

Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2023

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

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1.0 Purpose of Report

This paper is a summary of activity from Essex Police relating to enhancing the service given to vulnerable groups over the time period April 2022 - April 2023.

2.0 Recommendations

The board is invited to note the contents of the report and the actions being progressed by Essex Police.

3.0 Executive Summary

This paper will focus on five areas:

- Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders (MOSOVO)
- Online Investigations
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Criminal Exploitation and Missing
- Mental Health
- Fraud and vulnerability of the elderly.

It is proposed this paper is presented at the Performance and Resources Scrutiny meeting on 30th August 2023. The importance of detail in reporting against these crime types is to allow time to adjust the internal performance metrics to duly align with the recently published national CJ datasets.

4.0 Introduction/Background

The reporting period April 2022 to April 2023 has seen increases in demand in some crime types against vulnerable victims, notably Missing Children and Online Investigations; while in the area of Mental Health, a new, dedicated team intent on reducing serious violence caused by mental ill health is showing early indicators of bringing down demand.

The Force is preparing well for a child protection inspection by HMICFRS during the next reporting period.

5.0 Current Work and Performance

This section of the report will cover the summary of activity relating to vulnerable groups for the reporting period of April 2022 – April 2023, focusing on the five areas aforementioned in the executive summary.

The Essex Police Strategic Vulnerability Centre (SVC) supports the Force by maintaining a central repository of learning relating to vulnerability, and scanning for new developments, changes and best practice both locally and nationally. Through active engagement with our personnel, partners, regional and national colleagues, it is able to ensure our policies and procedures are up to date and be innovative in disseminating changes from learning. In November 2022, the SVC began publishing weekly Vulnerability Lessons which were circulated across the force, containing timely guidance formed from recent learning opportunities, in a concise format which signposts to current policies and procedures and guidance material, as a tool to improve practice.

5.1 Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders (MOSOVO)

There has been an increase in the volume of notifiable offences allocated to MOSOVO (778 in the 12 months up to April 2023 vs 658 up to April 2022), the solved rate has improved by 8.1% which is a further 1.9% increase on the improvement seen in the same period in the previous year (6.2% improvement in April 2022 on April 2021). Of the 778 notifiable offences allocated to MOSOVO in the 12 months to April 2023, 405 (52.06%) resulted in a solved outcome compared to 289 (41.9%) in the 12 months up to April 2022.

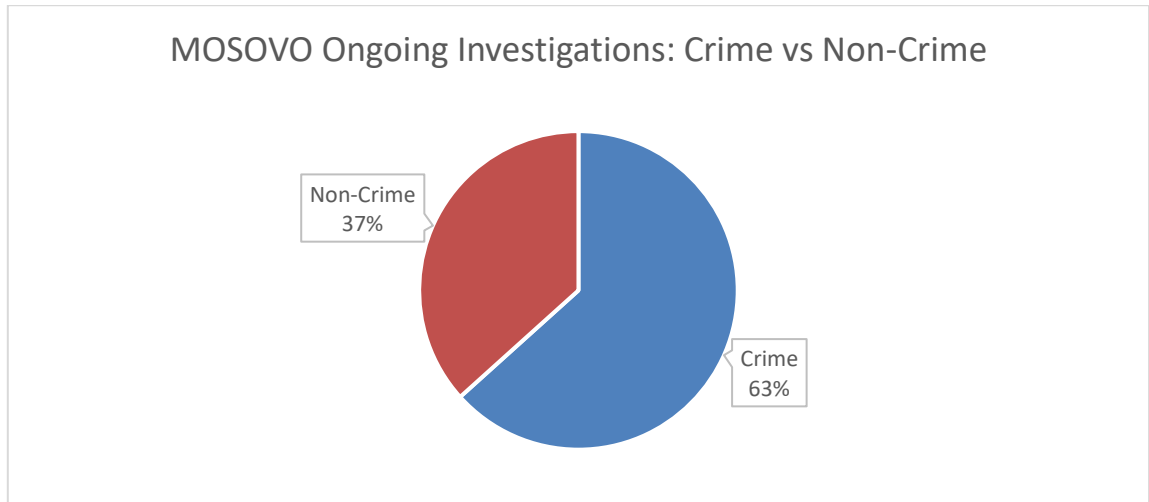
Unit	Total Notifiable Offences Allocated		Solved Outcomes		Solved Rate		Ongoing Investigations		
	Apr-23	May 22 to Apr 23	Apr-23	May 22 to Apr 23	Apr-23	May 22 to Apr 23	Crime	Non-Crime	Total
MOSOVO	53	778	29	405	54.72%	52.06%	133	77	210

In contrast to the above there has been a 22.5% decrease in ongoing investigations for MOSOVO in April 2023 compared to April 2022 (210 vs 271 respectively). 63% (133) of MOSOVO's ongoing investigations are crime as of April 2023. This is 55 less crime investigations than April 2022 (188).

