

## Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2024

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

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Vulnerable Groups Annual Report</b>
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<b>Date of Approval:</b>	<b>COG – 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024</b>

### 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 2023 - April 2024.

### 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 six areas:

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

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 national CJ datasets, and inform COG and the PFCC's office.

#### 4.0 Introduction/Background

The reporting period April 2023 to April 2024 has in many areas seen overall decreases in demand against some crime types against vulnerable victims, notably for MOSOVO led investigations, child safeguarding non-crimes, and mental ill health. However, in other areas there has been an increase in demand, including for our Child Abuse Investigations Teams, and POLIT.

The Force is continuing to prepare 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 2023 – April 2024, focusing on the six 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 are 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. These weekly lessons have continued throughout this reporting year, with analysis of the volume of recipients showing that they are regularly opened and read by upwards of five hundred members of staff.

#### 5.1 Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders (MOSOVO)

There has been a decrease of 23% in the volume of notifiable offences allocated to MOSOVO (594 in the 12 months up to April 2024 vs 776 up to April 2023), but the solved rate has increased from 54.1% in the previous reporting year, to 56.3% in this most recent period. This is a continuing trend, with there also being an increase of 1.9% in the year 2022 into 2023.

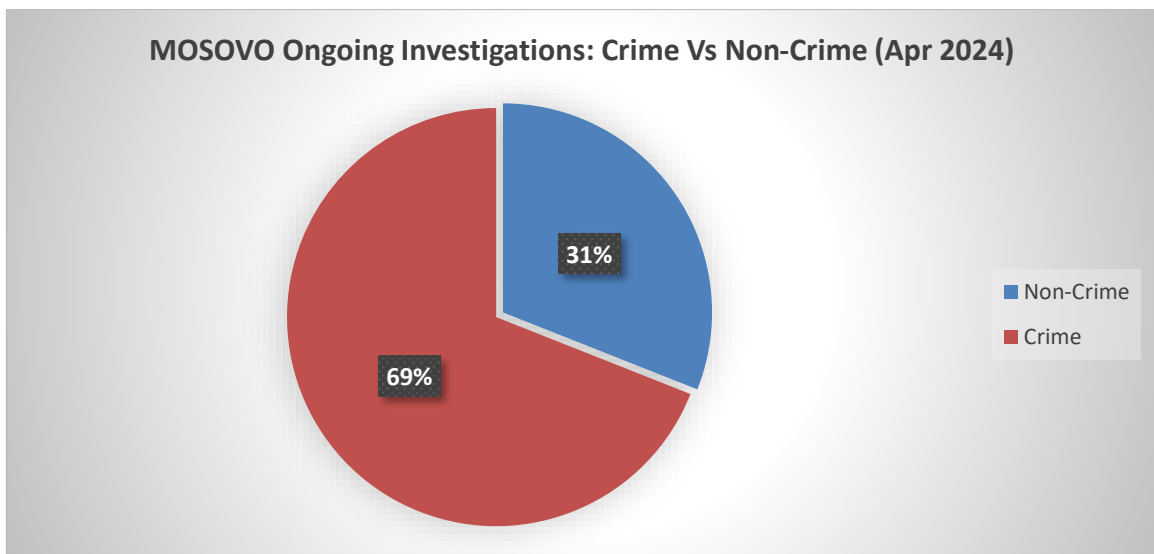
Investigations Allocated		Solved Outcomes		Ongoing Investigations			Intel Submissions		Count of Arrests	
May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24	May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24	Crime	Non-Crime	Total	May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24	May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24
776	594	415	306	171	78	249	2,073	2,039	116	102
		% Solved 54.1%	% Solved 56.3%							

In contrast to the above there has been an 18.6% increase in the total number of ongoing investigations open to MOSOVO when comparing the same point in time in April 2023 (210), and April 2024 (249). Of the 249 investigations open in April 2024, 69% are crime, which is a marginal percentile increase from 63% the previous year. The increase in total ongoing investigations is caused by the timeframes taken to download and examine digital media, with our Digital Forensics Unit (DFU) continuing to experience greater demands for their services.

Work is currently ongoing to understand the decrease in overall investigations allocated to MOSOVO in this reporting year, as overall demand on the department remains high, with prioritisation being afforded to Active Risk Management Systems (ARMS) visits.

MOSOVO is currently experiencing a 20% vacancy rate, which is also having an impact on service delivery. Whilst recruitment into these posts is continuing, priority is given to the nominals who present the greatest risks, with support being given by wider C&PP teams in completing ARMS visits.

