



# South Yorkshire Police's Response to Child Sexual Exploitation

Findings of an inspection commissioned by the  
Police and Crime Commissioner

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# Executive summary

In August 2013, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for South Yorkshire Police commissioned<sup>1</sup> Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to provide:

- an independent assessment of the effectiveness and resilience of the current arrangements in place within South Yorkshire Police to protect children from sexual exploitation; and
- recommendations for improvement.

Full terms of reference are attached at Annex A.

Fieldwork was conducted in late September and early October 2013. The inspection methodology is set out at Annex B.

## Principal findings

### Strengths

The PCC and Chief Constable have stated that the protection of children from sexual exploitation is a top priority for the force. To underline this focus, in early 2013 the PCC decided to increase the number of posts dedicated to tackling this kind of offending; as a result, there are now ten more officers working in this area.<sup>2</sup> This shows a clear commitment to enhancing the force's response to the sexual exploitation of children.

In addition, the inspection found all the officers and staff working in child protection to be deeply committed to their work. They were conscientious, enthusiastic, and focused upon achieving good outcomes for the children with whom they work.

The force and the PCC have also made considerable efforts to improve South Yorkshire Police's response to victims and potential victims of child sexual exploitation. For instance, they have:

- improved their engagement with other agencies and organisations which have responsibilities in relation to child protection (such as local authorities, child social care and education services, and third-sector organisations such as Barnardo's);
- developed strategies with these partners aimed at preventing children from becoming victims of child sexual exploitation; protecting children at risk of child

<sup>1</sup> Police and crime commissioners can commission HMIC to undertake inspections under section 54(2BA), Police Act 1996.

<sup>2</sup> The number of officers increased from 11 to 21.

- sexual exploitation; and supporting children in all situations (although these strategies are at varying stages of maturity); and
- created a comprehensive plan to assist in developing the way the force responds to cases of child sexual exploitation, with progress made in many areas of work as a result.

A number of force operations have led to prosecutions and convictions for child sexual exploitation. There are further court cases due in early 2014, which have resulted from operations conducted across the force. Investigations (using staff both from the districts, and from the force's major investigation teams) continue to identify historical cases of child sexual exploitation.

### Areas for improvement

Overall, however, HMIC found that these efforts to improve the force's response to child sexual exploitation have had mixed success.

In particular, although staff and officers were aware that tackling child sexual exploitation was a stated force priority, this has not consistently been translated into operational activity on the ground at a local (district) level:<sup>3</sup>

- many of the staff interviewed for this inspection felt that the emphasis from senior and middle local managers was still more focused on dealing with offences such as burglary and vehicle crime, rather than child sexual exploitation (and both the notices displayed in police stations, and some of the documentation reviewed for this inspection support this perception);
- at a force level, the processes for gathering and analysing intelligence clearly support the major child sexual exploitation investigations, and force units which two years ago would not have contemplated dealing with these kinds of cases are now managing several. However, local resources – including intelligence teams – were not fully supporting child sexual exploitation investigations; and
- staffing structures, resources and the approach to responding to child sexual exploitation have developed independently across the four districts, and vary significantly as a result. This makes it difficult to implement in a consistent way the actions detailed in the force plan to improve the response to this kind of offending.

HMIC therefore recommends that as a matter of urgency the force must put the PCC's strategic priorities into operational delivery on the ground.

In addition, South Yorkshire Police now must audit its response to child sexual exploitation and make sure that it has carried out this evaluation in accordance with the national policing child sexual exploitation action plan.<sup>4</sup> It must assess whether the changes it is making are having the desired effect (i.e. of improving outcomes for

<sup>3</sup> South Yorkshire Police is divided into four territorial districts, each coterminous with a local authority: Sheffield City; Rotherham Metropolitan Borough; Doncaster Metropolitan Borough; and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough.

<sup>4</sup> *Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan*, Association of Chief Police Officers, 2012.

children). The force proposed to do so in the summer of 2013; however, at the time of the inspection, the audit had still not been conducted. This means the force is unable to evaluate whether its plans in this area are on track.

In particular, HMIC is concerned that the force is not able to evaluate the quality of its protective work. HMIC's inspectors reviewed a small sample of such cases, and raised concerns with local managers that in some instances investigations led to prosecutions, but there was no record in the case file of the level of support and intervention provided by police and partners to the victim. This makes it impossible for the force to know whether the victim received the best possible service.

HMIC also found that many staff in public protection and children safeguarding specialist units were working in crowded offices, were poorly equipped, and found it difficult to manage their workloads. This situation is adversely disproportionate to the importance the PCC and Chief Constable have placed on this area of policing.

## **Conclusion**

South Yorkshire Police has made considerable efforts to improve its child sexual exploitation response. However, HMIC considers that the force-level focus and commitment to this is not truly and consistently replicated in all districts. While there are pockets of good and effective practice (most notably in Sheffield), the approach taken to tackling this kind of offending varies significantly across the force's four districts.

This situation must not be allowed to continue. It is unarguably of paramount importance that all children in South Yorkshire receive the same high levels of protection, irrespective of the policing districts in which they live.

HMIC has therefore made a number of recommendations (see p.34), and proposes to revisit South Yorkshire Police in spring 2014 to assess the progress and improvements made by the force.