Whilst it is noted there has been an increase in the total number of offences allocated to MOSOVO over the course of the year, in contrast, the total number of ongoing

investigations has decreased. This indicates there has been an improvement in MOSOVOs management of workload when compared to the same period last year.

The volume of non-crime ongoing investigations has fallen by 7%, with 77 ongoing investigations in April 2023 when compared to April 2022 (83). Non-crime investigations make up 36.7% of all MOSOVO's ongoing investigations. (These are largely MAPPA investigations, with some non-crimes created upon seizing a device while we ascertain if full offences have been committed).



It must be noted that from June 2023 MOSOVO will be dealing with all offences involving an RSO irrespective of crime type. Whilst this will increase demand, it is important in ensuring quality investigations against RSO's.

5.2 Online Investigations

In the 12 months up to April 23, 17.7% (220 of 1243) of Child Sexual Exploitation Crime Investigations were flagged to be cyber/online related. This is a 13.6% increase compared to the same period the previous year (May 21 – Apr 22: 1094). This increase could be caused by better utilisation of this Athena flag; however, it is still believed to be underused on investigations. This can be evidenced by scanning free text for "online" terms, many of which are not flagged. There is no active improvement process ongoing, but Essex Police are working with the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) and will look for future developments to include identification & correction of online flags.

	<i>May 21 - Apr 22</i>	<i>May 22 - Apr 23</i>
<i>CSE Online</i>	150	220
<i>CSE Non-Online</i>	944	1023
	1094	1243

POLIT recorded offences have increased by 21% (606 v. 499) offences during the 12 months up to April 2023 when compared to the same period last year. There has been a decrease in the number of ongoing investigations by 4% (364 v. 379) when compared to the same period last year, 6 of which were non-crime reports. The

number of solved offences has increased significantly by 52% (460 v. 303) when compared to the same period last year.

Section	Total Notifiable Offences Allocated		Ongoing Investigations			Solved Outcomes		Solved Rate	
	Mar 23	Apr 22 to Mar 23	Crime	Non-Crime	Total	Mar 23	Apr 22 to Mar 23	Mar 23	Apr 22 to Mar 23
POLIT	60	606	358	6	364	56	460	93.30%	75.90%

Britons are the third largest consumer of indecent images of children behind only America and Canada. The NCA estimates that there are 300,000 people in this country who pose a sexual threat to children online and UK referrals of child abuse images online are up 1000% since 2013. The NCA has identified the 10 most horrific dark web platforms have 2.88 million registered accounts. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse has found of the millions of indecent images of children circulating online, the majority were on the open web.

The improvements in industry identification of indecent images and artificial intelligence means that service providers are finding more illegal images on their sites than ever before. This, together with the public and political pressure on service providers to address this issue, will inevitably mean that referrals to Essex Police via the NCA will continue to increase.

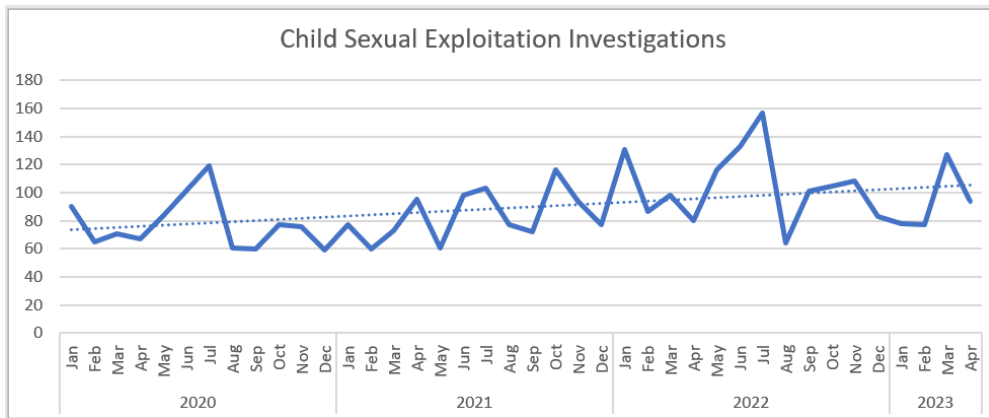
Huge advancements in Virtual Reality (VR), Extended Reality (XR), and Augmented Reality (AR) technology are being made, and platforms within the Metaverse continue to grow. There is an international drive looking at regulating this cyber-industry, and within the UK, the Online Safety Bill is currently in the House of Lords which aims to bring stronger regulation, new legislation, and protective measures to keep children safe online. However, OCGs continue to utilise this technology to offend at a far higher rate and this is predicted to rise¹.