The volume of non-crime ongoing investigations has remained about the same, with 78 in April 2024, and 77 at the same time the previous year. Non-crime investigations make up 31% of all MOSOVOS ongoing investigations. These are largely MAPPA investigations, with some non-crimes created upon seizing a device while we ascertain if any offences have been committed.



It must be noted that from June 2023 MOSOVO have continued dealing with all offences involving Registered Sex Offenders (RSOs) irrespective of crime type. It was therefore anticipated that this would have an increase on demand, however, this was to ensure quality investigations against RSOs take place. This process was recently further supported in learning from the MAPPA Serious Case Review (SCR) of TTK.

## 5.2 Online Investigations

In the 12 months up to April 24, 17.1% (149 of 873) of Child Sexual Exploitation Crime Investigations were flagged to be cyber/online related. Overall, the total number of CSE related investigations in this reporting year has reduced significantly by 26.3% (873 v 1243), however the percentile which is cyber/online related has remained about the same as 22/23, with last year's equalling 17.6% (220 of 1243).

The decrease in CSE related investigations this year can be explained in part by Operation Haiti, which was the force's largest ever CSE investigation, which resulted in the recording of 55 separate Athena investigations within the reporting year 2022/23, affecting the rise seen there. Also, there continues to be underusage of the Athena flag for CSE, with free text sampling for "online" terms having shown evidence of this. Essex Police is working with the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) and Athena Management Organisation (AMO) looking for future developments to include identification and correction of online flags.

	<i>May 21 - Apr 22</i>	<i>May 22 - Apr 23</i>	<i>May 23 - Apr 24</i>
<b>CSE Online</b>	150	220	149
<b>CSE Non-Online</b>	944	1023	724
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1094</b>	<b>1243</b>	<b>873</b>

POLIT recorded offences have again increased this year by 4.5% (633 v. 606) offences during the 12 months up to April 2024 when compared to the same period last year, and the year prior to then had seen a 21% increase (606 v 499).

There has been a significant decrease in the number of ongoing investigations by 28% (262 v. 364) when compared to the same period last year, 4 of which were non-crime reports. The number of offences solved increased by 3% (474 v 460) when compared to the same period last year, with solved outcomes remaining consistent at 75%, a marginal decrease from 75.9% from the previous year.

Investigations Allocated		Solved Outcomes		Ongoing Investigations			Intel Submissions		Count of Arrests	
May 22 - Apr 23	May 23 - Apr 24	May 22 - Apr 23	May 23 - Apr 24	Crime	Non-Crime	Total	May 22 - Apr 23	May 23 - Apr 24	May 22 - Apr 23	May 23 - Apr 24
<b>606</b>	<b>633</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>112</b>
		<b>% Solved 75.9%</b>	<b>% Solved 75.0%</b>							

The significant reduction in ongoing investigations, is impacted directly by the reduction in referrals made to the force by the NCA in the last reporting year. In May 2023, the NCA communicated with forces that they had received a vast number of referrals from META (formerly known as Facebook), resulting in a backlog. In response to this the NCA had to undertake a review and implement changes, and only since February 2024 have referrals begin to come through regularly. However, the stream of referrals is inclusive of the 9-month backlog and the additional material from META, and therefore it is predicted that the volume of referrals will be much greater over the next 12 months.

As part of the efficiencies which the NCA have sought to implement to tackle their backlog, following a pilot with a few forces, it is expected that Essex Police will be required to obtain referrals directly from the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), which will see a significant increase in work required to develop this intelligence. The decision on this will be made in July, but is anticipated to come in by the end of 2024.

Britons remain 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, and continuing to rise. 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 that 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, means that referrals to Essex Police will continue to increase, along with notifications from

Online Child Abuse Activist Groups (OCAAGs), commonly referred to as 'paedophile hunters'.

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 came into law on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2023, aiming to bring with it much stronger regulation 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 rise<sup>1</sup>.

POLIT has been 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. So far 3 staff have been trained, with a plan to train a further 11 in the next 12 months. POLIT can already perform basic (logical) examinations of mobile phones and tablets, however, full file (physical) extractions, along with examinations of computers and laptops must go to the DFU.

In the last 12 months, the DFU has provided POLIT with two Cellebrite Responder Kits (CRKs) for use in examination of mobile phones and tablets which would allow full file extractions. There have however been delays with this because of pending software updates, and also limitations with CRKs being unable to recover deleted material. Further work is ongoing between POLIT and DFU to enable a greater level of self-sufficiency in device examination.

