

Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2024

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

Title of Report:	Safeguarding Children – Essex Police compliance with statutory duties and guidance
Classification of Paper:	Official
Agenda Number:	09.0
Chief Officer:	ACC Kevin Baldwin
Date Paper was Written:	23rd April 2024
Version Number:	1
Report from:	Essex Police
Date of Meeting:	28th May 2024
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Date of Approval by Chief Officer:	ACC Baldwin - 2nd May 2024
COG Meeting Date	COG – 1st May 2024

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 2023.

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**

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.

Compliance Statement

As a force we understand our role and responsibilities in safeguarding children and continue to work well with safeguarding partners to achieve them. Child safeguarding and protection are a priority for our force and this report outlines why we consider the force to be compliant with its duty under this legislation.

There remain opportunities for improvement across different areas affecting children and these continue to be identified and tracked through the Child Protection and Safeguarding Board. In addition, the force will continue to learn and implement recommendations from its

work with partners in reviews such as Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panels (CSPRs) and Multi Agency Case Reviews (MACA).

4.0 **Introduction/Background**

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 **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).

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 2023 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, with child abuse and exploitation identified as a force priority. The plan specifies Essex Police will work collaboratively with our partners to build trust and confidence. It is therefore accepted that protecting the vulnerable is not the job of one or two teams alone. Whilst there are dedicated teams for investigations involving child victims (detailed below), there are many police resources across the commands involved in processes to identify risk, safeguard, and improve the lives of children.

All CAIT, CSE and QUEST teams should be trained on the Specialist Child Abuse Investigators Development Programme (SCAIDP). Of the 134 officers, 69 are trained and 24 are progressing their portfolios towards accreditation. The remaining 41 need to undergo this specialist training, but have to have progress along the detective pathway to a particular point before they can undertake it. The point at which this can be done varies between individuals dependant on their entry route onto the detective pathway.

In the last two years, the National Police Uplift Programme has seen growth in investigation teams that investigate the most heinous and serious offences against children. Current establishment of these teams is detailed in the chart below.

	DI	DS	DC	PSE
CAIT ¹	12*	18	101	
CSE ²	1	1	19	
QUEST ³	1	2	14	

¹ Child Abuse Investigation Team

² Child Sexual Exploitation investigations

³ Non recent sexual abuse investigations

POLIT ⁴	1	4	30	10
MOSOVO ⁵	2	8	36	13

*DI shared with ASAIT teams

5.2 Recent Areas of Focus

Force wide Child Protection and Safeguarding Board

Ahead of the anticipated HMICFRS Inspection, a force wide Child Protection and Safeguarding Board has been established, chaired by the Head of Crime and Public Protection. Current areas of focus are:

- Compliance with capturing the AWARE principles and Voice of the Child in every interaction with a child. This includes a report on compliance by our Audit and Inspection team, development of a PIR template in relation to missing children and dip-sampling of missing children found reports. The board has also established processes for BAU compliance checking and feedback process regarding recording of AWARE principles.
- Commissioned work on identification of victim blaming language in relation to children.
- Ensuring compliance with Police Protection powers and policy.
- The appropriate issuing of Community Resolutions to children.
- The early identification of CSE risks in children.

Further areas of work will include:

- Initial contact – Appropriate and accurate identification of risk.
- Investigations – Ensure thorough investigation with timely actions and enquiries.
- Decision making - Ensure our decisions are child-centred.
- Management of those who pose a risk to children.
- Children in custody.
- Missing Children.

