

HMICFRS National Child Protection Inspection of North Yorkshire Police (November 2021)

The Commissioner has been requested to provide Members with a response and action update on Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) National Child Protection Inspection of North Yorkshire Police which was conducted in November 2021, with the final report published on 29th March 2022.

The following report provides the Commissioner's response to the inspection findings and an update on progress and actions planned. North Yorkshire Police will attend the meeting to provide further detail verbally should Members have any questions specific to the delivery of actions to date.

Background

In November 2021, HMICFRS visited North Yorkshire Police as part of a national thematic inspection on child protection where every force in England and Wales is being assessed.

Following the inspection, HMICFRS published their report on Tuesday 29th March 2022 which is set out at Agenda item 8a for Members.

The report is of concern and disappointment to the Commissioner and to the Chief Constable as it showed that while the inspectorate found examples of good practice during their inspection in November, they also found inconsistency in North Yorkshire Police's treatment of children across the cases they examined.

The Commissioner is clear that all children deserve to grow up in a safe environment, cared for and protected from harm. But too many do not, and our police forces have an important role in identifying those who are vulnerable, protecting them and meeting their needs. That is why both the Commissioner and Chief Constable were candid in acknowledging that what this inspection found is unacceptable.

Sometimes not enough has been done to ensure that North Yorkshire Police can show that vulnerable children are as protected as they should be in North Yorkshire and York. All too often the failings come despite the best efforts of those who have a policing role to safeguard them.

It is important to highlight that the findings of this inspection are not seen as a reflection on individual North Yorkshire Police officers and staff and the important roles they undertake every day. Members will see from the report that this was noted by the Inspectors who witnessed the dedication and commitment from the officers and staff who conducted child abuse investigations, while often working in difficult circumstances.

Recommendations

The HMICFRS report set out ten recommendations for North Yorkshire Police, five of which were for immediate action and five identified by the Inspectorate for action within three months.

The Commissioner is satisfied that a robust action plan is in place and that a clear reporting and accountability structure is in place within North Yorkshire Police to address the recommendations and monitor progress.

The areas which have been identified by the Inspectorate for immediate action have all been addressed. Work is well underway for those recommendations which were identified by the Inspectorate for action within three months with much improvement already made to date.

North Yorkshire Police have progressed at speed with action to improve its policies, practices, leadership and governance which:

- Provides clear guidance to the control room staff to help them make the right decisions on officer response.
- Helps officers to expand their consideration of how they capture and take account of the 'voice of the child' through delivery of enhanced awareness and training.
- Brings greater clarity and consistency to its missing children arrangements and practices, including supervision, investigation and sharing of information through a revised overarching Missing Person policy which covers both adults and children.
- Improves how they work with and share information with partners about children at risk of exploitation.
- Shares the right information, with the right people, at the right time.
- Assigns investigations to officers with the right level of skills and capability.
- Ensures they work with partners to be able to take children to an appropriate place of safety and how they manage the detention of children when appropriate.
- Uses the appropriate systems to share information about registered sex offenders.
- Improves the level of awareness, understanding and skills in the area of Child Sexual Exploitation.

As part of the work being delivered, North Yorkshire Police have sought external guidance and expertise to progress key recommendations. This is to ensure any response to the recommendations is reflective of good practice identified in forces nationally, through engagement with HMICFRS, National Police Chiefs' Council and College of Policing.

Activity to Date

Upon receiving the *draft* HMICFRS National Child Protection Inspection report on 10th January 2022, North Yorkshire Police informed the Commissioner and her Executive Management Team of the report findings immediately and a full formal briefing followed four weeks later. While the Commissioner was rightly concerned by the content of the report, she was supportive of the draft plans presented to her which were being implemented without delay.

North Yorkshire Police were given six weeks from the date of the publication of the report on 29th March to respond to HMICFRS with an action plan. The Commissioner was reassured that North Yorkshire Police were able to set out their draft plans to HMICFRS on 2nd March. These plans were

further confirmed in full on 28th April when careful consideration was given to each recommendation and a detailed action plan was provided. This demonstrated to the Commissioner that North Yorkshire Police had not waited for the publication of the report before taking action. The Chief Constable and the Senior Leadership Team took the report and its findings seriously and acted quickly to address the recommendation presented in the report and make improvements in the service.

The Commissioner has a responsibility under s55 Police Act 1996, to respond formally to the HMICFRS National Child Protection Inspection report. The Commissioner's response is underway and will be completed before the deadline of 24th May 2022.

The Commissioner was encouraged that North Yorkshire Police took swift action to implement a Gold command structure following receipt of the draft report in January to address the findings and look at measures that could be implemented immediately to improve the service.

