) enquires, following which information can be shared without the consent of the parties involved.

The Force Child Abuse Investigation procedure specifically includes a section regarding information sharing, with a focus on making and receiving referrals. A now well embedded practice for sharing information with partners is utilised by the Force via the PP57 Essex Police Request for Children's Services form for Southend and Thurrock, and with referrals being made to Essex via the Essex Social Care portal.

Furthermore, the Force support information sharing with partners through engagement with and attendance at strategy meetings and discussions and case conferences. Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm there should be a multi-agency strategy discussion to determine the child's welfare and plan rapid future action. Participation in strategy meetings requested by Children's Social Care of the Triage Teams is consistently 100% and CAIT police staff ordinarily attending the case conferences with more complex cases attended by detective constables to share enhanced experience and expertise to inform decision-making, ensuring the child is at the centre of the process.

In addition, the Force form part of multi-agency Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) and Risk Management Meetings (RMM) concentrating on the safeguarding and welfare of children at risk of exploitation who go missing, focussing around disruption opportunities and collection of evidence to support prosecutions, alongside wider operational activity to tackle CSE threats through analysing local trends, patterns and hotspots.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) provides a forum where agencies can also share information concerning high-risk victims of domestic abuse in order to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase the safety of those victims, their children or family members. The aims of MARAC include the opportunity to increase the safety, health and wellbeing of victims of domestic abuse– adults, children and any other family members; and, to determine whether the perpetrator poses a significant risk to any particular individual or to the general community, including any children. The Force is responsible for researching the family in preparation for the respective SET MARAC meetings, with focus including child safeguarding. In particular, the officers embedded in MASH engage in daily discussions with Children's Social Care regarding referrals for children and young people.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR) occur in cases in which abuse or neglect known or suspected and child died or seriously harmed. The purpose is to identify improvements to be made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) are informed of such a case and undertake a Rapid Review of the case within 15 days of being notified, with all agencies involved taking part, before determining if a Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews is required. The CSPR can then make recommendations, and, consider learning.

Recruitment:

“safe recruitment practices and ongoing safe working practices for individuals whom the organisation or agency permit to work regularly with children, including policies on when to obtain a criminal record check” -

Essex Police vet all staff in accordance with the Vetting Code of Practice (VCOP) applied to all police forces in England and Wales, providing a 3-tier vetting clearance level determined by the level of access required to both assets and data.

In addition, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Unit are responsible for completing all DBS applications referred to the Force made by those seeking to work in regulated activity with children and/or vulnerable adults. DBS also complete all Barring referral requests, providing information regarding an individual for consideration to exclude them from working within the Child, Adult or both sectors.

Knowledge, Training and Supervision:

“staff are competent to carry out their responsibilities... feel able to raise concerns and feel supported in their safeguarding role”,

“staff should be given a mandatory induction, which includes familiarisation with child protection responsibilities and the procedures to be followed...”,

“appropriate supervision and support for staff, including undertaking safeguarding training”

“all practitioners should have regular reviews of their own practice to ensure they have knowledge, skills and expertise that improve over time”,

“All police forces should have officers trained in child abuse investigation” . –

In terms of training and skills, the Force’s Initial Police Learning Development Programme (IPLDP) provides every probationer officer with a broad overview of investigative and safeguarding activity. Further training provision was made available to existing officers via the 3-day Public Protection Awareness Programme course rolled out over recent years. With further training capturing front-line officers responsibilities for safeguarding children and how to report concerns to partner agencies through the Initial Crime Investigators Development Programme (ICIDP).

In respect of more focussed training, CAIT accredited detectives have the opportunity to complete the Specialist Child Abuse Investigators Development Programme (SCAIDP), enabling them in short the right support to: plan, conduct and supervise allocated (serious or complex) child abuse investigations and form effective co-operative working practices with other statutory and voluntary agencies to bring about the best possible outcome in relation to allegations of child abuse. Alongside the sexual offences trained officer (SOTO), Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) and National Child Death Training courses. With officers required to complete a Personal Development Portfolio (PDP) to evidence competency against key criteria.

The Essex Police College holds a budget for training, including safeguarding training, enabling officers and staff to access any multi-agency training provided at a cost by other organisations and the respective local safeguarding children's partnerships, focussing for example, on areas such as neglect. C&PP Command are now engaged in bi-monthly training seminars that are co-hosted by the Force with Social Care focussed around topic specific areas regarding children and investigative improvements.