National Vulnerability Action Plan (NVAP)

Essex Police is continuing to embed the NVAP under the ACC's Strategic Vulnerability Board. Thematic leads for each strand of vulnerability attend to provide updates on work within the national action plan. The improved governance put in place last year means that as a force we have a clearer picture of all the work taking place in each area of vulnerability. The overall aim of the NVAP is to improve policing's response to vulnerability, improve criminal justice outcomes, increase victim satisfaction, and create reductions in overall threat, risk, and harm. This central governance and cross-force representation has had the desired affect reaffirming that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Sunflower Suites

By the end of May 24 the full establishment of 4 Sunflower suites will be operating across the force at Braintree, Clacton, Grays and Southend. It is widely accepted across our safeguarding partnerships that a police station is a far from the ideal place for children, but

⁴ Police Online Investigation Team

⁵ Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders

it is also accepted the Police Protection process does not always run as fast as it should, so children end up spending time in police stations. These rooms provide comfortable rooms decorated with soft furnishings, equipped with dimmer lights, a TV, sofa bed, fresh bedding, toiletries, clean clothing and games. This results in a less emotionally distressing experience for children under police protection, particularly where their stay in police protection extends overnight.

Operation Henderson

Op Henderson is a joint initiative between Essex Police, and different partners from all three Essex local authorities, British Transport Police, and the railways. It aims to raise awareness of the vulnerability of young people to exploitation and abuse at stations to staff and passengers using the transport network. In 2023, two successful days of action were coordinated, and then a further one took place on 23rd April 2024, with further dates being planned in the next 12 months.

Operation Makesafe

Op Makesafe is a countrywide initiative educating our business community to spot and report Child Sexual Exploitation. Last year several test-purchasing operations were undertaken with support from our Volunteer Police Cadets at hotels around the county to check hoteliers' recognition of, and response to, potential child exploitation in their establishments. Operation outcomes are monitored by the SET CSE Strategic Group Chaired by ACC. Nationally this operation has been taken on by Op Hydrant who conducted a survey in January 24 to ascertain forces' experience of the operation, its impact and future options. Consideration must be given to what can be done with those hotels who fail the test purchase operation by failing to recognise the risk and take action to protect the child. Whilst activity under Op Makesafe will continue in Essex, it will be useful to understand the national position on failure activity.

Operation Encompass for Domestic Abuse and Missing Children

Op Encompass is a national scheme introduced to enable police to share data with schools around pupils exposed to high-risk domestic abuse. The Encompass referral is made directly to an identified safeguarding lead at the child's school to provide appropriate 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.

Currently in Thurrock and Southend, 162 schools are being serviced with 100% compliance rate. Since implementation in 2021, 682 referrals have been made.

Op Encompass has now developed to include its use for missing children. A referral is made using a similar process to the child's school following a missing episode. This allows the school to provide appropriate support to the child and provides an opportunity to understand the risks a child is exposed to whilst missing.

Work continues with Essex County Council to progress this into their schools; it is currently only in place with Southend and Thurrock local authorities. ECC are looking for a digital solution to reduce the resource implications.

Missing Children

Missing children investigations remain a priority for the force and with over 70% of all missing in 2023 being children it is now part of the Force's control strategy. Children often do not want to confide what is troubling them and causing them to go missing. The push and pull factors for a particular child are therefore not easily captured. In 2023, Southend ran a three-month pilot of a Missing Person's Unit dealing with the investigation of all missing children in Southend. This concept was developed following Operation Feedback the previous year and centred around the concept of visiting regular missing children outside of crisis and getting to know the child and their push and pull factors. Analysis of the impact of the pilot on the number of missing was inconclusive; however there were 3 distinct success stories where the work of the pilot has directly prevented further missing episodes for the 3 children. Work is underway to formulate options to further the work of this pilot team and build on these successes, including having better performance metrics to quantify the impact.

Further work is underway to identify the regular missing and found locations to overlay with criminal activity in those areas to identify the risks missing children are exposed to whilst missing and what prevention work can take place.

Delivery in Schools in Collaboration with ECFRS

Our Children and Young Persons Officers (CYPs) in collaboration with Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) continue to attend primary and secondary schools as part of schools PSE delivery. Presentation areas include knife crime, gang awareness, gender-based violence, and CSE. These inputs not only deliver education and awareness but also have a positive impact on perceptions of police by young people. They have also been delivering presentations in secondary schools around the dangers of self-creating and sharing of indecent images of children. This team also works with partners in "2simple" to develop one free lesson a year for schools to use them on a particular area identified for police. In 2023, this lesson centred on the dangers and legislation surrounding the use of nitrous oxide.