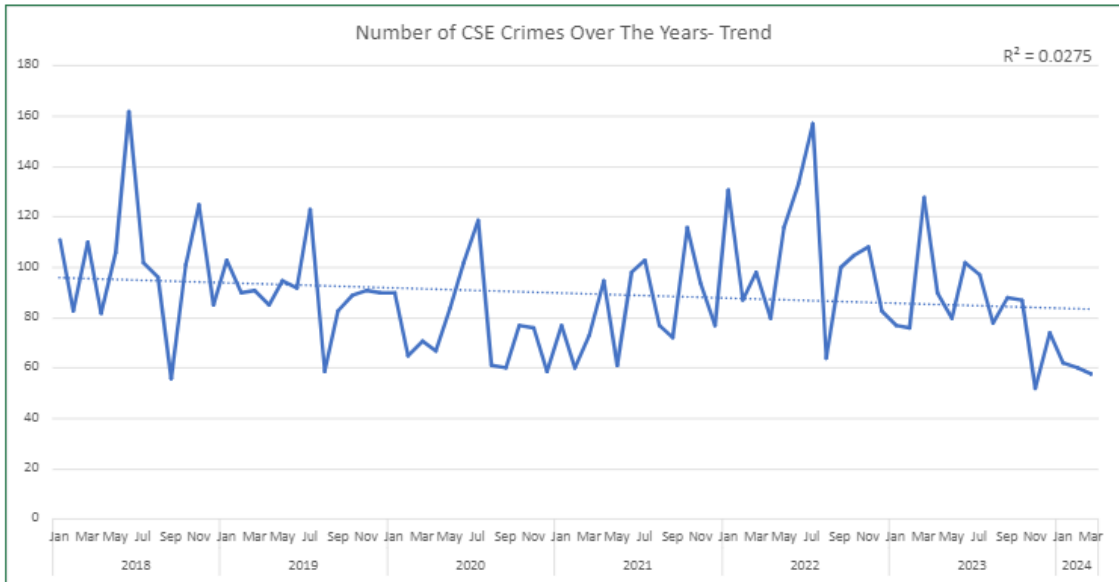
When comparing the variations in ongoing investigations by MOSOVO and POLIT, the positive impact that having access to CRKs has for POLIT is evident. The ability to undertake some of the work which MOSOVO have to wait for DFU to undertake, means that POLIT are able to expedite investigations, highlighting the benefits of having access to self-service downloading of devices.

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

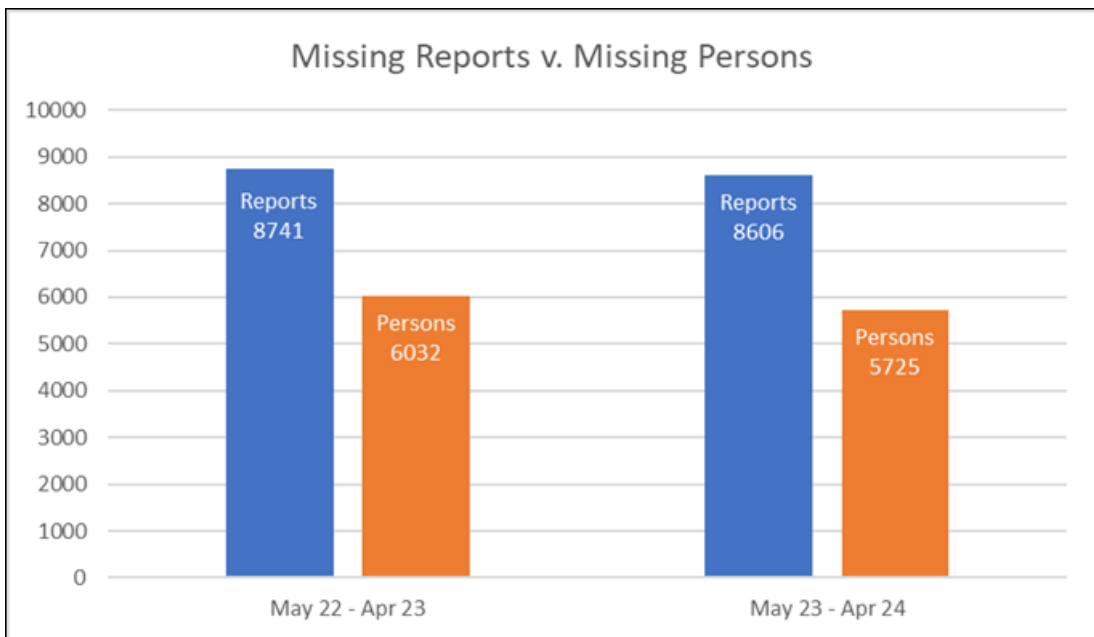
In the 12 months up to April 24, there were 928 Child Sexual Exploitation Crime investigations recorded. This is 299 less investigations than the same period from the previous year (1227).

