


PCC and CC Force Inspection response record

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Force	Staffordshire
Police and Crime Commissioner	Ben Adams
Chief Constable	Acting CC Becky Riggs
Title of inspection	PEEL Spotlight: The policing response to the investigation of online child sexual abuse and the management of registered sex offenders
Published Date	
Inspectorate	 <p>HMICFRS Makina communities safer</p>
Summary of inspection	<p>This spotlight report highlights how police forces and national bodies must work together to make sure forces can meet the demand faced by online child sexual abuse and exploitation teams and management of sexual offenders and violent offenders teams.</p> <p>We have reviewed the findings related to the work done by these teams from our 2021/22 and 2023–25 police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy inspections, and identified where police forces could further improve, as well as examples of good practice and innovation.</p> <p>We have identified where police forces could further improve, as well as examples of good practice and innovation. And we have identified opportunities for the National Police Chiefs’ Council, College of Policing and the Home Office to work with forces to improve the system. Our report makes 16 recommendations to support this aim.</p>
Grade	
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve risk prioritisation and oversight of OCSAE referrals, including regular intelligence reviews and central oversight 2. Review OCSAE staffing levels to ensure sufficient capacity to manage demand. 3. Develop national guidance and training for online child sexual abuse investigations. 4. Strengthen use of arrest, bail and bail checks to better manage risk to the public. 5. Provide support for families of suspects, including third-party provision. 6. Improve MOSOVO governance and data quality to ensure consistent offender management. 7. Enhance the new national offender management system (MAPPS) with stronger functionality and funding. 8. Strengthen MOSOVO workforce planning and supervision, including demand forecasting and reducing abstractions. 9. Review processes for removing Sexual Harm Prevention Orders where appropriate. 10. Ensure compliance with national standards for offender visits and checks, including unannounced and double-crewed visits. 11. Update national guidance (APP) for offender management to reflect current risks and practice. 12. Introduce national training for MOSOVO roles, including supervisors and digital capability. 13. Assess national procurement of digital triage equipment to improve efficiency and consistency. 14. Develop a national risk-based system for prioritising digital device examination and reducing backlogs. 15. Introduce mandatory wellbeing screening and support for staff in high-risk roles. 16. Strengthen partnership arrangements with probation, including formal service level agreements and escalation processes.



Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's initial response

The Commissioner welcomes the report and recognises both the increasing demand and risk profile associated with online child sexual abuse and offender management. The scale of growth in referrals and registered offenders reinforces this as a system-level risk requiring whole-system leadership, not solely policing response. There is clear alignment with the Commissioner's priorities on:

- Protecting vulnerable people and children
- Preventing reoffending and managing risk in the community
- Strengthening partnership working and system governance

However, the findings also indicate structural pressures (capacity, capability, and consistency) that require robust local assurance.

The Commissioner notes that the report highlights both good practice and areas requiring improvement, alongside increasing demand and complexity in offending. This reinforces the need for strong local leadership, clear governance, and sustained investment to ensure that risk is effectively managed and safeguarding opportunities are maximised.

1. Management of risk and safeguarding:

The Commissioner places particular emphasis on ensuring that:

- Risk relating to suspects and registered offenders is consistently identified, assessed and actively managed throughout investigations and offender management activity
- Safeguarding remains the primary consideration in all operational decisions, including arrest, bail and ongoing monitoring

The Commissioner expects to see clear evidence that no cases are subject to unmanaged drift or delay, particularly where children may be at risk.

2. Capacity, capability and resilience:

The report identifies ongoing pressures relating to staffing levels and specialist skills. The Commissioner seeks assurance that:

- Staffordshire Police has a robust understanding of current and future demand
- Workforce levels and skills are sufficient to manage that demand safely
- There is a clear plan to strengthen training, professional development and retention within these specialist areas

3. Governance, performance and oversight:

The Commissioner recognises the importance of strong performance frameworks and data quality in managing risk effectively. Assurance is sought that:

- There is effective, consistent governance across OCSAE and MOSOVO functions
- Performance data is reliable, accessible and used proactively to identify and address emerging risks
- Senior leaders have clear visibility of backlogs, overdue activity and workload pressures

4. Consistency of practice and adherence to national standards

The Commissioner is concerned by findings relating to inconsistent approaches and adherence to guidance. The force is asked to demonstrate how it will ensure:

- Consistent application of national guidance and authorised professional practice
- Clear accountability where practice deviates from expected standards
- A culture where risk, rather than resource pressure, drives decision-making



5. Use of technology and timeliness of investigations

Delays in digital forensics and inconsistent use of technology present a direct risk to safeguarding. The Commissioner seeks assurance that:

- The force is actively addressing delays in device examination and investigation timelines
- Investment in technology is aligned to improving operational effectiveness and safeguarding outcomes
- There is clarity on how digital capability will be strengthened over time

6. Workforce wellbeing and sustainability

The Commissioner recognises the significant emotional and psychological demands placed on officers and staff working in these areas. Assurance is requested that:

- Wellbeing provision is proactive, accessible and embedded, rather than reliant on self-referral
- Supervisors are equipped to provide trauma-informed support and oversight
- Workforce sustainability is being considered as part of overall service delivery

7. Partnership working

Effective safeguarding requires strong partnership arrangements, particularly with probation and children's social care. The Commissioner expects:

- Robust, clearly defined partnership arrangements with shared accountability for risk
- Effective information sharing and escalation processes
- Evidence that partnership activity is improving outcomes for victims and communities

The Commissioner supports HMICFRS in highlighting the need for urgent and sustained improvement in this area. While recognising the complexity of the operational environment and the dedication of staff, the Commissioner is clear that this is a priority area where strong leadership and demonstrable progress are essential. The Commissioner therefore requests a comprehensive force response outlining:

- Current levels of compliance and performance
- Key risks and mitigations
- A clear and deliverable improvement plan

This should provide confidence that the force is taking decisive action to strengthen its response, manage risk effectively and safeguard the public.