Embedding of AWARE Principles Across the Force

The AWARE⁶ contextual safeguarding principles help develop professional curiosity and ensure consistency in recording when dealing with children at incidents – even if they are not directly involved (e.g. at a DA incident). AWARE is a mnemonic to help officers observe and note down what is happening around the child, in a consistent and high-quality way, to gather information and identify early safeguarding opportunities.

Whilst AWARE has been implemented within the force in 2022/23, it is evident that there are significant gaps in compliance and understanding across the force. It will therefore remain a key theme of the Child Protection and Safeguarding Board and form a significant part of the force wide Flex training starting in May (see below).

Development of Force Wide Vulnerability Training

A flex training day has been secured by C&PP to develop and deliver training on vulnerability; the agenda for the day will focus on children, identifying risk, safeguarding, and capturing the voice of a child. The inputs on the day will include:

- Professional curiosity

⁶ AWARE Principles - Appearance, Words, Activity, Relationships & Dynamics, Environment

- Vulnerabilities specific to children and how they change in adolescence
- AWARE principles
- Children in custody
- Issuing Community Resolutions to children
- Police Protection Process
- CSE
- Input from partners on safeguarding referrals
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)
- Individual Needs Assessment (victims of crime)

Flex training will be delivered to all LPT officers; however it is recognised the impact of this training is required across the force, for all officers and staff directly or indirectly involved in the investigation, safeguarding and protection of children. An eLearning package is being developed to cover similar areas to the flex training and the mandating of this package will be sought for those who have not completed the flex training.

This year, the Strategic Vulnerability Centre are hosting a schedule of roadshows across the county with the objective of enhancing their work by speaking to those officers and staff who are working on the ground supporting victims, investigating crime, and assessing risk. It has given them the opportunity to hear from the frontline about the effectiveness of procedures and what is being understood by our people from the training and force communications.

Centralised Tracking of Reviews

C&PP have now centralised the administration, allocation and recording of all case reviews, not just the ones that arise from a statutory obligation. MACAs and MATAs are now tracked along with CSPRs and DHRs. This to ensure appropriate and effective representation is in place in each of these reviews and following completion themes and reoccurring recommendations are identified appropriately.

Victims and Prisoners Bill

In 2023, the Victims' and Prisoners' Bill was introduced into Parliament, which introduces further measures to compliment the Victims' Code. Once legislated, this new bill will enshrine all 12 victims' rights into law, and so significant work is ongoing in preparation for this. The bill will introduce measures to better serve the victims' experience. The bill is currently towards the end of the parliamentary process. Right 4 is especially important for child victims of crime, and so implementation of this bill will recognise the children have distinct needs and ensure this are provided for the code. The Bill will cover a structured framework for needs assessment with children. Work is underway in force in relation to improving compliance on taking of VPS and Individual needs assessments (IVNA) in anticipation of the legislative obligations that the new act will impose.

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) are working with forces to build a performance matrix for all 12 rights of the Victims' Code. Essex has been selected as one of the pilot forces to run this matrix and is working with the national team to build the structure and ToR for this pilot. The data capture and consolidation is hitting hurdles in places, especially around where performance very much depends on the performance of partners such as the CPS. In addition, much of the data will need to be extracted from Athena. If changes are needed in Athena to enable this, then delays are inevitably built in due to the consortium arrangement.

5.3 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

The Working Together 2023 statutory guidance sets out key roles for organisations and agencies to deliver effective arrangements for safeguarding, the three statutory local safeguarding partners, health, local authorities, and police. The 2023 guidance has made significant changes to the 2018 guidance.

