

Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2022

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

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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 with regards to safeguarding children across Southend, Essex and Thurrock. It provides a high-level summary of the Force's approach in key areas to support the safeguarding of children and detail some current relevant areas of work. It will also set out current 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

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

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's Partnership 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*".

LSCPBs 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.

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 10(2) specifies that arrangements are made with a view to improving the well-being of children relating to five specific areas, namely:

- 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.

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*".

Essex Police is engaged and represented at a senior level in 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 various associated subgroups that feed into the main boards.

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. Further detail on Force compliance with the Working Together guidance will be given later in this report.

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.

The local SET Procedures, agreed by the safeguarding partnerships/board, are well embedded across three authorities and Essex Police, and form a central part of compliance and practices within the daily operations within the C&PP Command. The SET Procedures give clear operational guidance regarding local multi-agency working and regarding agencies' responsibilities. They are reviewed roughly every two years.

5.0 Current Work and Performance

This section of the report will cover how current work and performance demonstrates compliance with Sections 10 and 11 of the Children's Act 2004 as well as the national Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 statutory guidance.

5.1 Police resources involved in improving the wellbeing of children

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 being vulnerability. The plan specifies that the Force will work with partners to build trust and confidence and clarify our purpose and role. It is therefore accepted that protecting the vulnerable is

not the job of one or two teams alone; and there are many police resources involved in improving the wellbeing of children, these including:

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 investigate 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.
- *Domestic Abuse Problem Solving Team (DAPST)* – this new team works with high-volume repeat victims and repeat perpetrators to break the chain of offending, violence and harm – in which we know children are often the overlooked victims.

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* - 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.

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 2021/22, many of which will protect children. The Serious Violence Team has roughly doubled in size, significantly enhancing the capacity of the Force to target county lines and drug gangs. MOSOVO has received 14 officers to focus on delivering activities deemed essential to preventing the harm caused by high-risk sexual offenders. A Missing Persons Sergeant post has been created to supervise, ensuring consistency and effectiveness, across the 10 existing Missing Person Liaison Officers.

Additionally, over the past year, funding for a new POET team has been agreed: a new proactive civil orders enforcement team, who will ensure any civil orders are enforced and, where breached, are pursued accordingly.

5.2 Recent areas of focus

The Section 28 special measure has been successfully rolled out and embedded in Essex courts this year. Section 28 regulations of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 allow the evidence of some vulnerable victims or witnesses (children are always classed as vulnerable) to be pre-recorded at an early stage, before trial. This means their recollection of what happened is fresher and they do not have to go through the ordeal of giving evidence in a courtroom. Essex Police achieved its first conviction using the Section 28 special measure in April 2021 and more have followed. This undoubtedly helps to minimise emotional distress to children and a side-effect is that it is expected to reduce the number of trials, as other forces have reported more guilty pleas being entered after video evidence is disclosed to defence.

An area of focus in 2021-2022 has been the National Vulnerability Action Plan (NVAP), which is set out by the Vulnerability Knowledge Practice Programme

(VKPP). The NVAP is a clear, evidence-based, nationally audited guide that every Force has signed up to. VKPP sent out a benchmarking request to all forces in 2021 then used this to create an action plan which focuses on common themes that span the range of vulnerability: from first response and initial investigations to victim care and leadership. The plan is designed to inspire officers of all ranks to adopt a holistic approach when dealing with vulnerability, thereby tying in with the theme that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility as stated in the national Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance 2018. The NVAP gives guidance and direction to forces and the plan sits underneath the Force Plan. At the national level, governance is driven by the chair of the Violence and Public Protection board, supported by the individual national vulnerability strand leads. At local level, governance of the NVAP sits with an ACC under the Public Protection Strategic Board (soon to be renamed the Strategic Vulnerability Board).

For children taken into Police Protection and awaiting Social Care placement, Sunflower suites have been identified at four key police stations and electrical/ decoration work has been commenced in two of them this year. The Sunflower suites are comfortable rooms that do not look like typical police station rooms, being equipped with dimmer lights, a TV, sofa, bed, toiletries, games and even a gaming console; so that an emotionally distressing experience is made less stressful for children.

