

## **Devon and Cornwall – National child protection inspection September 2015**

### **Background**

This report into the inspection of child protection arrangements in Devon & Cornwall was published in September 2015. Protecting children is one of the most important tasks the police undertake. Only the police can investigate suspected crimes, arrest perpetrators and monitor sex offenders. Police officers have the power to take a child who is in danger into a place of safety, or to seek an order to restrict an offender's contact with children. The police service also has a significant role working with other agencies to ensure the child's protection and well-being, longer term.

Although the report noted a strong strategic and leadership focus on safeguarding generally and child protection specifically there were a number of areas of real concern highlighted. The report noted that the initial response to reports of concerns about child welfare was good. There were issues highlighted about the awareness of staff and the consistency of evidence gathering to support assessment of risk. Specific concerns were raised about the management of children who regularly go missing from home.

Issues were also raised about the quality of investigations focusing on the capacity and capability of resources to undertake investigations and supervision.

Significant backlogs in the cases waiting to be dealt with by the high-tech crime unit were noted and although these are subject to risk-based prioritisation there was concern that the residual risk was considerable.

Recording of strategic meetings and decision making was also highlighted as needing action to improve.

### **Police & Crime Commissioners Response**

I welcome the report describing the results of Her Majesty of Inspectorates inspection of child protection arrangements in Devon & Cornwall.

I was pleased to read that HMIC recognised the strategic focus on this issue that is evident in my Police and Crime Plan. I was particularly pleased that they found that this was being reflected in the Chief Constable's leadership and commitment to deliver improved services to protect vulnerable children. This issue is a clear priority for me and has driven a great deal of force activity by the police to ensure that potential harm or risk is identified and that the force work together with partners to provide effective support and protection.

The report highlights a number of clear concerns and areas where improvement is required. However I would note that some of these are areas where pilot initiatives were already underway and these were already delivering improvements in children's safeguarding in Devon & Cornwall at the time of publication.

In addition I feel strongly that some of the issues concerning recording and outcomes may be the product of the singular and police-centric focus of the inspection. While I expect the Chief Constable to ensure that this issue is addressed, a broader inspection that included a review of child protection arrangements across stakeholders might have provided a more rounded view.

The Chief Constable has provided me with an action plan that sets out a clear response to the substantive issues raised and will address the recommendations set out. I shall be holding him to account for delivery against this action plan.