This is supported through the use of e-learning NCALT training packages, alongside a varied programme of Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

A C&PP Command skills profile is now available based on essential and desirable training to identify current and plan for future gaps, ensuring officers are equipped with the necessary skills. In terms of understanding how training is used by staff, regular ABE and investigation / SOTO reviews are completed by supervisors, with Case Action Plans (CAPs) set by officers and supervisors requiring regular ongoing review, alongside 3 monthly DI reviews and 6 monthly Supt reviews in place for Released Under Investigation cases.

The Force recognise that conducting high-quality interviews with children is attained through Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) training and completion of high-quality supervisory reviews. It is deemed that the interview quality in Crime and Public Protection is good, however, the quality can vary in LPAs, therefore an ABE Quality working group has been established in order to improve this process.

The Personal Development Review (PDR) system also provides an opportunity for bi-annual performance reviews enabling objectives to be set, as well as training and developmental needs identified where necessary.

Powers:

“The police have a power to remove a child... if they have reasonable cause to believe that the child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm... Police powers can help in emergency situations, but should be used only when necessary and, wherever possible, the decision to remove a child from a parent or carer should be made by a court”,

“Restrictions and safeguards exist in relation to the circumstances and periods for which children may be taken to or held in police stations”.

“creating a culture of safety, equality and protection within the services they provide” –

Where it is stated or believed that a child is in need of immediate protection as they are suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, the attending officer must ensure the immediate well-being of the child, including seeing the child and, if appropriate, speaking to them. Police Protection powers should be considered where appropriate; however, the exercise of police protection powers should be undertaken only where it is not possible to leave a child in any given situation without them being at risk of significant harm.

The Force have a specific Police Protection Powers procedure setting out the powers available under Section 46 of the Children Act for children under 18 years of age up to 72 hours. The procedure includes explicit reference to the fact that children should only be taken to the police station in exceptional circumstances, i.e., where lack of immediately

available local authority accommodation is available and that they should not be taken to the cell block.

Further powers are available to officers under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 and Section 49 of the Children Act 1989, for children under 16 or under 18 in the care of a Local Authority respectively, to secure a Child Abduction Warning Notice (CAWN). CAWNs can assist in safeguarding vulnerable young people, disrupting the criminal activity of adults associating with them against the wishes of the parents or local authority carers and can be used where arrest or prosecution for any substantive offences is not available or appropriate at that time. The result of a CAWN is that the adult may be liable to arrest and prosecution.

6.0 Implications (Issues)

6.1. COVID-19 impact

It is crucial to reflect on the current issues relating to the impact of COVID-19 on the safeguarding of Children. COVID-19 has put all services under significant pressure, however, there has been considerable positive work undertaken and the strength of the partnership and working together has supported new ways of working enabling a coordinated response to safeguarding children. The virtual nature of meetings and training has highlighted continued effectiveness and increased participation and engagement.

However, the on-going and longer-term impact of COVID-19 cannot be overlooked. The potential hidden harms concerning children who would ordinarily have the protection, oversight and reporting opportunities via other services, i.e., teachers and schools, diminished due to COVID-19 restrictions and as services return to more 'normal' operating models there is an expectation reporting will increase. In addition, whilst the prioritisation of serious offence cases by the courts during the pandemic has been pledged to reduce delays and deliver speedier justice for victims, case and trial delays may result in victims becoming disengaged and increasing numbers of cases being discontinued.

That said, this challenging period has resulted in a number of positive benefits in working "smarter" and saving time through effective implementation of new and virtual practices, including use of videoconferencing and Microsoft Teams, enabling staff to carry out daily business and ensuring continued effective engagement with partners, for example at multi-agency strategy meetings.

6.2. Funding Contributions

The Working Together 2018 guidance makes it clear that statutory partners have equal responsibility for safeguarding children and therefore, arguably, the contribution and financial responsibility to the local safeguarding children's partnership effort ought to be more closely aligned and shared in such a way that a disproportionate burden does not fall on any one particular agency. In essence the current funding provision by the Force is perceived not to align with the Working Together principles which set out that safeguarding partners should, "*agree the level of funding secured from each partner, which should be equitable and proportionate... to support the local arrangements*".