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<sup>1</sup> NCA Strategic Assessment 2022/23



In the 12 months to April 2024, there were 8,606 missing person reports (5,725 missing persons) compared to 8,741 reports in the same period in the previous year (6,032 missing persons). After a 25% increase 22-23, this is showing a 1.6% decrease in number of reports and actual persons. Sixty percent of the missing persons in the 12 months up to April were children (3,469), which as a percentile is up from last year (58.6%). However, as an overall total, this is a reduction of 1.6% from last year (3,524 v 3,469).



In the last 12 months the missing persons policy has been reviewed and significant changes made in line with APP and learning from the Nicola Bulley Review, we also formalised in procedure the Op Firefly process discussed in last year’s paper. These amendments have been accompanied with CPD on missing people for all Inspectors and C/Inspectors, which included the importance of dynamic risk assessment during the missing episode, and appropriate identification of risk exposed to when the child returns.

Over the last year, the Strategic Vulnerability Centre has hosted a series of roadshows in various stations across the force to enable the operational support officers for CSE and Missing to speak to officers and staff on the frontline, to talk about specific areas of concern

or uncertainty they may have, and to ensure our policies and procedures are as informed as possible.

Op Innerste and a 10-point action card seeks to make sure that children entering the UK illegally are treated as a vulnerable and exploited person, rather than as criminals. Further to this, the Missing Persons procedure has been developed to ensure missing migrant children / unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC) are reported to police and treated identically to any other missing child in local authority care.

Face to face return interviews are conducted with all found children and submission of an intelligence report (PIR) is mandated in policy to capture the voice of the child using the AWARE principles. This ensures we identify risk, including CSE at the earliest opportunity. Compliance in submission of these PIRs is regularly over 90%, and work is now underway to improve their quality. An action within the Child Protection and Safeguarding board is developing the quality of PIRs in relation to missing children once they are found, identifying their vulnerabilities and the risks they are facing whilst missing. In addition, MPLOs dip-sample police return interviews monthly and provide direct feedback to officers.

A PIR template has been designed and published for use on Athena. The template seeks to improve the quality of the PIRs submitted when a missing child returns home. The template includes capturing of the AWARE principles, persons associated with when missing and locations visited.

The FLEX training discussed in the Child Safeguarding section of this report is mandated training for all LPTs, and in this most recent round there was a specific input on CSAE, which included:

- Definitions CSE and Group Based Sexual Exploitation (GBSE), PSA
- Offences they link to new offences online safety act S48, S49 SOA
- How to spot the signs: VOTC – AWARE, Characteristics of Exploitation
- Where might you encounter CSE: missing, DA, crimes as suspects and or victims
- GBCSE: Identifying patterns, location
- Operational orders and disruption techniques
- Prevention work: How partners can help
- Orders and Child Abuse Warning Notices (CAWNs), National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

In addition to FLEX, an e-learning package has is about to be rolled out which includes information on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their impact, to educate on how exploitation and abuse affects a child and manifests itself in their behaviour.

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.

There are a number of areas that are under development in the area of missing and/or CSE where full scoping, governance and implementation is yet to take place, one of these is work progressing a Missing Persons Team. The pilot in the South LPA delivered some very positive results in terms of prevention of repeat missing and safeguarding. Work is progressing to scope the possibilities of extending this pilot for a length of time to adequately

demonstrate the impact on repeat missing, demand on resources, and overall safeguarding of missing children.

Another area of focus is building on the Herbert protocol to assist with other vulnerable groups. Currently work is progressing in this area in respect of veterans and those who have autism, identifying key information at the earliest opportunity as to where they may be, who they may be with and how they may respond to police.

### 5.3 The Protection and Safeguarding of Children

This section is a new area of focus for the 2024 Vulnerability Performance and Resources Scrutiny Report.

In the 12 months up to April 24 there were 7,427 Child Abuse Crimes recorded by the force, and 911 Child Safeguarding Non-Crimes. This is a reduction from last year of 2.6% (7,427 v 7,625) in Crimes, and 16.2% (911 v 1,072) in non-crimes.

Child Abuse Crimes			Child Safeguarding Non-Crimes		
May 21 – Apr 22	May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24	May 21 – Apr 22	May 23 – Apr 24	May 23 – Apr 24
6,565	7,625	7,427	1,101	1,072	911

Approximately 50% of all Child Abuse related crime and non-crime investigations are undertaken by the six Child Abuse Investigations Teams (CAITs) across the county. In the 12 months up to April 2024, there has again been an increase in the volume of investigations allocated to CAIT (4,238 vs 4,139 up to April 2023), an increase of 2.4%. Alongside this, there has been a 6.5% increase in incident attendance (1837 v 1724), a 37.4% increase in intelligence submissions (213 v 155), and an increase in arrests of 11.1% (260 v 234). However, the solved rate has declined to 4.4% from 4.9% in the 12 months leading up to April 2024, with eighteen fewer solved outcomes than the same period the year before.

