

- The focus at a borough level on reducing MOPAC 7 crimes⁵ is set out in posters and at management meetings far more clearly and more frequently than the need to achieve good results on behalf of London's children. We were told in interviews that there was a greater focus on reducing these crimes than upon child protection. This requires urgent correction. (See pp.22–23.)
- While we found good examples of officers working quickly and effectively to protect children when the risk to them was evident and straightforward, they frequently failed to consider whether other children might be at risk from the same perpetrator, for example by checking which other young people he or she was in contact with on social media or in real life. (See pp.69–70.)
- Some officers and staff did not have the training they needed to do their jobs effectively. For instance, we found officers in roles focused on tackling child sexual exploitation (CSE) who had not been trained in the subject, and some staff within the force's command and control centres⁶ could not recall having had any safeguarding or CSE training as part of their initial training course. Given that these staff represent the first opportunity to recognise risk to a child and deploy the right resources to protect them, this is a very serious omission. (See pp.66–67.)
- Officers frequently failed to request strategy discussions⁷ with all relevant partner agencies (such as children's social care and health services). Police attendance at child protection review conferences⁸ was also patchy. These shortcomings mean that formal opportunities to share information and develop comprehensive and robust action plans to address identified risks with partner

⁵ The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has established seven principal neighbourhood or 'MOPAC 7' crime types as particular priorities for the MPS: burglary, criminal damage, robbery, theft from a motor vehicle, theft from a person, theft of a motor vehicle and violence with injury. See pp.22–23 for more detail about the 'MOPAC 7' crime types.

⁶ These handle emergency calls and other incoming calls to the MPS, and despatching police officers to deal with incidents. See p.39 for more detail on the centres.

⁷ These multi-agency meetings or phone calls should involve children's social care services, the police, health and other bodies and be convened to plan rapid future action if there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering (or is likely to suffer) significant harm. See *Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, HM Government, March 2015, pp.35ff. Available from www.gov.uk

⁸ These bring together family members (and the child where appropriate) with the supporters, advocates and professionals most involved with the child and family to make decisions about the child's future health, safety and development. These conferences are convened on completion of police work with children who are identified as 'in need' rather than 'at risk'. See *Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, HM Government, March 2015, pp.46ff. Available from www.gov.uk

agencies are not being fully exploited. As a result, decisions on how best to protect a child or decisions about the level of risk he or she faces are often taken more slowly than they should be, in isolation and without proper consideration of all the circumstances of the case. (See pp.52–54.)

- Officers and staff often do not assess cases properly or speak to children who are clearly at significant risk of CSE, and do not accelerate action to protect them and trace suspects – meaning they continue to be at risk of abuse. (See pp.74–77.)
- Children are frequently detained in custody after they have been charged rather than being moved to more appropriate accommodation (which should be provided by the local authority). In the 40 custody cases we audited, we found 39 that resulted in the child being charged, refused bail and kept in police custody to appear in court. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984⁹ is clear that the police should avoid keeping children and young people in police custody any longer than necessary, both pre and post-charge. (See pp.87–92.)
- Borough officers are often unaware of the registered sex offenders in their areas and so miss opportunities to gather intelligence routinely about those who pose the greatest risk to children. (See pp.83–86.)
- We often found unacceptable delays, in all kinds of investigations, in gathering evidence, updating children on the progress of their cases, or acting on information (for instance, about individuals possessing indecent images of children). (See, for instance, pp.75–76.)

The MPS is the first force that HMIC has inspected as part of its child protection programme to have no single chief officer with responsibility and accountability for all child protection matters across the force.¹⁰ This has led us to conclude that there is an indefensible absence of strategic oversight of this very important issue. (See pp.19–25.)

We also found that the force does not adequately use MPS-wide police and partnership data analysis of child abuse and other related offence types to track incidents, interventions and outcomes for children. Instead, we found different teams and areas carrying out their own analyses of demand and trends, although frontline officers were frequently unaware of any analysis undertaken in their boroughs.

⁹ Section 38(6) and Code C.

¹⁰ The MPS has separate heads of profession at both commander and deputy assistant commissioner level for specific themed areas including domestic abuse, missing persons, sexual offences, harmful cultural practices and female genital mutilation.

Meanwhile, the operation is resulting in new identification of those involved in the sharing and distribution of indecent child images, of around 400 a month. This area of online child abuse image offending carries significant risk, specifically for those cases not in the high-risk category, which are therefore not subject to investigation to identify suspects or victims, or to undertake safeguarding.

Despite force investment in staff specifically for Operation Bellona, maintaining the capacity and capability to deal with the significant scale of online offending remains a serious problem. The capacity and staffing problem has been recognised and recorded as a risk, together with an acknowledgement of the risk that those online accounts not subject to investigation represent to children.

CSE

Officers and staff working in the boroughs reported they did not have access to, or were not aware of, analytical information about CSE or missing children to provide them with a comprehensive understanding of the local picture. This is despite evidence that some boroughs do have local profiles (i.e. analytical products setting out where there are trends or concentrations of offences, victims or places where crimes take place), and the fact that the force has recently developed a CSE 'dashboard' (i.e. summary of information held), produced from police data. This is more focused, however, on high-level management data, rather than giving any analysis of what this might be indicating. So it provides top-line numbers on matters such as victim gender, alcohol or drug involvement, the number of flagged CSE categories and investigation status.

In December 2015, the National Police Chiefs' Council collected information on the nature and prevalence of CSE from all the relevant agencies across England and Wales (such as local authorities, and health and education services). The purpose of this exercise was to produce regional problem profiles or assessments. A London CSE problem profile is in preparation, with completion expected in June 2016.

However, the MPS still needs to do more to understand the extent and nature of CSE locally within each borough, and particularly across London. At present there is insufficient information and intelligence about CSE in London, especially in terms of knowing where perpetrators live and offend, and links to missing children. Furthermore, the information and intelligence about CSE that does exist is not used effectively to safeguard children. While some individuals in other agencies know about children who are at risk and the work the police may be doing to manage that risk, better analysis of all the information held by all relevant agencies could lead to more targeted and effective work to protect children and prevent offending. Such analysis would also help refine the requirement of what information should be gathered by which agency.