POLIT are working with the Digital Forensic Unit (DFU) to train POLIT staff in device examinations to make them more self-sufficient and avoid delays in prosecutions. POLIT can perform basic (logical) examinations of mobile phones and tablets, however, full file (physical) extractions, along with examinations of computers and laptops must go to DFU. If the material required is not retrieved from a logical examination, POLIT are not authorised to conduct a physical examination of a device. DFU have offered POLIT three Cellebrite Responder kits which could be used to examine mobile phones and tablets. DFU stated the Responder kit would be able to perform full file extractions, thus removing the need for POLIT to send mobile phones and tablets to DFU unless there is a unique issue. DFU have agreed to train POLIT staff to do this and this training has commenced.

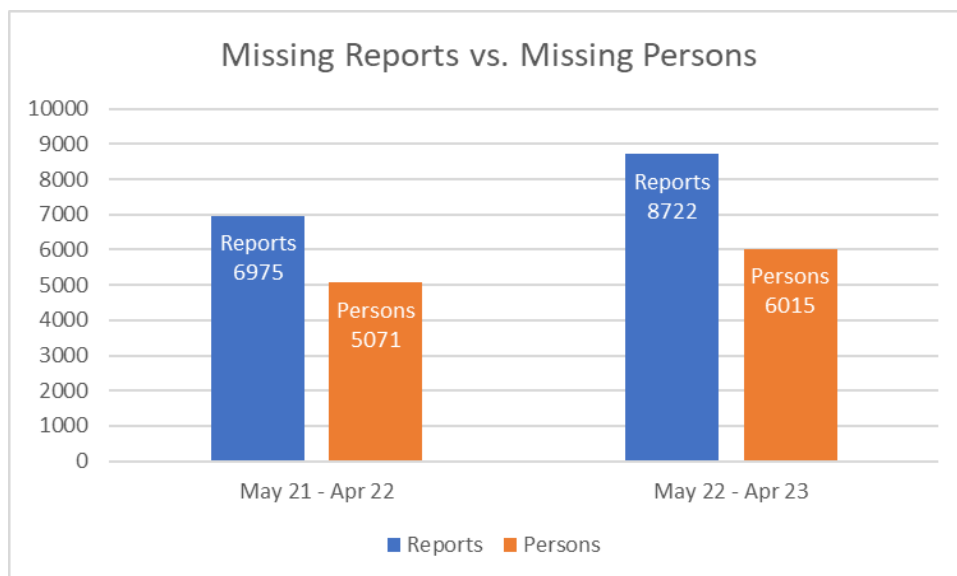
¹ NCA Strategic Assessment 2022/23

5.3 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Criminal Exploitation and Missing

In the 12 months up to April 23 there were 1,243 Child Sexual Exploitation Crime investigations recorded. This is 149 more investigations than the same period from the previous year (1094).



In the 12 months to April 2023, there were 8,722 missing person reports (6,015 missing persons) compared to 6,975 reports in the same period in the previous year (5,071 missing persons). This is a 25% increase in the number of reports and 19% increase in number of actual persons. 58.6% of the missing persons in the 12 months up to April 2023 were children (3,524).



Within the last 12 months Essex Police have developed a new process, Op Firefly, between the Missing Person Liaison Officers (MPLOs) and Op Orochi, who work to disrupt drugs lines. This referral process pertains to children the MPLOs believe to be involved in drugs lines; and it is proving effective, having been instrumental in bringing down a drugs line running out of Northampton in its first six months by identifying and doing work around a missing child who was frequently travelling up to Northampton.

As of April 2023, we have started receiving a product from TOEX (Tackling Organised Exploitation Programme) which overlays data from our two systems

relating to missing persons (Athena and Compact) from all nine Athena forces – enabling us to see movement between borders and identifying our most at-risk children and adults, according to an RFG Recency, Frequency, Gravity rating.