Investigations Allocated		STORM Attendance		Ongoing Investigations			Intel Submissions		Count of Arrests	
May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24	May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24	Crime	Non-Crime	Total	May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24	May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24
4,139	4,238	1724	1837	858	121	979	155	213	234	260
+ 2.4%		+ 6.5%					+ 37.4%		+ 11.1%	

Solved Outcomes		Athena Outcomes 20 & 22	
May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24	May 22 – Apr 23	May 23 – Apr 24
186	168	862	813
4.9%	4.4%		< 5.7%

A force wide child protection and safeguarding board, chaired by the head of C&PP, meets every six weeks, driving activity which seeks to enhance how lived experiences of children are captured, and to prepare the force ahead of the HMICFRS Child Protection Inspection. Activity resulting from this board includes regular dip-sampling and the creation of feedback processes connected to our recording of VOTC and vulnerabilities.

Capturing and recording the VOTC remains a priority for the force, and in 2023 the AWARE principles were introduced as a framework to aid our personnel to do this. This has been embedded across our procedures, and training delivered to all LPT officers during FLEX, with



an e-learning training package expected to be completed by the remainder of practitioners who are likely to come into contact with children.

In 2023, 14 new child safeguarding dashboards went live on A4E, providing data and insight for all personnel across the force specifically around child abuse and safeguarding, child neglect, CSE, missing, and overall children who are coming to police attention. These new dashboards now enable teams to be able to acutely see where the greatest risks to children lay, and be able to examine their own performance and response to this.

In the Springtime of 2024, a Ch/Insp was appointed as Operation Lead for Children and Young People to enhance awareness of Child Centred Policing to our operational teams, and to work collaboratively with partners and other departments to improve how lived experiences of children are captured.

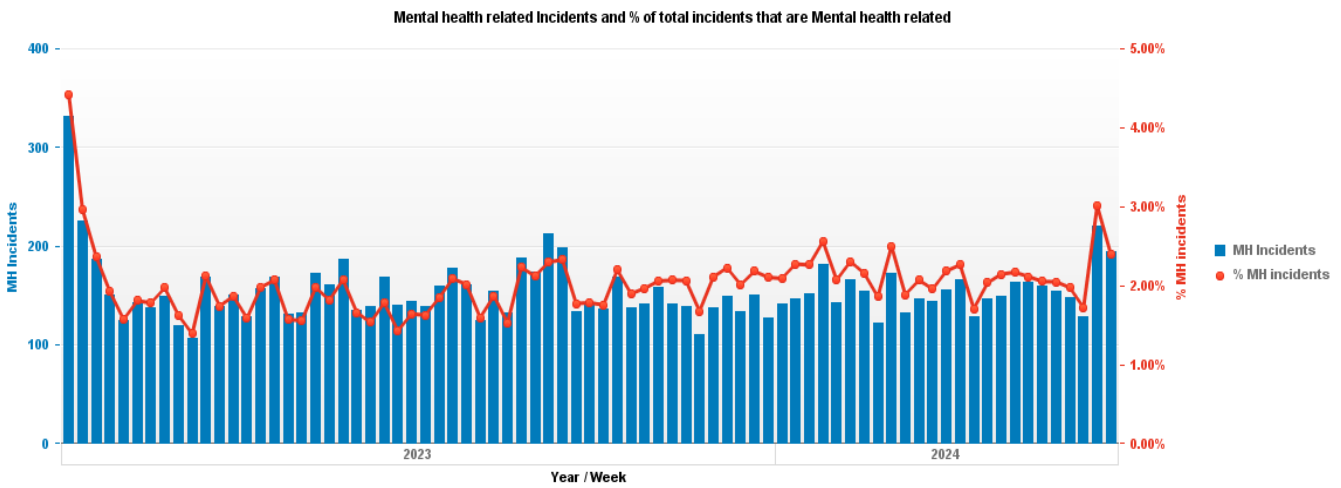
Between 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024, the International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI), formerly known as PIER, held their annual conference (PIER24) in Hounslow, looking at tackling online harms 'through transforming the whole system approach'. This was attended virtually on both days by staff from across C&PP and the wider force, and a delegate-pair attended in person to network with partners and participate more closely in the discussions to be able to brief back to senior leadership.

