



## **RESPONSE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER OF WILTSHIRE AND SWINDON TO THE JTAI MULTIAGENCY RESPONSE TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT (Prevention, Identification, Protection and Support) - February 2020.**

### **Report Summary Findings**

The report describes findings from six JTAs (Bracknell Forest, Cornwall, Derby, Islington, Shropshire and York) carried out between September 2018 and May 2019.

This included a deep dive into the experiences of children and young people who are at risk of, or subject to, child sexual abuse in the family environment. The findings consider the extent to which children's social care, health professionals, the police and probation officers were effective in safeguarding children who live with sexual abuse in the family environment.

Whilst there are no specific recommendations, there are areas of focus which include:

- **Poor-quality criminal investigations:** Significant delays to police investigations mean that children are left in limbo, or at worst unsafe. Rather than arrest, voluntary attendance is being used to interview suspects, so children aren't protected by bail, while potential abusers could be destroying evidence. Inappropriate bail conditions leave abusers free to contact and, in some cases, even return to live with the children they are abusing.
- **Preventative work is absent or focused on known offenders:** Inspectors saw little work to educate the public about risks relating to child sex abuse. It was also clear that, possibly due to a reluctance to discuss the topic, local partners are not prioritising prevention work.
- **Professionals rely too heavily on children to speak out about abuse:** Children are unlikely to tell someone that they are being sexually abused, particularly when they know the perpetrator. Parents, professionals and the public must understand and know how to respond to the signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse – education is vital.
- **Some initiatives are working well, but these are too piecemeal:** Inspectors found examples of effective work in all areas. For example, when children do receive support, it is usually good quality and makes a positive difference – for example the cross-borough Lighthouse project, which provides therapeutic support for victims and their families. While individual initiatives and campaigns are working well, these are not in place in all areas. A more consistent and strategic approach to what works would widen impact and efficacy.

## **Chief Constable's comments**

Having read the areas of focus in this report, I am pleased to acknowledge that Wiltshire Police is already ahead of the curve in implementing many of the focus areas raised for improvement.

Within Wiltshire and Swindon, we have well established Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) which ensure that our officers and staff work alongside Children's Social Care and Health colleagues to share relevant information which enables us to identify risks and so safeguard children.

However, we are never complacent and are always looking to identify how we can improve the quality of investigations, and so provide the best service to all victims, including those who are vulnerable and have been abused both within and outside the family.

A good example of this is, we are currently in the process of reviewing our operating model to ensure that the correct number of appropriately trained officers are available to deal with the demand that these types of investigations require.

The training is undertaken with partner agencies to ensure that victims and families receive a consistent and joined up approach for this type of crime, as well as helping make the often difficult process of disclosure of abuse as least traumatic as possible.

I can confirm that our Child Protection lead has considered the findings detailed in the report with a view to capturing the areas within a continuous improvement plan.

This, along with other work in this important area of policing, recognises our ongoing commitment to tackling challenges as a partnership.

## **Police and Crime Commissioner's comments**

I welcome the findings of the JTAI Multi - agency Report to Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment. Although I agree with the comments of my Chief Constables in that we are ahead in many of the areas raised in the report as requiring improvement and further attention, there is, however, no room for complacency. More can be done to ensure that all children and young people receive consistently good support from all partner agencies.

The work currently being undertaken by the joint partners in the county to both identify the risks associated with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and to increase awareness to this type of crime, is I feel having a positive effect on the volume of Child Sexual Exploitation crime in the county.

The partnership approach in Wiltshire has strengthened its awareness of, and services to tackle, child sexual exploitation. It has also ensured that it has retained a distinct focus on child sexual abuse in the family environment. Responding effectively to child sexual exploitation requires all partners to take responsibility for their own work and to work collaboratively with each other.

I recently reported to the Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel that the number of crimes tagged with a CSE marker was decreasing. For the period October to December 2019 there were 20 crimes recorded with a CSE marker and in the last 12 month period, there were 9 fewer crimes in the previous year. Overall the trend is showing a slight decline, although I continue to ensure that crime numbers in this area decrease on an ongoing basis.

The Force and partners have an agreed plan in place with 19 strands of activity to manage and prevent the threat posed by child sexual abuse and exploitation to children within Wiltshire and Swindon. Performance against the plan is regularly monitored and as chair of the Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board it is a regular item for discussion and scrutiny.

Last month (18/03) I supported the national Child Exploitation Awareness Day. The Children's Society, Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council worked with Wiltshire Police to encourage everyone to consider how we can all think, stop, and speak out against exploitation and to highlight the dangers and signs linked to Child Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation. Jointly we delivered an important message regarding sexual exploitation and that it is a form of child abuse. Our campaign emphasised that CSE does not always involve physical contact and can occur through the use of technology such as phones and the internet.

Working with our partners, I and Wiltshire Police are determined to highlight and tackle the signs of CSE. The more people are aware of it, the easier it is for more people to spot the signs which will hopefully lead to more children being protected.

In the Wiltshire Council local authority area, council staff and police officers work collaboratively in a multi-agency group called the Emerald Team which delivers direct interventions with children and their families to reduce the risks of Child Sexual Exploitation and other types of exploitation such as criminal exploitation and county lines. A similar multi-agency group exists within the Swindon Borough Council area, and is called the Opal Team. Both teams are building on 'contextual safeguarding' on how people address concerns for young people when they are vulnerable to harm coming from outside of their home and family.

I have also been a strong advocate of Operation Makesafe, a project where Wiltshire Police and The Children's Society will be delivering training for hotels and B&Bs, making staff and proprietors aware of the signs which could lead to child exploitation - the aim of the training is to protect those most vulnerable from becoming victims. Training was scheduled for mid-March but had to be postponed, due to the coronavirus situation. However I am pleased to report that video training sessions are to be arranged with hotels and B&Bs very soon.

Clearly there is a concern that Hotels and B&Bs can be used by criminals to sexually abuse and criminally exploit children. The work that forms part of Operation Makesafe therefore seeks to work with managers of these businesses to help prevent this. Operation Makesafe focuses on training people to spot the signs of child exploitation, be it criminal and/or sexual, and report it to the police. Spotting signs of child abuse is everyone's responsibility and that includes those working in the service industry.

I trust the above serves to demonstrate a number of examples of how a joined up approach between the police and partner agencies can work to fight against child exploitation.

One of the priorities in my Police and Crime Plan is to protect the most vulnerable people in society and I feel very strongly that victims of sexual offences receive the utmost support and protection. I am proud to have set up Horizon - our victim and witness care service which can signpost people to a number of agencies or charities who can provide specialist support to those in need. I also support The Phoenix Project (Wiltshire), Swindon and Wiltshire Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) and Splitz Support Services who all play a valuable role in shaping strategy and policy, as well as offering practical valuable support services in this area of crime.

Tackling Child Sex Abuse has to be via a partnership and multi-agency approach. A key element of effective joint working to address child exploitation is an effective child protection system and I am confident that this exists in Wiltshire.

I am assured by Detective Superintendent Ben Mant (Public Protection Dept.) that the report findings have been reviewed and where necessary, incorporated into the Force Areas for Improvement.

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