

Policy Briefing

Inspection and the policing of CSE – Learning from the Joint Targeted Area Inspections

Dr Carlene Firmin¹

1. BACKGROUND, INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE

In 2016 Her Majesty's Inspectorate for the Constabulary (HMIC), Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Probation (HMIP), the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the social care division of Ofsted conducted five thematic joint inspections into local responses to child sexual exploitation. Inspections involved a 'deep dive' into the experiences of young people who services had identified as being at risk of CSE and/or going missing, and were undertaken in:

- South Tyneside
- Oxfordshire
- Central Bedfordshire
- Croydon
- Liverpool

Findings from the process were documented in individual letters to each area in addition to a thematic report. The letters and thematic report share findings on multi-agency progress and challenges across these five locations. This briefing draws out the learning from those documents that are specific to the policing of CSE and considers the implications for local policing practice and national policy in the light of the [needs assessment](#) conducted by the CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub in 2015. The themes considered in this briefing are:

- Implementing strategies in practice
- Analytical support, problem profiling and information sharing
- Barriers to multi-agency working
- Engaging with young people
- Contextual practices and approaches

Following a brief consideration of each theme this briefing will conclude by highlighting the policy implications of the JTAI CSE thematic process for the policing of CSE and associated vulnerabilities.

2. JTAI REPORT – THEMATIC FINDINGS

¹ [Dr Carlene Firmin](#) is a Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre and is providing expertise on peer-to-peer abuse and contextual safeguarding to the CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub.

Overall the JTAI reporting was complimentary about the policing response to CSE and noted that practice was 'effective and impressive' in most areas visited. This level of progress was also reflected in the needs assessment conducted by the CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub in 2015 which identified the progress that had been made, particularly in relation to the strategic commitment to addressing CSE, within forces across England and Wales. Challenges therefore are found in relation to the implementation and impact of that strategic commitment, and the variable practical application of local action plans and strategic documentation.

Strategic implementation

All five areas inspected as part of the JTAI process had strategies and plans in place to tackle CSE – a direction of travel identified nationally in 2013 report of the Office of the Commissioner's Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups. A number of forces visited also had clarity about their overall strategic responsibilities for responding to CSE and the varying roles of managers in overseeing and supporting the process of implementation.

However, as in keeping with the wider CSE and Policing Hub Policy needs assessment the JTAI process identified significant variability in the operational impact of both plans and coordinated management processes. The JTAI report concluded that this level of variation resulted in 'some children (having) to wait too long to get the help and support they need' (JTAI Report: 6). As has been documented in other reviews and inquiries on ways of ensuring a better fit between strategic commitment and operational delivery was the use and understanding of local problem profiles. The JTAI report found that when senior management within police forces had a good understanding of the local CSE profile they could in turn develop a helpful oversight of local practice and of the training and development needs of their staff to respond to this profile. Secondly, how the police and other partners worked together appeared to set the conditions for successful strategic implementation in areas that were inspected. The thematic report noted that strategic commitments were often 'collective' – i.e. across agencies – but this level of coordination was not realised in practice.

It seems, therefore, that in order to understand and develop successful approaches to strategic implementation, forces need to enhance both their understanding of local CSE profiles and the quality of their engagement in multi-agency partnerships.

Analytical support, problem profiling and information sharing

Over recent years multiple inquiries and reviews have identified the importance of building responses to CSE upon locally developed problem profiles. It is largely accepted that while all areas should be alert to the fact that young people can be sexually exploited in any part of the country, the ways in which exploitation may occur and the places it happens in will differ. As the profile differs, so too may the response in order to best safeguard young people from the local risks they are faced with. Fundamental to problem profiling activity is investment in analytical support and information sharing practices that ensure profiles are developed using a comprehensive and dynamic evidence base.