Providing help, support and protection

The revision has a renewed focus on how organisations and agencies provide help, protect and safeguard children and their families. This is described in three sections: Early help (strengthening the role of education in supporting children), safeguarding and promoting welfare of children and child protection (introduction of new national multi-agency child protection standards).

Leadership:

The force has strong oversight and governance. The ACC for C&PP and Criminal Justice oversees safeguarding of children within the C&PP Command. The ACC holds a quarterly Strategic Vulnerability Board attended by representatives from all Commands, 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 who lead on Proactive and Partnerships and Investigations, and a senior police staff responsible for the strategic oversight of vulnerability across the force. Through this structure, the safeguarding of children is championed throughout the organisation.

Whistleblowing:

Essex Police 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. Our confidential reporting platform continues to be regularly used, and the Force frequently raises awareness of any serious wrongdoing by our people to encourage reporting and guide everyone in our organisation to always behave in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Professionalism strategy.

Allegations Concerning those Working with Children:

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 Essex.

Force policy also makes clear that PSD should be informed of any 'notifiable association,' which is any association, other than during official police business, where a police officer or member of police staff comes into contact on more than one occasion with any person knowing or believing them to be a criminal.

Essex Police works closely with the Local Authority Designated Officers (LADOs). They have responsibility for managing allegations against adults who work with children and provide advice, information and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations around allegations and concerns regarding paid and unpaid workers. Where any concerns are investigated pertaining to an adult who works with children, a referral to LADO will be made

in the initial phases so that they can monitor progress, ensure the child's voice is heard, and their resources and expertise can support safeguarding.

SET Procedures

The Force Child Abuse Investigation procedure specifically directs staff to the partnership SET procedures, and these will be renewed in 2024. At present, the working group for this are considering commissioning an external company. This renewal will incorporate the changes developed in response to the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 guidance.

The SET Procedures are well embedded across the organisation and form a central part of compliance and practices for 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. There is a well-established escalation process up the chain of command. SET Procedures also set out the process for capturing professional disagreements made at a Child Protection Conference.

Information Sharing:

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 these 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 via a PP57 Essex Police Request for Children's Services form for Southend and Thurrock. Recent improvements have been made to this process with development of an online version which has simplified the process; it is now a faster, more auditable and management information is more accessible. This will lead to identification of emerging risk and assist with targeted interventions. Referrals to the Essex local authority are made via the Essex Social Care online portal which doesn't allow the scrutiny of the data to highlight emerging risk. Agreement has recently been reached with Essex Social Care to run a pilot whereby we use the PP57 process and the Children and Families hub act as a triage function providing feedback to officers and raising standards of referrals. Police have agreed to supply officers for the hub.

Information sharing with partners is supported by the 'Overarching Safeguarding across geographical Essex' Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) which facilitates the exchange of personal and sensitive information in the interests of protecting children, young people, and adults from actual or potential harm. In addition, this year a process has been agreed with all local authorities to allow sharing of anonymised data to assist with work conducted by subgroups of the safeguarding boards.

Information sharing is further supported through engagement with and attendance at strategy meetings, case conferences, and other appropriate discussions. 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 consistently 100%, 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, MPLOs will regularly attend meetings with partners regarding regularly missing children to develop the safeguarding plan for that child.

In addition, the force forms part of multi-agency Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) and Risk Management Meetings (RMM), chairing some of these. These meetings concentrate on the safeguarding and welfare of children at risk of exploitation who go missing, focussing on 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 share information concerning high-risk victims of domestic abuse, and then produce co-ordinated action plans 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 what risks the perpetrator poses to any individual or to the general community, including any children. The Force conducts research of families discussed at MARAC 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 working days of being notified, with all agencies involved taking part, before determining if a Child Safeguarding Practice Review is required. The LSCP can then make recommendations and consider learning.

Recruitment:

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 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.

Training and Supervision:

The 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

officer responsibilities for safeguarding children and how to report concerns to partner agencies.