In March this year, the Strategic Vulnerability Centre hosted a force-wide learning event called 'Working Smarter & Be the Change' which was opened by the Deputy Chief Constable and attended by officers and staff from across the force. The event shared innovative ideas and learning from a wide range of cases in recent years, and centred around key themes which included CSE, missing children, and professional curiosity. All presentations were recorded and made available to everyone who was unable to attend on the day.

The Essex Police Quest team and the CSE Proactive Investigations Team have had an uplift in staff which has enabled them to take on more investigations during this reporting period. These specialist teams focus on allegations of historic child sexual abuse and tackling cases of complex and or organised Child Sexual Exploitation. For the last financial year these teams have seen a total of 16 convictions with a combined total sentencing of 85 years.

Operation Feedback took place in late 2022, which examined how numbers of repeat missing children cases could be reduced and safeguarding of children and young people could be made more effective, via adopting a preventative public health approach. This came on the back of using data to develop a better understanding of the problem profile – in that most of Essex's missing persons cases are missing children who are frequently missing and graded as medium risk. Operation Feedback identified considerable benefit from investment in building rapport over several visits with vulnerable repeat missing children by the same officer, leading to greater understanding of the child's circumstances. The positive results – which showed a marked reduction in missing activity for the three months after the trial – are the basis for supporting a pilot for a dedicated Missing Children Unit to continue this work, and which will be trialled in Southend for three months from July 2023. This pilot will involve increased working with key partners and, if it can evidence continued reduction, the hope is to roll out the approach force-wide.

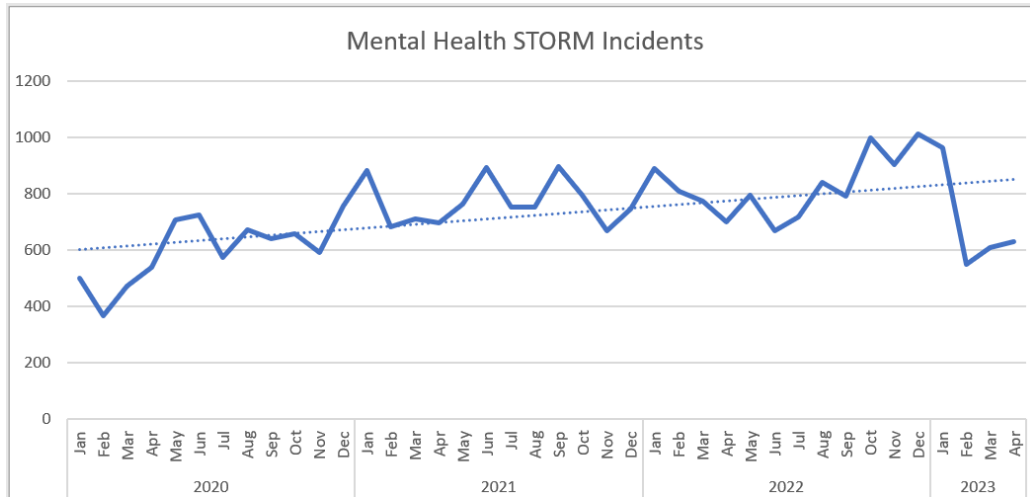
Police intelligence reports (PIRs) are crucial for missing person investigations to support problem solving in repeat cases (particularly of children) and this allows accessibility to other ATHENA Forces who may have interactions with these individuals. All Sergeants & Inspectors training now contains an input on missing persons, which has resulted in a significant increase in the volume of PIRs being submitted. Wider levelling up training through webinars and Flex Days is planned for the next 12 months, to continue to raise knowledge and awareness of missing persons investigations amongst our officers and staff.

'Buddi Clips' are being used throughout the County for adults with dementia or memory loss, using GPS data to locate vulnerable adults. In July, this scheme was used with a frequently missing vulnerable adult, which had a positive impact as of the 20 reported missing episodes, 19 could be dealt with by family using this technology. The data from his previous missing episodes was used on the 1 occasion police were required, and this assisted in the search for him, where he was found safe and sound very quickly.

5.4 Mental Health

Calls received with a final call type recorded to be “MENT HLTH” have continued to increase over the past 3 years, however, in the last 12 months up to April 2023, numbers have stayed relatively similar to the same period in the previous year.