The JTAI report identified the significant benefits of profiling activity. From ensuring that local communities were informed of the local dynamics of risk as part of awareness-raising and prevention exercises, through to using profiles to communicate with young people about the risks they faced and the potential interventions that could be offered. The effective use of

profiling was evidenced as having a beneficial impact. However, while analytical support is largely put in place by police forces, with some investment from other agencies such as community safety and social care, the data required to build a profile is a multi-agency responsibility. The JTAI report noted the resource implications of sharing multi-agency data to build problem profiles and the need for dedicated analytical resource to map information as it was provided.

As a result it appears that while problem profiling has a critical role in ensuring the implementation of strategic commitments, its success may be determined by a) the amount of investment the police and others can make to this area of delivery and b) the quality of contributions made by multi-agency partners to the profiling building process.

Barriers to multi-agency working

During the CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub 2015 assessment, the need to improve multi-agency working was the most consistently identified challenge for policing CSE identified across published documents and our roundtable consultations across the country. While the Hub's wider assessment work was often focused on broad and complex partnerships across statutory, voluntary and private sectors, for example, much of the JTAI commentary identified particular persistent challenges in partnership working between the police and children's social care. The ability of the police to effectively address CSE was, in part, related to local response of children's services and vice-versa. The report argued that more work was required to 'enable the police and children's social care to have a better understanding of the reasons why children go missing' (JTAI: 4).

Furthermore, the inspections identified a number of cases where statutory child protection procedures were not followed in response to CSE and in one area this resulted in police failing to conduct a joint investigation with children's social care into a CSE referral. While it is important to note that this example only relates to one area featured in the JTAI thematic, the Hub's broader series of consultation roundtables in 2015-2016 identified similar recommendations for a need for consistent application of child protection procedures in response to CSE referrals and the challenges of achieving this. While the JTAI report did not explicitly note this, other inquiries have suggested that CSE is not always an easy fit with child protection frameworks that are largely focused on abuse within the family – a matter for wider policy debate and development.

While these challenges to multi-agency working were identified the JTAI process also surfaced examples of effective engagement between the police, children's social care and other partners – including consistent and coordinated approaches to notify partners when young people were missing from home or care. The issue of variability was often at the centre of many of the report findings, and raises questions about the role of national, regional and local policy development in ensuring that effective outcomes that are achieved for children in one area can be secured in others. Inconsistency, amongst other matters, can have a significant impact on the ability of forces to successfully engage with young people – and this matter was identified as a need in both our assessment of the policy landscape and the JTAI thematic report.

Engagement with young people

In keeping with wider research into CSE (Beckett & Warrington, 2015; Berelowitz, et al., 2012) the JTAI report noted the importance of building relationships with young people in order to successfully engage them in services and support. The Hub's roundtable consultations identified both strengths and areas for development in the ability of police officers to successfully establish trusting relationships with young people. It was noted that community and neighbourhood-based officers often had good relationships with young people that had developed over a period of time – they were able to engage with young people on the streets or in other localities where they were spending their time and develop trust through informal interaction. Roundtable attendees also noted, however, that these were often not the same officers who would conduct 'safe and well' checks after young people had been missing from home or interview them when they were giving statements about their experiences of CSE.

It was therefore encouraging that during the JTAI process inspectors identified police forces that had developed practices that were able to respond to the needs of children and young people. The disruption of perpetrators was also seen as central to that process and effective investigations and well-communicated outcomes provided opportunities to develop trust. In one example the report noted how young women stated that they understood why the police were acting on the information that they had provided and through relationships with social workers in a multi-disciplinary team they were able to feel more protected. The police role in perpetrator disruption, as a means of building trust, was also noted in another site where one young person reported that 'the police were particularly helpful and he felt they had taken some of the responsibility off him by monitoring his phone and making sure support was in place when risks increased which helped' (JTAI: 14).

Beyond disrupting abuse, inspectors identified police forces that were attempting to implement lessons learnt from previous operations. In one site, for example, the police ensured that a young person had someone to speak with who they trusted when deciding whether to pursue a case through the criminal justice process.