Chief Constable's response

Staffordshire Police welcome this report and the recommendations within. We recognise the sustained and increasing volume of registered sex offenders being managed within the community, alongside growing complexity in offending behaviours, particularly within the online environment. This reinforces the importance of continual review of our operating model to ensure it remains resilient, effective and aligned to emerging demand.

Our dedicated Police Online Investigation Team (POLIT) have been utilising the KIRAT Risk Assessment Tool, Prioritisation Tool and Case Management System (CMS) for some time and consistently meet compliance timescales. At the end of Q3, Staffordshire were within the top four forces nationally for management of referral demand. This provides strong assurance that current processes are effective and risk-focused, however, in acknowledging the predicted uplift in national demand, we are clear that further capacity planning and refinement is required to sustain this position.



A review of the POLIT operating model is being carried out in conjunction with MOSOVO, recognising the intrinsic interdependencies between online investigations and the ongoing management of registered sex offenders in the community. This work is being informed by both current performance and future demand modelling, including anticipated increases linked to national activity such as NCA referrals.

The review is focused on identifying sustainable operating solutions that balance safeguarding outcomes with workforce wellbeing, ensuring our people remain supported in what is a high-risk and high-demand environment.

Demand, safeguarding responses and suspect management are overseen through robust daily performance oversight at both operational and executive level, supported by established governance structures. This reflects a clear understanding of the fragility and criticality of this system, and the significant risk that high-harm perpetrators pose to children, vulnerable individuals and families. This level of scrutiny ensures that risk is continually assessed, prioritised and acted upon at pace.

We also continue to ensure that demand pressures, including increasing RSO volumes, are clearly articulated within workforce planning, with ongoing consideration of the offender manager ratios required to maintain effective and proactive risk management. This aligns with wider national conversations regarding capacity and sustainability across MOSOVO services.

Staffordshire Police remain proactive and outward-looking, embracing innovation and aligning closely with national portfolios to enhance our response to child protection and offender management. We are reassured that our teams are already connected with forces identified as delivering best practice and are actively contributing to the national ambition through pilot activity, including the development of new referral pathways, digital tools, and improved data-driven approaches.

This ensures that Staffordshire is not only maintaining a strong current safeguarding response but is also well-positioned to adapt to future challenges, delivering a service that is both effective and sustainable.

Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's overall comments

The Commissioner welcomes the Acting Chief Constable's positive and proactive response, particularly the evidence of strong current performance in managing referral demand and the clear recognition of the increasing scale, complexity and risk associated with online child sexual abuse and offender management. The use of structured risk assessment tools, daily oversight arrangements, and engagement with national best practice provides encouraging assurance that safeguarding is being treated as a critical priority.

The Commissioner is reassured by the force's commitment to reviewing the POLIT and MOSOVO operating models, alongside its focus on future demand modelling and workforce sustainability. This reflects an appropriate understanding of the systemic pressures highlighted by HMICFRS and aligns with the expectation that services evolve in response to both current and emerging risk.

However, the Commissioner considers that the scale of the challenge set out within the inspection requires continued pace, clarity and demonstrable impact. While current performance indicators are strong, these must be sustained and translated into consistent outcomes across all areas identified by HMICFRS, particularly in relation to:

- Consistency of practice and adherence to national standards



- Timeliness of investigations and digital forensics
- MOSOVO governance, data quality and offender management activity
- The robustness of partnership arrangements, particularly with probation and safeguarding partners

The Commissioner welcomes the emphasis on governance and daily oversight but will seek further assurance that this provides clear visibility of backlogs, overdue activity and unmanaged risk, and that it is driving timely intervention where required. It will be important to demonstrate how this oversight translates into improved consistency of practice across teams and sustained compliance with national guidance.

The Commissioner is particularly supportive of the force's focus on workforce wellbeing and sustainability. Given the high-harm nature of this work, it is essential that wellbeing provision is proactive, embedded and matched to demand, with supervisors equipped to provide effective support and challenge. This must remain a core enabler of service quality and risk management.

The Commissioner also notes the force's engagement with national innovation and pilot activity. This is positive and should continue; however, it will be important to ensure that learning is embedded locally at pace and that investment in digital capability directly reduces delays and enhances safeguarding outcomes.

Overall, the Commissioner is encouraged by the direction of travel and the strength of leadership demonstrated. However, this remains a high-risk area of business with significant public protection implications. The Commissioner will therefore maintain close oversight of delivery against this agenda and will monitor:

- Force action plan progress
- Evidence of sustained performance under increasing demand and
- Continued strengthening of partnership arrangements with clear shared accountability.

This approach will ensure that Staffordshire Police not only maintains its current strengths but delivers the sustained, system-wide improvements required to protect vulnerable people and manage risk effectively within the community.