There remains good collaboration between the Strategic Vulnerability Centre and all three of the Safeguarding Partnerships in our county, with partnership boards at all levels routinely attended. As part of this, in the last 12 months, the force has participated in a total of sixteen statutory Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs), and a further three Multi-Agency Case Reviews (MACAs); which have all taken an in-depth examination of the responses to children in different cases where children have suffered death or serious harm. Additionally, work has continued with our SET Partners as we prepare to revise the SET Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures over the next 12 months, and also renew the 'Effective Support Resources' used by our partnerships.

#### **5.4 Mental Health**

Calls received with a final call type recorded to be "MENT HLTH" have decreased in the last 12 months up to March 2024.

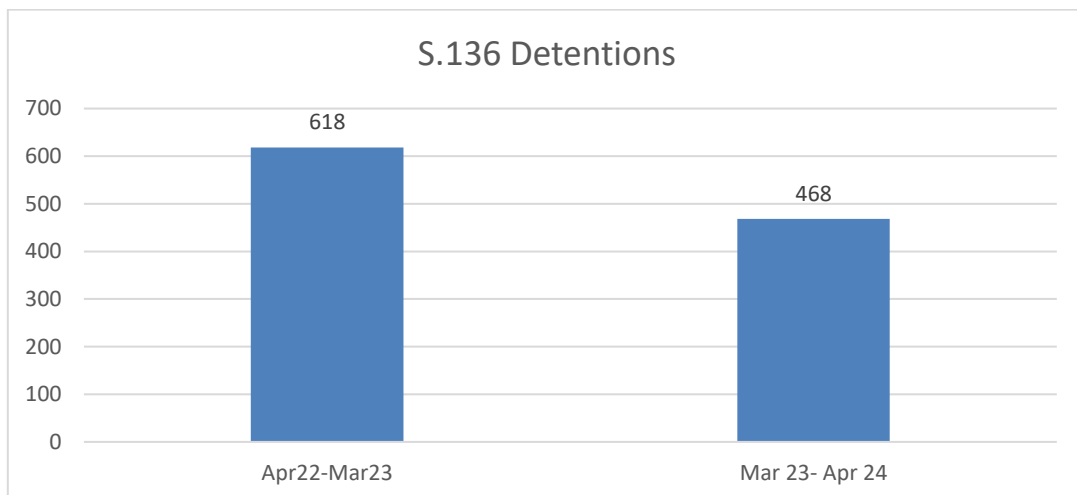
From April 2023 - Mar 2024, there were 7,850 STORM incidents of this type recorded which is an 18% decrease on the same period in the previous year (7,850 v 9,482).



There are several contributing factors to this decline - the work by the Mental Health Prevention Team (MHPT) and the Mental Health Risk Management Board (MHRB), the implementation of the four phases of Right Care Right Person (RCRP), and the work of the frequent caller team within Contact Management. A good example of the work under the MHRMB is regarding persistent caller to police (LL) who was arrested for misuse of the 999 system in January and issued a CO in September 2023.

The MHPT have been integral in the implementation of RCRP for the force which focuses on making sure that a person in crisis receives the right help from the most appropriate agency. This has included significant partnership working, training of different teams, and drafting policy and processes. Additionally, the MHPT challenge partnerships operationally and strategically to release officers from unnecessary abstractions.

In terms of Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983, there were 465 detentions by police in Essex in the 12 months leading up to and including March 2024, which is 150 less than the same period the previous year and builds on the previous 10% reduction. An overall reduction of 25% has been achieved this year.



The Essex Police Strategic Aims regarding mental health remain in line with the Force Plan.

**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:

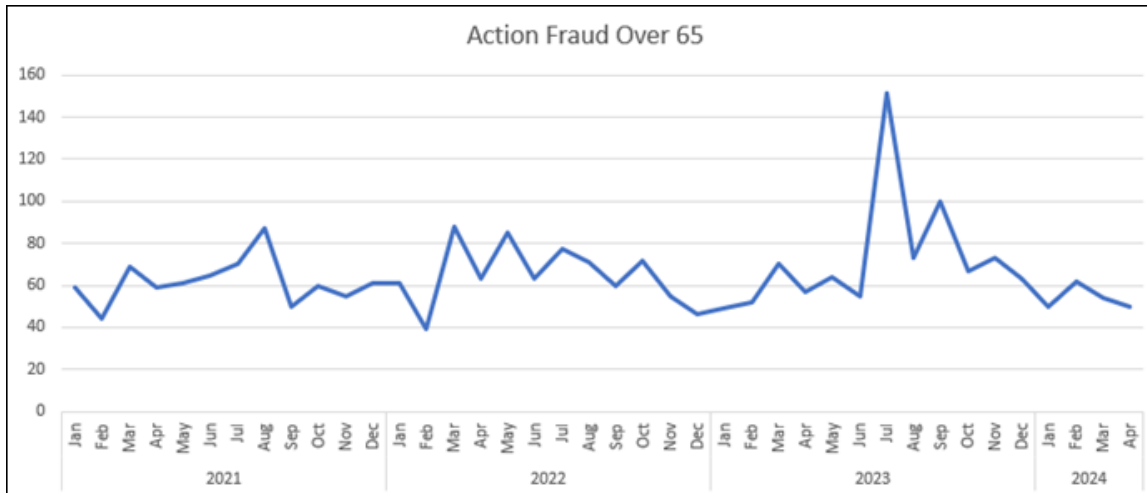
- Reduce and prevent serious violence in NHS professional settings through continuing work by the Mental Health Team under Operation Cavell.
- Improve the investigative approach, quality, and victim and witness confidence.
- Taking a greater offender centric approach, and never assuming an absence of 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 Essex Partnership University Trust (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 2024 (May 23 – April 24), there were 862 Action Fraud investigations recorded by Essex Police with a victim aged 65 or over. This is 13% higher than the same period the previous year (757). The age with the highest number of victims during this time was 77, and the oldest victim 101 at the time they experienced the fraud against them.