Project Goldcrest has been running across Thurrock throughout 2021 and is intended to be pushed out further across the county this year, following academic evaluation. Goldcrest has been highlighted by the aforementioned NVAP as an example of good practice in tackling evidential issues with rape/sexual offences in the CSE/gangs arena. The project is a multi-agency collaboration between Essex SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) and Mountain Healthcare, in partnership with Essex Police, Social Care (SC), Health and SERICC (South East Rape Incest Crisis Centre) and is designed for the young person (age 13-18) that refuses to engage with the police or support an investigation, for whom the current pathway is not working and is not meeting the young person's needs. They could be reluctant to engage for a variety of reasons: fear of reprisals, poor experience of working with services and an inability to see themselves as exploited. The aims of the pilot are to increase the level of the reporting of abuse by giving the young person a choice in the way in which they can report and how evidence is recovered. Project Goldcrest allows the young person to capture forensic evidence of rape in a secure way without giving an evidential account, which is then frozen and stored by police in an anonymous way until that young person is ready and willing to make a report.

Op Encompass is now established in Thurrock and Southend, with 90% of eligible schools signed up to the programme; Essex is completing due diligence but is keen to follow by rolling out the programme incrementally over its 550 schools. Op Encompass creates a referral pathway for officers to directly inform a relevant school that a child has been present, or ordinarily resides at an address, where a medium- or high-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. It provides schools with a greater understanding about why a child may be

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.

An analytical study of CSE online abuse during the Covid lockdown was commissioned at the end of 2021 to establish the extent to which the pandemic and associated restrictions and lockdowns affected technology-based CSE within Essex. The report produced, identifying specific age groups most affected, was shared with partners in social care and there is now a multi-agency drive to create a county-wide agreed response to tackling online CSE.

The POLIT team has created a guide for all officers to assist in the investigation of the most prevalent offences committed online involving children. POLIT has also developed and is rolling out a framework for operational deployment of bi-yearly proactive CSE awareness days, involving partners in social care, education, the transport infrastructure, and associated business. POLIT have additionally taken on responsibility for managing all investigations attributed to Online Child Activist Groups (OCAGs; or “paedophile hunters”), of which numbers have risen slightly in 2021-2022.

5.3 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

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’s arrangements are strongly led in particular by chief officers and Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioners.

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 has strong 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 Strategic Board attended by representatives from various Commands including C&PP Command, who report on activity, risks and issues and oversee activity under the NVAP. 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.” –

Dedicated Children and Young People (CYP) officers 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.

Voice of the Child training was given to LPT officers in 2021. A Voice of the Child steering group has since been set up to present a formal and consistent process across Essex Police that is tracked and audited and focuses on contextual safeguarding. All force policies & procedures have been reassessed in light of this Voice of the Child work and amendments made where necessary. Investigations are dip sampled for quality assurance and further training is planned.

CSE Force procedure sets out 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).

It is recognised that children are often the overlooked victims in a domestic abuse incident between adults. This year, a Domestic Abuse Problem Solving Team (DAPST) was set up to prevent re-offending through intervention, proactive monitoring of preventative orders and an “Achilles heel” approach. The team focuses on repeat offenders and repeat victims and will undoubtedly help to reduce emotional and physical distress for children caught up in domestic abuse incidents.

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

Every police officer and member of staff has received training in the Essex Police Code of Ethics, which defines 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 has 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 has 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.

Work has been done this year to strengthen working relationships with Local Authority Designated Officers (LADOs) by a series of meetings between all three SET LADO partners, representatives from Crime & Public Protection Command and the Professional Standards Department.

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 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 online portal.

Furthermore, the Force supports 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 is 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 attend all initial child protection conferences, as well as relevant review conferences, to share enhanced information and expertise to inform decision-making, ensuring the child is at the centre of the process.

In addition, the Force forms part of multi-agency Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) and Risk Management Meetings (RMM), chairing some. These meetings concentrate 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) provide 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 is known or suspected and the child died or was 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) is informed of such a case and undertakes a Rapid Review 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 vets 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 is 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 completes 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”. –

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 is given in the 3-day Public Protection Awareness Programme course and the Initial Crime Investigators Development Programme (ICIDP), which captures front-line officers’ responsibilities for safeguarding children and how to report concerns to partner agencies.

