

### **Child Protection Deep Dive Initial Findings.**

In May 2020 T/D/Supt McNALLY was commissioned by CC FARRELL to commence some deep dive audit work of case files to test progress against the findings of the 2019 Child Protection inspection. 20 cases have been subject of a deep audit across the following themes – Missing child; domestic abuse cases where children were present; DII related investigation; child protection investigations; and police protection cases.

It should be noted that this work is a snapshot as the sample size is relatively small because deep dive audit is time consuming if it is to be of real value.

To reflect HMICFRS inspection grading categories<sup>1</sup>, the cases were graded as follows:- **8 Good; 3 Fair, 1 Requires Improvement and 5 Inadequate.**<sup>2</sup>

#### **Key findings:-**

It is clear that positive progress has been made since the HMICFRS Child Protection inspection. There were good standards of investigation, clearly documented THRIVE and good supervisory oversight. The rationale for exercising powers of Police Protection is much more clearly documented; along with the rationale for rescinding the power.

BWV was effectively used in all domestic abuse cases.

Where individual cases have been highlighted to officers and their supervisors, they have been receptive to feedback and open to viewing the process as a learning experience.

Since the time of the Child Protection inspection a monthly Children and Families Scrutiny Panel has been introduced and is chaired by Detective Superintendent ASHTON however the scope for deep dive of cases is limited within the panel due to the time consuming nature of the work.

The audit however found that there are still areas for improvement in relation to the management of missing children investigations – in particular where children were Looked After children in the care of the Local Authority, and often when they were missing overnight. This audit found that often the vulnerability of such children was not recognised neither in a Force Control Room environment, nor in the front line response. This was also the case when children went missing frequently. Whilst all missing children should as a minimum be graded as ‘medium’ risk, there sometimes appeared to be little cognisance of additional risk factors such as a child who had been shown to be vulnerable to exploitation. Where a child is in the Looked After system and repeatedly goes missing, their vulnerability *increases*, yet this review found evidence that officers and staff were failing to recognise this and that there was a culture of people assuming that those children were *less* at risk, and an assumption that they would return home of their own accord, because this was a pattern of ‘normal’ behaviour. In fact, in one recent case the word ‘Street wise’ was used to describe a child who was missing from Local Authority care and was vulnerable to CSE.

Some immediate changes have been implemented by A/Chief Insp ARTHUR to address some of these gaps. These include implementation of new opening codes in Webstorm that differentiate between cases where the missing person is under the age of 18 or over the age of 18. For those cases where the person is under 18, a new question set has been developed that guides the call handler into making a more accurate assessment of that young person’s vulnerability. Incident logs relating to missing children can now only be closed follow a supervisor review. A revised training package has been developed around the ‘vulnerability’ element of the THRIVE and is being rolled out in Force Control Room currently. The impact of these changes will need to be tested in the coming months.

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<sup>1</sup> Note HMICFRS intended to pilot the introduction of a ‘FAIR’ grading category in PEEL2020 in one force. Inspection activity was suspended during Covid however and this pilot has not taken place. No decisions have been made as to whether a ‘FAIR’ grading category will be adopted therefore.

<sup>2</sup> Records of individual audits are retained within the Safeguarding folders.

The planned changes in Force Control Room however do not address the wider issues about awareness of risk, or of front line response in managing missing person enquiries for vulnerable Looked After children, particularly when they go missing overnight.

This audit has also found that whilst there are good examples of the use of BWV in domestic abuse cases, frequently officers are still not engaging with children who are present during a domestic abuse incident to understand what life is like for that child.

**Recommendations:-**

The force should consider developing arrangements for regular deep dive audit and scrutiny of case files to inform organisational learning and to ensure they are well placed to address issues in advance of the annual HMICFRS Victim Services Assessment. (VSA)

The force should consider how the learning from audit and scrutiny is effectively captured within the organisational memory;

The force should take steps to improve the front line response to missing children enquires in cases where young people are missing overnight.