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.

Essex Police has signed up to the National Economic Crime Victim Care Unit (NECVCU) level 1 and 2 service, providing a consistent level of advice, support, and signposting for non-vulnerable and vulnerable victims of fraud. Level 3 relates to the most vulnerable or urgent cases which remains the responsibility of the force to deliver.

Each month the force receives between 700 and 950 reports of victims of fraud and cyber-crime, with the list of victims shared by Action Fraud with our dedicated fraud coordinators to check for vulnerability and repeat victimisation on police systems. Enhanced support is then afforded to those identified as being vulnerable. Approximately 10% of all reported fraud involves victims over 65; however it is predicted that this percentile is much higher, because older victims are less likely to report fraud they are victim to.

Our Prevent and Protect team have set-up the first Multi-Agency Approach to Fraud Forum (MAAF) that involves key stakeholders such as Victim Support, Trading Standards, Social Care, Local Authority Counter Fraud, and media amongst others. A number of working groups have been formed to look at sharing data, joint educational and preventative communications and tracking a victim's journey.

Increased focus from our Serious Economic Crime Unit on proactively pursuing intelligence through Defence Against Money Laundering and Suspicious Activity Report disseminations, identifying offenders and victims through financial data. This has led to arrests of suspects not only committing fraud but also those receiving funds for other crime types, such as child abuse and exploitation.

Extensive work with academia has taken place around understanding romance fraud and supporting victims of this very personal offence through a romance fraud peer support group. This has been identified as good practice via the national lead force, the City of London.

## **6.0 Implications (Issues)**

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

POLIT has again 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 in the 12 months leading up to April 2024, the team has already received 51 OCAG referrals, and 41 UCOL referrals.

The total investigations dealt with by POLIT in 2022 was 372 (reactive referrals and proactive investigations), which increased to 606 in the same reporting period in 2023, and to 633 in this most recent reporting period, with the forecast being that this upward trend will continue. The delay in referrals by the NCA in 2023 has further implications for possible victims of live abuse, who are not being identified and safeguarded.

The decision by the NCA to introduce a new Case Management Tool for forces to obtain intelligence directly from NCMEC will see significant impact to the force, with a need for additional resources to facilitate this.

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 can carry out their duties to the highest standard.

Across Crime and Public Protection there is a 15.12 vacancy rate of detectives, and there continues to be challenges with recruitment and retention of personnel which is having a 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 detective figures for the teams in Crime and Public Protection:

Department	Est	Str	Variance	Required Det Est	Accredited Det Str	Accredited Det Var against Req Det Est	Acc Det Gap %	% Accredited Against Req'd Est
Operations Centre	22.63	21.11	-1.52	22.63	17.31	-5.32	-23.50	76.50
Proactive	79.00	68.01	-10.99	61.00	47.45	-13.55	-22.22	77.78
Investigations Hubs	217.00	214.39	-2.61	217.00	119.57	-97.43	-44.90	55.10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>322.63</b>	<b>307.51</b>	<b>-15.12</b>	<b>304.63</b>	<b>188.33</b>	<b>-116.30</b>	<b>-38.18</b>	<b>61.82</b>

Considerable work continues to be undertaken by the force's crime training and detective development team; to increase the numbers of accredited detectives in investigative roles. However, challenges with retention within C&PP continue to impact on our overall accredited detective strengths, and for the Investigations Hubs, the total headcount of accredited detectives now in June 2024 remains identical to June 2023, at 119, which is only 55%. As the table above shows, this percentile is greater across our Operations Centre and Proactive teams.