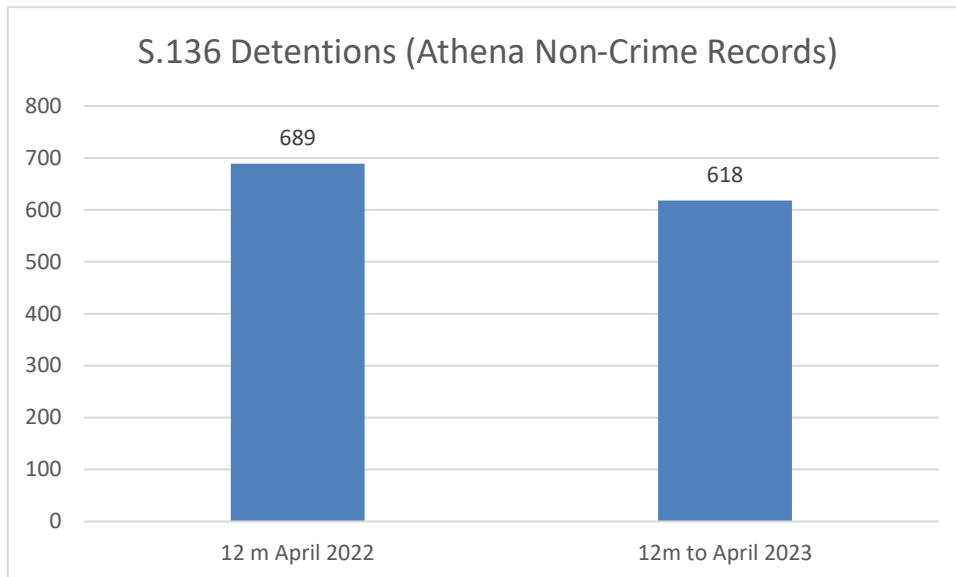
In the 12 months up to April 2023 there were 9,482 STORM incidents recorded which is 0.4% increase on the same period in the previous year (9,482 vs. 9,441).



There has been a significant drop (43%) in Mental Health call volumes from Jan 2023 to Feb 2023 (from 964 incidents to 548 in February 2023). There are several contributing factors to this sudden decline, including the formation of the new Mental Health Prevention Team (MHPT)² and the revision to the S.136 MHA Escalation Policy which went live in January and is publicised daily by the MHPT. Additionally, a persistent caller to police (LL) was arrested for misuse of the 999 system in January and calls from him dropped from 115 in January to 23 calls in May.

In terms of Mental Health Section 136 non-crime investigations, there were 618 in the 12 months leading up to April 2023, which is 71 less than the same period the previous year, a 10.3% reduction. This correlates with the STORM data, with S.136 detentions declining January into February by 34%.

² Mental Health Prevention Team (MHPT) is the proposed name for this new team but awaits ratification.



Mental health has been an increasing area of business, however following the formation of the new Mental Health Prevention Team (MHPT) in the last year, there is evidence this is having a positive impact in reducing demand on the Force.

The Essex Police Strategic Aims regarding mental health are in line with the Force Plan 2022/2023:

Prevention – Understand the themes and work in partnership to reduce the escalating risk of serious violence in:

- Repeat contact cohorts
- Repeat victim cohorts
- Repeat suspect cohorts

Investigation - Understand the themes and work in partnership to:

- Reduce and prevent serious violence in NHS Professional settings through continuing work by the Mental Health Team under Operation Cavell.
- Improve the investigative approach, quality, and victim and witness confidence.
- Taking a greater offender centric approach, and never assuming an absence of capacity, but instead routinely seeking mental health assessments.

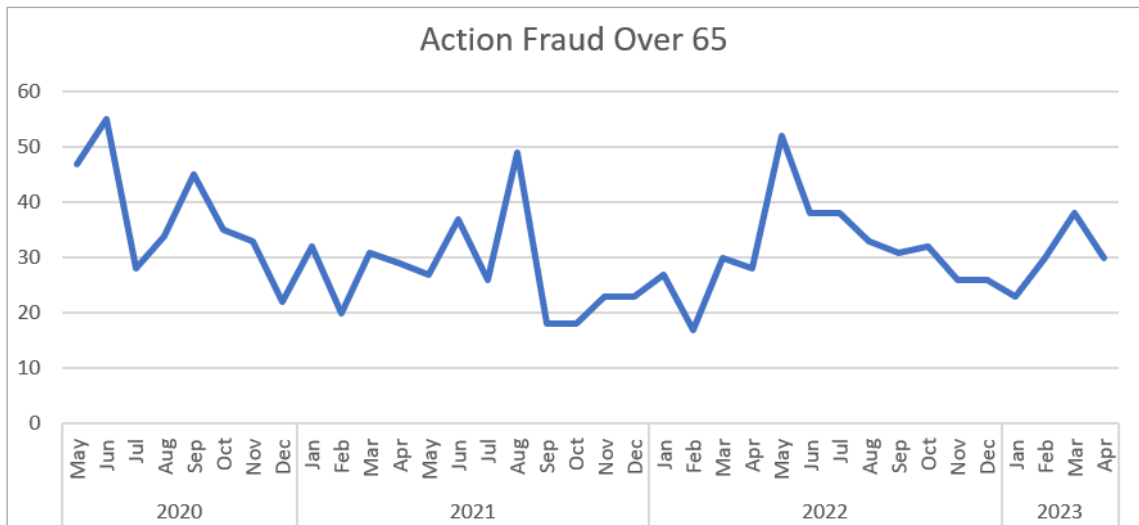
Response - Understand the themes and work in partnership to:

- Reduce the unnecessary amount of S136 detentions
- Improve service delivery of MH services through the MHST and EPUT teams
- Improve the THRIVE risk assessment and response to S135 detentions
- Challenge partnerships operationally and strategically to release officers from unnecessary abstractions

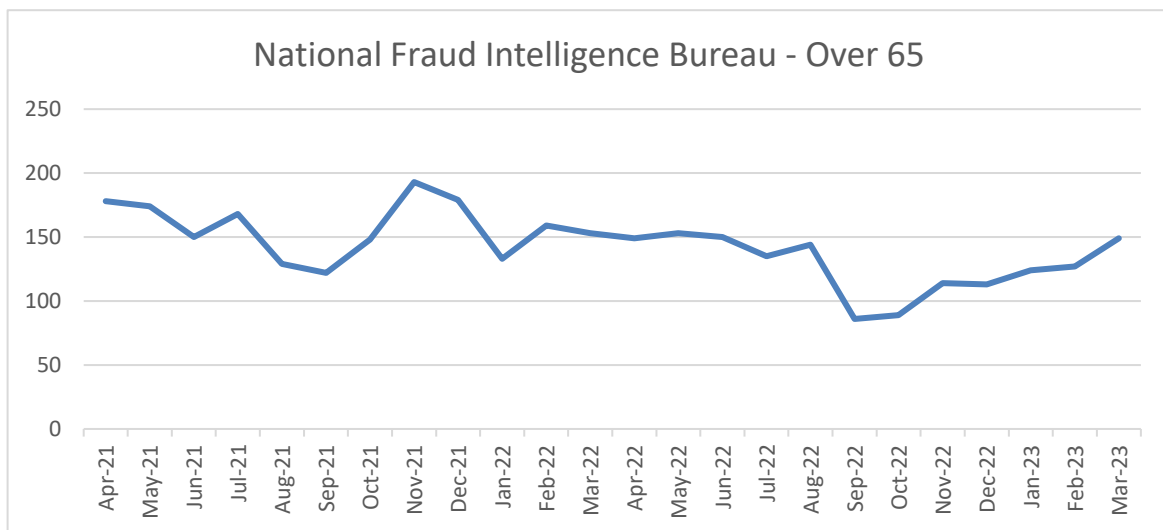
5.5 Fraud and vulnerability of the elderly

In the 12 months up to April 2023 (May 22 – April 23), there were 397 Action Fraud Investigations recorded by Essex Police with a Victim aged 65 or over. This is 23%

higher than the same period the previous year (323). The age with the highest number of victims during this time was 75 with 29 victims at the date the crime was committed.



Recorded by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau in the 12 months up to April 2023, there were a further 1532 incidents of fraud recorded to have taken place in Essex with a victim aged 65 or over. This is 20.6% lower than the same period the previous year (1885). The age with the highest number of victims during this time was 67 with 102 victims at the date the crime was committed.



Fraud is predominantly investigated by the Economic Crime Teams (ECU) of the Serious Economic Crime Unit (SECU), a department within the Serious Crime Directorate (SCD). In general, fraud relating to elderly victims is dealt with by the Volume Fraud Teams, who triage all reports referred to Essex Police by Action Fraud and investigate the majority of these. Fraud may also be reported as a call for service via STORM as a live incident. These are dealt with initially by LPA officers and depending on the complexity of the case they may retain the investigation.

In April 2023, Fraud Coordinators who were previously based within LPSU moved across into SCD under Prevent & Protect and continue to deliver bespoke services to

vulnerable victims through signposting, safeguarding and crime prevention work, whilst ensuring national messaging is circulated through media. The Fraud Coordinators provide a strategic and tactical partnership response to identify and support vulnerable victims of fraud within Essex.