Despite these advances, some inspections still identified the use of problematic language within records that appeared to blame young people for the abuse that they were experiencing. Delays in two areas impacted the ability of forces to build trust with the young people they were responding to, and had the opposite effect of the proactive disruption work noted above. The report authors noted that failures to demonstrate that they were taking a young person seriously and were committed to keeping them safe impacted the confidence that young people had in the police or their trust that interventions would work.

It seems therefore, that the challenge of consistently engaging young people in the policing response to CSE persists to a certain extent. The effective work with young people was aided by a) partnership working, b) effective information sharing and profiling and c) wider strategic commitments to responding to CSE. As such the JTAI process suggests that in terms of developing responses to policing CSE there is a level of interconnectedness between strategic implementation, profiling and information sharing, multi-agency working and engaging young people.

3. CONTEXTUAL PRACTICE

At the University of Bedfordshire we have been developing an evidence base for contextual and holistic approaches to addressing CSE over a number of years. From involving parents,

communities and businesses in the response to CSE (D'Arcy & Thomas, 2016), identifying the peer group, school and neighbourhood contexts associated with the issue (Firmin, et al., 2016), and evaluating services with reference to the contexts in which they are delivered (Harris, et al., 2015), we have demonstrated the significance of 'place' and 'space' in building responses to CSE.

The JTAI report has paid significant attention to the importance of developing contextual responses to CSE and referred to a briefing we produced on inspecting CSE through this lens (Firmin, 2015) in their thematic publication. In terms of policing CSE there are important practices to note. The report highlights:

- The roles played by schools, businesses, recreation and transport providers in identifying, referring and responding to concerns related to CSE. In terms of policing this identifies potential roles for school officers, neighbourhood and transport policing teams, as being central to any local response to CSE. Indeed the report explicitly notes the benefits of aligning community engagement work with police and community safety activity to disrupt the behaviours of those abusing young people.
- The need to record information about schools, peer groups and neighbourhood dynamics when undertaking risk assessments. As a consequence of this it is critical that those building police intelligence or local problem profiles identify routes to accessing data about these spaces, and the impact such information may have on how risk is understood locally.
- The importance of understanding the contexts and relationships in which CSE occurs, so that responses seek to change these dynamics in addition to the intervening with the individual behaviours or experiences of young people who have been exploited and/or those who have exploited them. From a training perspective, policing colleagues may want to consider the extent to which context is covered in training programmes along with policing approaches to disrupt them
- The benefits of developing a 'whole council approach' when seeking to fully recognise the partnerships required to respond to contexts associated with CSE. By forming working relationships with a range of council officials police forces will be better equipped to produce multi-agency responses to public environments in which young people are exposed to CSE.

The JTAI report provides a number of examples of contextual approaches identified in the sites that were inspected, this included activity developed in South Tyneside where:

94% of taxi drivers have been trained in identifying child sexual exploitation and training is a condition of receiving a licence. As a result, between 2014 and 2015, there has been a 53% increase in reports from taxi drivers of concerns about child exploitation to the police (JTAI: 12-13).

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This document has provided an account of the thematic implications of the JTAI CSE inspection report for the policing of CSE in England and Wales. In addition to highlighting thematic challenges with existing practices and examples of where policing responses appear to be progressing, the report signifies potential policy recommendations. The issue of national variations in the efficacy of policing responses implies that more may need to be done in order to achieve a level of consistency for young people who have experienced CSE. The multiple

policing roles of relevance to CSE are also of note, and suggest a need to consider force-wide responses to the issue in addition to the activities of any specialist or public protection unit. The continued confusion, in some areas, about the role of child protection processes for responding to the risk of CSE – particularly when it occurs beyond a child’s family who are fully engaged and active in working with professionals to safeguard their child – is also of note. Most critically, it seems that in order to advance the policing of CSE nationally levers need to be identified for consistent implementation of strategic commitments. Ensuring that analytical support is appropriately resourced, barriers to partnership working are addressed and successful approaches for engaging young people are more routinely utilised are all fundamental to bridging the policy and practice gap.

REFERENCES

The JTAI report referenced throughout this briefing can be accessed [here](#)

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