In terms of more focussed C&PP training, CAIT accredited detectives must complete the Specialist Child Abuse Investigators Development Programme (SCAIDP), giving them the right support to plan, conduct and supervise 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 also undertake Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) and National Child Death training courses (DI only) 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.

Officers and staff have access to the Virtual Crime Academy which is a platform designed to support investigations and the safeguarding of vulnerable persons and children by pulling together essential news, learning and reference materials, policy and procedure updates, local guidance, learning the lessons, and professional development opportunities. The Officer's Guide to Vulnerability has been developed into SharePoint pages to make it more accessible to all officers and staff, enabling them to find information more quickly on the specific area of vulnerability they are seeking guidance on.

Essex has been selected as a pilot force for the new SSAIDP2 under the new RASSO National Operating Model (NOM) – it should however be noted that this will focus on offences against adults and the content is covered in the SCAIDP portfolio.

Frontline officers and staff (LPT, CPT, call handlers, front office) will receive training in 23/24 on the new RASSO NOM and will include training on response to all victims of sexual offences. This will be incorporated into the IPLDP for future probationers.

C&PP SLT members are required to attend the College of Policing Public Protection Senior Leaders Course and complete an operational competency portfolio demonstrating senior leadership across a wide range of Public Protection matters.

A C&PP Training and Skills terms of reference has been revised and will recommence in the next month, reoccurring every 6 weeks. It is chaired by a DCI and will identify training gaps across various departments, identify role-specific training required and discusses general improvements in training provision.

In 2023 all C&PP teams were provided with a protected learning time to allow CPD to be completed, including, NCALT, podcasts, college learn and partner training.

The Essex Police College holds a budget for training, including safeguarding training, enabling officers and staff to apply for access to any multi-agency training provided at a cost by other organisations and the respective local safeguarding children's partnerships. C&PP Command is engaged in ad hoc training seminars that are co-hosted by police with Social Care focussed on topic-specific areas regarding children and investigative improvements.

Personal Development Reviews (PDRs) are undertaken every 6 months, providing opportunities to review performance, set relevant SMART objectives, and to assess training and developmental needs of individuals.

Powers:

Where it is believed a child needs 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.

Section 46 of the Children Act sets out specific immediate powers which officers can utilise to remove a child to a place of safety for up to 72hrs; however, the exercise of these 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. Our Police Protection Powers procedure makes explicit reference to the fact children should only be taken to the police station in exceptional circumstances, i.e. where no local authority accommodation is available, and they should not be taken into a custody suite.

In the last 3 months, 42 children were taken into Police Protection. As a result, the PP process has been included on the Vulnerability flex day and direct oversight and feedback will be delivered by Ops Centre within C&PP. Oversight of improvement in this area is driven by the Child Protection and Safeguarding Board. The last board set an action that the next failure of a Designated Officer who has had the training will be a requirement to place that officer on an action plan.

Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 (MHA) affords police a power to detain any person (including any child) who appears to be suffering from a mental disorder, who needs immediate care or control, and take them to a place of safety. Last year an amendment was made to our S.136 MHA Procedure to discourage the use of this legislation for children, but instead to utilise S.46 of the Children Act to help ensure that children are not unnecessarily institutionalised or stigmatised by the process.

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)

The National Picture

The Angiolini enquiry and subsequent report into the handling of Wayne Couzen's offending has led to a review of the sexual offences policy and processes not only for adults but children too. The new NOM is centred on RASSO, but in Essex this will be widened to include all sexual offences. The Op Soteria National Joint Unit's ambition is that the NOM will eventually be applied to all criminal investigations. These principles will mean strategic and tactical development of our approach to reflect the principles of suspect focus, victim centred, context led investigations within our policy and procedures.

As discussed previously in this report, the Victims' Bill, will enshrine victims' rights in legislation. It is anticipated that this will lead to increased national focus and reporting requirements on the force's victims code compliance. With regards to some of the 12 rights we are very informed as to our performance, know our areas of underperformance and have actions and plans in place for improvement however, in others will are not currently able to measure performance.