6.0 Implications (Issues)

The Home Office has set an expectation that forces will solve cases considered to be potentially high risk, and the Essex POLIT for example has historically been one of the leading forces in relation to the volume of referrals that are initiated which shows the value of investment the force has made into investigations of this type.

POLIT have experienced an increase this year in reactive referrals, which is the result of higher than anticipated volumes of Online Child Abuse Activist Groups (OCAGs) and undercover online referral investigations (UCOL) in this period (see section 6.2). The initial research conducted around the predicted volume of referrals indicated that there were likely to be 18 to 20 OCAG referrals during the year, but by the end of November 2022 the team had already dealt with 51. There were also 38 UCOL referrals for that period.

The total investigations dealt with by POLIT in 2022 was 372 (reactive referrals and proactive investigations) which is forecast to increase to 421 in 2023 with further increases over the next 3 years.

This year-on-year increase is also being seen across all C&PP teams who are undertaking investigations, with a total of 7,616 notifiable offences being recorded between April 2022 and April 2023, and 6,931 notifiable offences being recorded in the previous reporting period, which is an overall increase of 10%. Force finance and resources data are already provided at a high level to the PFCC's office monthly, in the form of the Financial Monitoring Report and the Police Objective Analysis. These reports are presented to the Performance and Resources Scrutiny Board and the subsequent Strategic Board. To continue to manage the ever-growing demand further investment in police officers and staff numbers is required to ensure the teams are fit for purpose and are able to carry out their duties to the highest standard.

Across Crime and Public Protection demand has risen whilst there continues to be a 45.71 FTE vacancy rate. There continues to be challenges within recruitment and as such this sees a further knock-on effect on the capacity of teams. Detective numbers do not reflect the volume of overall staff with some areas only seeing half of their headcount been accredited at PIP2. The following provides a breakdown of numbers for the PPIU hubs:

Rank	Establishment	Strength	Vacancy	Vacancy Percentage	Headcount	Headcount of Accredited Detectives
Inspector	13	9	-4	-30.77%	9	9
Sergeant	31	31.48	0.4813	1.55%	32	32
Constable	172	155.74	-16.2584	-9.45%	165	78
Grand Total	216	196.22	-19.78	-9.16%	206	119

Within proactive (MOSOVO and POLIT) there is currently a 34% vacancy rate which is made up of a mixture of police officers and police staff. Within these roles officers and staff carry out the same roles, therefore this vacancy rate provides additional risks within this area of business.

It is worth noting that Essex Police have a young and inexperienced workforce, which continues to create additional challenges, particularly around the investigation of serious and complex cases. Those with shorter service are not generally aware of prior organisation learning, and therefore it is imperative to maintain a central repository of lessons learned to not only inform our staff today, but also for the future.

6.1 Links to Police and Crime Plan Priorities

The work detailed above contributes to a key priority in the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024, namely “Protecting vulnerable people and breaking the cycle of domestic abuse.” It also makes a positive impact on other priorities set out in the Police and Crime Plan such as “Reducing violence against women and girls” and “Improving support for victims of crime.” Much of this effort is driven by partnership work, which aligns with a key theme of the Plan, ‘Increasing collaboration’.

6.2 Demand

Forecasts from the PA Consulting Demand Analysis Report back in November 2017 around rises in domestic abuse, missing persons, and adult safeguarding demand were indeed correct, and there has since remained a need to increase staff to meet this demand as we greater aim towards preventative policing.

The review of the C&PP Command which concluded last year is continuing to inform the Operational Change Projects, which have been brought together to ensure that dependencies between the workstreams are mapped to maximise the efficiencies and benefits of the programmes. It is fair to say, however, that demand is expected to continue rising, and new challenges will face us.

Within C&PP, much activity now focuses on prevention, including:

- a greater focus on civil and criminal orders; supported by the POET team;
- increasing our offender centric approaches, such as Op Ratify;
- taking more evidence-based approaches to transforming our response (Op Solteria Bluestone);
- improving how our teams work with others outside the Command to problem-solve, such as closer partnerships between our PPIU hubs and DAPSTs.

Online investigations and those into the sexual and criminal exploitation of children are expected to continue to rise significantly in the coming years. Our POLIT team has seen a 37% increase in work since taking on cases from Online Child Abuse Activist Groups (OCAG), and this is expected to increase once the Online Safety Bill passes through Parliament.

Essex has, in the last reporting year, again seen an increase in the overall number of mental health related incidents, however only 0.4%. Detentions under S.136 of the

MHA have decreased, which is attributed to the joint work by our MHST with EPUT, and the formation of the MHPT who are supporting front line teams with their close partnership work. Demand in this area is not expected to decline over the next reporting period.