In terms of more focussed C&PP training, CAIT accredited detectives have the opportunity to complete the Specialist Child Abuse Investigators Development Programme (SCAIDP), giving them 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. They are also able to undertake Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) and National Child Death training courses as well as training to become a Sexual Offences Trained Officer (SOTO). Officers are required to complete a Personal Development Portfolio (PDP) to evidence competency against key criteria.

A C&PP Command skills profile is now available based on essential and desirable training to identify current gaps 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, 5-monthly DCI reviews, and 6-monthly Supt reviews in place for Released Under Investigation cases. Learning from reviews is used to target appropriate training.

Vicarious Trauma training was delivered as a mandatory one-day package to all members of C&PP Command this year, to educate all officers and staff as to how traumatised children might present to officers and different ways to engage with them.

A C&PP Training & Skills board was set up this year to ensure all incoming staff are offered relevant and timely training, identify training gaps from various departments, identify role-specific training required, enable officers to maintain their accreditation via CPD events and discuss general improvements in training provision.

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. C&PP Command is now engaged in ad hoc training seminars that are co-hosted by the Force with Social Care focussed around topic-specific areas regarding children and investigative improvements.

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

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 has 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, for 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.

For children taken into Police Protection and awaiting Social Care placement, Sunflower Rooms have been identified at four key police stations and electrical/ decoration work has been commenced in two of them this year. The aim is to provide comfortable rooms that do not look like typical police station rooms, equipped with TV, sofa, bed, toiletries, games and even a gaming console; so that a traumatic experience is made to feel safer and less stressful for children.

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.

6.0 Implications (Issues)

Living with Covid

As we continue to navigate through a new way of living with Covid, it is pleasing to note that the Force has not noted a steep increase in numbers for reporting of child abuse offences (as per the aforementioned analytical study of CSE online abuse). The partnership working throughout the worst of the pandemic and beyond has remained strong, with new ways of working now embedded, enabling a coordinated response to safeguarding children.

However, as detailed in more depth later on in section 9.0, Covid 19 has provided the “perfect storm” for Non Accidental Injury (NAI) in babies with the combination of social isolation, lack of access to healthcare, job losses and financial uncertainty. We note the impact some national high-profile cases have had in the community; and Essex Police is leading on a conference for the prevention of serious assaults on babies and child homicide in 2022, taking the key headline findings to strategic partnership boards to test and challenge SET procedures. This is being progressed through the SET learning and development board and has support from all partners.

The annual NCA Overview of Serious Organised Crime (SOC) Threat suggests that the nature of offending nationally has changed, in that the use of technology in SOC has increased and adapted significantly; and this could have future implications for child sex offences. Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) are utilising technology to offend at a far higher rate and this is predicted to rise, e.g. encrypted devices being used to commit child sex offences online. Offenders are also better able to cloak their identity online and are using cryptocurrencies that enable easier anonymous access to SOC. That said, 45% of child sexual offences nationally were child on child and 59% of indecent images offences are committed by under 18s; it is highlighted police forces are better at recording these offences now, which could explain the increase. Recommendations for forces include specialist training, continuous professional development, education with partners and the use of civil orders to limit access to technology for offenders. Much of this is already underway for Essex Police, such as a 4-day Digital Investigators Course that is open to all ranks and positions that covers the dark web and cryptocurrency. Additionally, POLIT has already identified an area of work in that numbers of children who are not in mainstream education (whether electively home-schooled or any other reason) have increased since the start of the pandemic; and they do not have access to the training, support and information around online safety that they would normally get from school. POLIT is working with education leads on this.

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 previous years, the funding provision by the Force was 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*". However as of this year the funding has been adjusted to ensure distribution is aligned in a more equitable way.

6.1 Links to PFCC Police and Crime Plan Priorities

The work of the Force in safeguarding children links to the following priorities in the PFCC Police and Crime Plan:

Protecting vulnerable people and breaking the cycle of domestic abuse

Reducing violence against women and girls

Increasing collaboration.

