



Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Reality Check Visit to Merseyside Police Update Report

11th November 2019

Further to the Reality Check Visit held in April 2019, Merseyside Police have requested the following updates and amendments to be noted by Committee.

1. Members were originally advised on a briefing note that the Vulnerable People Unit (PVPV) team consisted of *4 Police Staff Inspectors, 15 Detective Constables 3 Detective Sergeants and a Detective Inspector*. This was later corrected and Members are advised that the team consists of *a detective inspector, three detective Sergeants and 14 Detective Constables*.
2. Questions were asked about situations where vulnerable children required emergency removal – Members asked if there were ever instances where Police Officers were literally left holding the baby? There are times when cases are stacking up with both Merseyside Police and with the Emergency Duty Team. Merseyside Police would like to reassure members that; *In some cases, an officer will need to sit with children until Children's Services can assist. If there is clearly a significant risk Police will use their powers under a Police Protection Order. This allows the removal of the child to a place of safety. This may sometimes include a Police Station if there are no other immediate alternatives*.
3. The team known as 'Compass' consists of officers from Children's Services, Merseyside Police, Youth Offending Service and Catch 22. The team investigates all incidents of Child Sexual and Criminal Exploitation, including missing episodes in Wirral.
4. Merseyside Police have provided further information on the Definition of Child Criminal Exploitation, which they would like noting:

"Child criminal exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity:

 - *in exchange for something the victim needs or wants.*
 - *for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator.*
 - *through violence or the threat of violence.*

The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology."

5. Regarding the 72 Hour Target to find Missing children; Merseyside Police have issued the following amendment; *All children who have returned from a missing episode are offered a return home interview by Catch 22. They are seen within 72 hours. From research it is known that children who go missing regularly are more vulnerable to being exploited. This issue is recognised within the pan Merseyside missing protocol with a view to reducing the number of missing incidents and supporting young people.*
6. Regarding County Lines, please could members also note the below Home Office Guidance; *County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.*
7. Officers discussed learning from the successful investigation and conviction of two brothers for grooming and sexual offences. Members asked how we support Victims once they have made a disclosure of exploitation. The victims (now adults) have provided invaluable feedback into how they were dealt with and treated.
8. Historically public services are good at reacting however there now needs to be more emphasis placed on prevention. Services need to *identify vulnerabilities within young people that may lead to exploitation so that they can be offered the appropriate support. As an example, officers are working with outlets where young people congregate to identify risks and put preventative measures in place.*
9. Members wanted reassurance that the issue of CE was being looked at more tactically. For example, if a local park is seen as an issue can officers visit and try to find out what is going on? Officers replied that Child Exploitation is now more transient. *A multi-agency approach is taken to identify hotspots and provide disruption whilst attempting to engage with the young people, as an example Operation Beachsafe / Operation parksafe.*
10. *It has been identified nationally that social media is a concern. Perpetrators use this platform as a way of engaging with young people in order to groom and exploit, often hiding behind fake profiles, making their identity difficult to locate.*