Fraud is the most common offence in England, amounting to 41% of all crime in the year ending September 2022. Presently, the vast majority of fraud offences are not recorded by forces, and in Essex only about 1 in 16 offences have an investigation created. The remaining are recorded by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB); however, there are changes taking place to the current Action Fraud service which will be replaced within a year, and along with the introduction of the new Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, this is expected to impact on the volume of fraud investigations which are referred.

6.3 Risks/Mitigation

Currently, of the three Local Authorities in Essex (Southend Essex & Thurrock – SET), Southend and Thurrock each have an established MASH, however Essex does not. Crime and Public Protection Command have concerns that the absence of a MASH in Essex decreases the effectiveness of safeguarding children in our County, particularly as there are greater barriers to information sharing. A benefits paper has been presented to COG and discussions to introduce a MASH with Essex County Council are ongoing.

Data sharing platforms between Essex Police and Essex County Council with regards to concerns for children remains an area of significant challenge for the Force. Whilst the MASH models in place with Southend and Thurrock allow much more efficient and effective exchanges of information in response to concerns, this is a reactive rather than proactive or preventative process. Work is ongoing as part of this year's BT Hothouse 3 to design a proof of concept for a data sharing platform which agencies will feed into to identify those at greatest risk. Also, new information sharing agreements are being formed, to enable the sharing of aggregated and anonymised data to the Safeguarding Adults and Childrens Boards in the County. This will inform the sub-groups and the associated safeguarding boards of local trends in Essex in the interests of directing strategic activity to protect children, young people and adults from actual or potential harm.

6.4 Equality and/or Human Rights Implications

In writing this paper there are no identified equality and/or human rights implications. However continual consideration is giving to these implications in the delivery of the business as usual of the command and in developing policies and working practices.

6.5 Health and Safety Implications

C&PP Command tackles some of the most serious and complex crimes within our communities when victims can be at their most vulnerable. Our officers and staff have highly demanding roles in terms of the potential emotional impact on those involved and the length and complexity of the high-harm, high-risk investigations. Occupational health support and psychological screening is available to all relevant members of the command.

7.0 **Consultation/Engagement**

Consultation with several teams has been made for this paper, and they have each contributed data for this paper:

- Essex Police's Performance Analysis Unit
- Essex Police's Continuous Improvement Department
- Essex Police's Mental Health Team
- Kent and Essex Serious Crime Directorate

8.0 **Actions for Improvement**

Essex was subject to a HMICFRS PEEL inspection in 2022, the results of which were published in October 2022. It rated the Force Adequate for Protecting Vulnerable People, adding that whilst we understand the nature and scale of vulnerability, we needed to do more to maintain and improve the wellbeing of staff involved in protecting vulnerable people, in particular children. The Force Performance Board is continuing to work through the AFIs and recommendations from this inspection.

We have five management level risks on the Force Risk Register which are owned by C&PP Command currently, and three open national child protection investigation thematic recommendations which were given to all forces. Work is continuing on these Force Risks, and all the thematic recommendations have been evidenced and are awaiting to be reviewed following our next inspection by HMICFRS.

9.0 **Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome**

A full C&PP review was undertaken between 2021 and 2022 which looked at the command's practices and processes, the results of which are now being considered as part of the Operational Change Projects. Of these three projects, one is focusing on Investigation, Safeguarding, and Crime and Public Protection, and another on 'Better Identification of Risk and Offences' and the Introduction to the new DARA risk assessment tool.

The government has this year introduced the Victims' and Prisoners' Bill into Parliament, which introduces further measures to compliment the Victims' Code. Once legislated, this new bill will enshrine all 12 victim's rights into law, and so significant work is ongoing in preparation for this. Essex Police is already working closely with partners to ensure victims will not just consistently be referred to support services, but that those support services are tailored to the individual needs of each victim, and that our pathways to this are efficient and clear.

Missing investigations in Essex are a priority for the Force, and the 25% increase in the number of missing reports for the last reporting year highlights the necessity for the additional missing persons Flex training which is being delivered in 2023.

The Force is continuing to drive forward significant change in our use of data and insight for day-to-day policing, and work by our Digital Business Change Team and Strategic Change & Analytics Department, in collaboration with Agilisys, is continuing to improve and develop our A4E dashboards. Within this there is specific focus on analytics around risks of exploitation of children, and development in this area is

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further supported by other ongoing work, such as the 'Maximising Crime Prevention Opportunities Through Technology' work born from the BT Hot House 3.

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