6.2 Demand

The PA Consulting Demand Analysis Report of November 2017 noted that demand was increasing across many areas in Public Protection, with particularly notable rises in domestic abuse, missing persons and adult safeguarding demand. It noted that significant further staff may be needed here to cope with increasing demand and to enable a shift back towards preventative policing.

C&PP has faced both recruitment challenges (an inexperienced workforce) and an increase in volume in crimes relating to children over the course of the past year. Figures show an increase of 33.1% in the number of CAIT investigations between Feb 21 and Feb 22; from 2,592 to 3,449. MOSOVO has seen a 23.9% rise, from 527 to 653. POLIT has seen an increase of 19.2%, from 406 to 484 investigations. Although Child Triage numbers in the same period were down by 14.2%, it is expected that child protection is an area where demand will continue to rise.

6.3 Risks/Mitigation

This paper does not intend to provide further detail except to note the previously mentioned risks in the NCA report into SOC and the increasing volume of potential offenders for online Child Sexual Abuse/Exploitation, and to also refer to C&PP Command recruitment challenges. There have been active recruitment campaigns throughout this reporting period; however the challenge is not just about volume, but about the proportion of officers and staff relatively new in service and experience working in a Command that deals with high harm, complex cases. Risks and associated mitigating actions are covered in the C&PP Vulnerable Groups Quarterly Report and internally they are placed on the C&PP operational risk register.

6.4 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 affecting 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.

6.5 Health and Safety Implications

N/A

7.0 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
- Risk Policy & Co-ordination Officer

8.0 Actions for Improvement

Essex is currently in the process of an HMICFRS PEEL inspection and HMICFRS is planning to talk to CYP officers, MARAC, MOSOVO and POLIT in the coming weeks. We currently have three open national child protection investigation thematic recommendations which were given to all forces (one of which is reducing the unnecessary criminalisation of children) that await confirmation from HMICFRS as to whether we have evidenced them and can close these off.

Several HMICFRS inspections of police forces across the UK over the past year have highlighted concerns with the way the Voice Of The Child (VOTC) is recorded and understood by policing. To that end, a VOTC steering group has been set up in Essex with the aspiration that this work will ensure that Essex Police are safeguarding children more effectively and are meeting their obligations as a professional agency towards the safety and protection of children in Essex. The aim is to implement a change in process across all operational policing to ensure the VOTC is recorded alongside a child risk assessment in line with the AWARE principles that direct attention to contextual safeguarding. (AWARE is an acronym that directs the officer towards recording Appearance, Words, Activity, Relationships & Dynamics and Environment.) The VOTC AWARE Project will affect every part of the organisation and will require an enhanced training schedule across Essex Police to deliver against the objectives.

9.0 Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome

A full C&PP review started in 2021 and is continuing at present, which aims to review current practices, processes and explore opportunities for improvements. This review is expected to conclude Q2 2022.

Between October and November 2021 alone, the NHS in Essex reported 16 cases of serious injury to children; 12 of these cases involved children under a year of age and 8 cases were within weeks of being born. Covid 19 has provided the “perfect storm” for Non Accidental Injury (NAI) with the combination of social isolation, lack of access to healthcare, job losses and financial uncertainty. Therefore Essex Police has put forward a proposal to hold a multi-agency conference on Child Death and Serious Injury of Young Children in 2022. The objectives are to provide a better understanding of agencies’ responsibilities; to look at how we learn from past cases; examine examples of good multi-agency working; and ultimately work in partnership to provide a whole system approach to learning and development.

The new POET team is in the process of being staffed and will embed this year. The team is a new proactive civil orders enforcement team, who will ensure any civil orders are enforced and, where breached, are pursued accordingly. These civil orders include Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWNs), which are used to disrupt the criminal or undesirable activities of adults associating with young people against the wishes of those young persons’ parents/local authority carer.

Multi-agency collaborative training is planned between SET partners, police and health in respect of Missing Persons this year as we look to put the National Framework for Adults Missing From Care into place.

The Victim Service Team is preparing for the forthcoming Victims Bill following the end of the consultation period and the Justice Secretary setting out plans in December 2021 for a “Victims Law” that guarantees greater consultation with victims during the criminal justice process to ensure their voices are properly heard.