Within C&PP there is currently an 18.37% vacancy rate which is made up of a mixture of police officers and police staff, with the majority of these vacancies sitting within MOSOVO and POLIT, which provides additional risks within this area of business.

It is worth noting that Essex Police has 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 aim towards greater preventative policing.

Essex has, in the last reporting year, seen a decrease in the overall number of both child abuse related crimes (▼2.6%), and child safeguarding non-crime investigations (▼16.2%). The previous upward trend in child abuse investigations since 2020 is forecast to stabilise over the next few years.

We have again seen a decrease in the overall number of mental health incidents recorded by the force (▼18%), and also 150 fewer S.136 detentions. This 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 significantly over the next reporting period; however whilst work continues with partners on RCRP, an overall reduction in calls for concern for welfare is expected as work continues with partners to ensure it is the most appropriate agency that is responding.

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

- The introduction and embedding of the RASSO NOM within Essex, with pillars 1 and 2 emphasising suspect-focussed investigations built from learning from Op Soteria Bluestone.
- A greater focus on civil and criminal orders; supported by the POET team;
- Increasing our offender centric approaches, such as Op Ratify;
- Improving how our teams work with others outside the Command to problem-solve, such as closer partnerships between our PPIU hubs and DAITs.

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 again this year seen an increase of 4.5% in work, despite there being a significant reduction in expected referrals to the Force from the NCA due to the backlog referenced in section 5.2, and once the NCA has caught up, and when the new Case Management Tool is introduced later this year, this is expected to further increase.

Fraud continues to be the most commonly experienced crime in the UK, affecting UK society economically and socially. It accounts for over 40% of crime in England and Wales, with the ONS estimating that 3.5 million incidents of fraud were experienced by adults aged 16 and over between April 2022 and 2023. Most fraud offences continue to not be 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). Changes this year following the Force signing up to the National Economic Crime Victim Care Unit (NECVCU) has allowed level 1 and 2 services to be undertaken externally, giving SECU and front-line officers more resilience to investigate and support victims at Level 3.

## 6.3 Risks/Mitigation

Currently, of the three Local Authorities in Essex (Southend Essex and 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 was presented to COG in 2022 and discussions to introduce a MASH with Essex County Council are ongoing. An agreement has however been reached with ECC for 1 DS and 3 Constables to move into their Childrens and Family Hub from September 2024. They will have responsibility for reviewing referrals made by the Force to Childrens Social Care, completing an assessment of risk similarly to how the MASH's already do it, and seek to increase the quality of referrals, and reduce the number of unnecessary ones.

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. In November 2023, new agreements were made for the regular sharing of aggregated and anonymised data to the Safeguarding Adults and Childrens Boards in the county, which enables our safeguarding partnerships to examine trends and patterns to inform ongoing activity, and this data continues to be shared each month.

#### **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 given 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, and high-risk investigations. Occupational health support and psychological screening is available to all relevant members of the command, and there is a force wide programme of regular communications promoting achieving an optimal work-life balance, and easily accessible services from the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

#### **7.0 Consultation/Engagement**

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

- The Strategic Vulnerability Centre
- Essex Police's Performance Analysis Unit
- Essex Police's Mental Health Team
- Kent and Essex Serious Crime Directorate
- Essex Police's HR Organisational Management Team

#### **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 and two operational risks on the Force Risk Register which are owned by C&PP Command currently, and a further two for recommendations connected to thematic reports; response to group based CSE and meeting the needs of the victims in the CJS. Work is continuing on these Force risks and thematic recommendations, with all updates being tracked by the Continuous Improvement Team in preparation for review following our next inspection by HMICFRS.

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

The Victims' and Prisoners' Bill received Royal Assent on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024, bringing into legislation further measures to complement the Victims' Code, and enshrining all twelve victim's rights into law. Significant work has already been undertaken by the force both in preparation for, and in response to this Bill; however further work with partners is continuing 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 whilst this year has seen a small decrease of 1.6% in the number of missing reports, there have been year on year increases up until this year, and a considerable amount of time is afforded to these types of investigations. Work is continuing which is looking at the options of introducing a Missing Persons Investigations Team for the force. Bench marking with other forces has taken place, and a second pilot to trial this is planned for later this year.

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 and Analytics Department, in collaboration with Agilisys, is continuing to improve and develop our A4E dashboards. In 2023, 14 new Child Safeguarding dashboards went live, and presently work is ongoing for further data analytics products.

The force wide Child Protection and Safeguarding Board will continue to drive activity to properly identify and respond to child vulnerability. It remains the responsibility of everyone in policing to ensure the lived experiences of children are properly captured at every opportunity, and this board has representation from all commands, and continues to set and track actions for the future.