7.0 Links to Police and Crime Plan Priorities

The work of the Force in Safeguarding Children links to the following priorities in the Police and Crime Plan:

Priority 3 – Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Abuse

Priority 5 – Tackle Gangs and Organised Crime

Priority 6 – Protecting Children and Vulnerable People from Harm

8.0 Demand

Due to regular reporting mechanisms regarding demand through the C&PP Vulnerable Groups Quarterly Report, this paper does not intend to provide any further specific detailed analysis of the demand in respect of safeguarding children, suffice to reiterate the increase in that paper in both the number of Child Triage referrals (33% increase) and CAIT investigations (22% increase) in Q3 2020/21 compared to the same period the previous year.

9.0 Risks/Mitigation

This paper does not intend to provide any further specific detail except to note the recorded risks in respect of: 1) the increasing volume of potential offenders for Online Child Sexual Abuse (OCSA) and Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE), and, 2) the C&PP Command Recruitment Challenges. These risks and associated mitigating actions are covered in more detail in the C&PP Vulnerable Groups Quarterly Report.

10.0 Equality and/or Human Rights Implications

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 1 states that a child: “*means every human being below the age of eighteen years...*” This is reinforced by the Children Act 1989, Section 105, definition of a child as: “*a person under the age of 18*”.

The Working Together guidance also defines a child as, “*anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday*”, this definition aligns with the definition set out by the Force in its Child Abuse Investigations procedure.

A child is classified as vulnerable by virtue of their age, supported through provisions in legislation, namely the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, and the Victims Code of Practice.

The close working partnership arrangements will continue to better facilitate a common ethos and co-ordinated approach to innovate, drive change and address issues effecting children across Essex, Southend and Thurrock.

Essex Police will do everything it can working with partners to reduce any opportunity for harm, including protecting and safeguarding vulnerable children.

11.0 Health and Safety Implications

12.0 Consultation/Engagement

In preparation of this report, the following documents have been used to inform the content:

- [The Children Act 2004](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018](#)
- Force policies and procedures
- SET Procedures

In addition, the following have been approached to provide an opportunity to contribute to the content of this paper:

- C&PP Command
- SET Children's Board Managers

13.0 Actions for Improvement

Following the publication of the HMICFRS National Child Protection Inspections 2019 thematic report in February 2020, the Crime and Public Protection (C&PP) Command completed a self-assessment of the Force's current position against the five key areas contained within the thematic. Key areas of note for this report include the self-assessment conclusion that:

- The role and commitment of Chief Officers and the wider Senior Leadership Team to protecting and safeguarding children is evident.
- More work is required to evidence attending officers' efforts to seek to establish, record and share vital information at DA incidents.
- Increased joint working between specialist and local policing teams and enhanced engagement and feedback with children and victims in respect of service delivery and improvements was required.

A number of self-assessment recommendations were made as a result, with oversight and governance through C&PP Command Team, the Public Protection Programme Board (PPPB) and the DA Governance Board.

The HMICFRS Force Liaison Officer is sighted on the Force's progress to date against the HMICFRS National Child Protection Inspections 2019 thematic report recommendations and will be returning to Force in August 2021 to further review progress.

14.0 Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome

A peer review in the Operations Centre Child Triage Team was commissioned to be undertaken by Children's Social Care. The aim was to assess process efficiency and consider any risks associated to the current threshold of referrals. The review seeks to create efficiencies within Essex Police, to obtain a better understanding regarding how each agency operates, and, identify opportunities to continue to work more closely with services.

Joint training has been organised between Essex Police CAIT Teams and Children's Social Care. The training sessions are due to commence in early 2021 via MS Teams and sessions will be topic specific.

Further work is also underway focussing on re-designing Child Protection forms for taking children into Police Protection, a working group has been established for further consideration around adoption of a FREVVO form in Essex. Alongside engagement in a workshop in March 2021 for all Athena forces, set up to review the question sets for taking children into Police Protection with a view to introducing the Police Protection process into Athena.

Essex Police seek to coordinate all statutory and non-statutory reviews to track progress on actions and coordinate activity with key partners. The effort taken to commission and complete such reviews can often be untested with the returning of an action marked 'completed'. This will test our processes against real and present danger with dip sampling and peer reviews.