Work with partners will need to continue to ensure the amendments made within the revised Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 Guidance are fully understood and embedded within all joint working.

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 2021 - 2024:

- Protecting vulnerable people and breaking the cycle of domestic abuse
- Reducing violence against women and girls
- Improving support for victims of crime
- Increasing collaboration.

6.2 Demand

In the last reporting period, CAIT, POLIT and MOSOVO investigations had all seen a rise. Within this reporting period, the same level of increases had not been experienced across all areas.

	1st April 2022-31st March 2023	1st April 2023-31st March 2024	% Difference
CAIT Investigations	5544	5735	>3.4
POLIT Investigations	624	466	<25.3 ⁷
MOSOVO Investigations	763	657	<13.9
Child Triage	964	708	<26.6
CSE Triage	16	37	>131.3

This significant increase in CSE triage is an indication of risk more accurately being identified and referred into the team by other areas of the force.

6.3 Risks/Mitigation

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. There remain 3 AFIs open which will be reviewed following the undertaking of the next HMICFRS inspection anticipated late 2024/early 2025.

An inspection of the effectiveness of the police and law enforcement bodies' response to group based child sexual exploitation in December 2023 made two recommendations, one of which remains outstanding.

Meeting the Needs of Victims in the Criminal Justice System report in Dec 2023 has one recommendation ongoing for the College of Policing and NPCC to develop the minimum standards for the completion of victim needs assessment. Once completed, this will need implementation within force.

⁷ There is a significant backlog within NCA of investigations been distributed to forces, this would account of the dip investigation figures

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.

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
- Force SharePoint Pages (intranet)

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

- C&PP Command
- Risk, Policy and Co-ordination Officer
- The Continuous Improvement and Analytics Directorate
- HR

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 DCC led Peel AFI Chamber continues to work through the remaining 5 AFIs and recommendations from this inspection.

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). These have all been evidenced and are awaiting to be reviewed following our next inspection by HMICFRS.

Essex Police operates a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with Southend and Thurrock, but Essex Childrens Social Care (CSC) have not been supportive of this model which does not line up with national guidance and causes some issues with Essex Police's lawful requirement to share information. Some of these concerns are shared by Health Colleagues and of course Police, Health and Local Authorities are the statutory agencies. Following a series of discussions, a 6 month pilot has been agreed with Essex CSC to adopt the same model as Southend and Thurrock. This is led by DCS Andy Waldie and will be evaluated during the pilot to ensure benefits are identified. The pilot is due to commence mid 2024.

9.0 Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome

- Further inspections are expected in the next reporting period, all of which may generate actions, AFIs and recommendations, some of which pertaining to the protection of children and vulnerability:
- HMICFRS Thematic Inspection in Crime Investigation – Expected June 24
- HMICFRS PEEL Inspection – Expected July 24
- Joint Thematic Area Inspection (JTAI) – Domestic Abuse and the Front Door – Expected between November 24 and May 25
- HMICFRS Child Protection Inspection - Expected 2024.
- The HMICFRS will be examining the force wide response to dealing with children, this is not just about the investigation of child abuse or child protection. It covers every aspect, children brought into custody, the initial incident risk assessment by CCC when a child is involved, when a child goes missing and how we protect children when they are exploited and involved in crime. Preparation for this inspection is being overseen by the newly established Child Protection and Safeguarding Board, but the results of this inspection will inform future areas of work and focus for the force around safeguarding of children.
- Missing children investigations in Essex are a priority for the Force, and particularly so given that children account for 71% of all missing. Work arising following the Missing Person's Pilot in Southend will need to be scoped and options developed.
- Further work to be carried out between C&PP and L&D to identify teams that have the lowest amount of SCAIDP trained officers, to then assess which individuals can undergo SCAIDP training ahead of schedule.