The first NCPI Gold meeting took place on 4th February, which is chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable Mabs Hussain. This strategic group addresses the issues raised within the report and tracks improvements against the action Plan. The Gold group initially met on a fortnightly basis to ensure a clear action plan was in place and has now moved to meeting on a monthly basis.

Steve Cotter, the HMICFRS Force Liaison Lead for Lancashire Constabulary and North Yorkshire Police attends the Gold group to hear of the progress being made to which both the Commissioner and the Chief Constable are grateful for his attendance and support.

Temporary Assistant Chief Constable Lindsey Butterfield chairs the Silver group, ensuring delivery and progress against the action plan and reports directly to the Gold group. The Bronze leads own and deliver against each action within the Plan which includes the Heads of Safeguarding, Crime, Customer Contact, Criminal Justice and Custody, Learning and Development and further supported by People Services, Business Insight and Communications.

North Yorkshire Police have also appointed one of their recently retired Sergeants into the role of Child Protection Coordinator to support the ongoing work. The Child Protection Coordinator brings with her a wealth of policing knowledge and experience over 30 years with most of her career spent as a Detective safeguarding vulnerable people. The role will assist in co-ordinating the work to address the recommendations set out within the HMICFRS report.

The Commissioner has attended two of Gold meetings in March and May with one of her Executive Managers being a permanent member of the group. A Senior Manager from the OPFCC is a member of the Silver group, ensuring the Commissioner receives regular updates on progress.

Members were provided with a private briefing on 16th March by the Commissioner, the Chief Constable and the Deputy Chief Constable which respected the embargo placed on the report but gave a summary of the specific areas for improvement and actions being taken.

The Commissioner, along with North Yorkshire Police, met with local authority partners in February who have offered their full support in addressing the report's findings and ensuring that children are kept safe in the city and the county.

It is the Commissioner's responsibility to scrutinise the work of North Yorkshire Police and to hold the Chief Constable to account. Therefore, the Commissioner held a special Public Accountability Meeting on the HMICFRS National Child Protection Inspection on 8th April, immediately after the

report was published. This provided North Yorkshire Police the opportunity to set out their response and approach to improving the service they deliver in protecting children.

At the special Public Accountability Meeting, North Yorkshire Police presented the work which had already taken place by 8th April to address:

- the missing children arrangements;
- improving officer and staff's understanding of child sexual exploitation;
- the management of registered sex offenders and;
- recommendations which require support from partner agencies.

The Commissioner and her Team promoted the special Public Accountability Meeting on social media to engage and reach out to the public so they could submit any questions they wished North Yorkshire Police or the Commissioner to answer. Nine questions were submitted which were either addressed in full at the meeting or followed up with correspondence where further information was provided.

Further information is available on the OPFCC website where the special NCPI Public Accountability Meeting can be viewed which can be accessed via the link <https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/police-oversight/governance/governance-process/corporate-scrutiny-board/pam-8april2022/>.

Next Steps

The Commissioner will review publicly the progress made against the National Child Protection Inspection action plan as part of the Safeguarding Public Accountability Meeting which is due to be held on 21st July 2022. For this meeting North Yorkshire Police have been asked to present on delivery three months following publication of the HMICFRS report.

North Yorkshire Police are planning to host another engagement session with partners in July to follow on from the local authority partner briefing session held in February. This session will provide partners with an update on progress and provide an opportunity for further questions or shared learning to be addressed which the Commissioner is very much hoping to attend.

As North Yorkshire Police will be subject to a Victim Service Assessment (VSA) inspection in June 2022, it is taking the opportunity prior to the inspection to reassure itself on the service it provides. There is some correlation within this area of work and the National Child Protection Inspection in particular the broader issues relating to safeguarding and investigative standards. Therefore, VSA reporting will also be considered through the Gold group which is an approach the Commissioner very much welcomes to ensure she remains updated on any key matters relating to the safeguarding of children.

The Commissioner and her Management Team will continue to attend both the Gold and Silver group meetings, engage with partners and ensure updates are communicated. Through the focused work taking place to address the recommendations, this is providing the Commissioner the opportunity to consider areas where further support or funding may be required to ensure North Yorkshire Police continue to make improvements safeguarding the children of North Yorkshire and York.

Summary

The HMICFRS National Child Protection Inspection report does set out that there is evidence that improvements were underway in November 2021, when the inspection took place. The Commissioner has been assured by the Chief Constable those have continued at pace, so many of the issues identified are now in the process of being addressed.

The Chief Constable has publicly accepted the findings of the Inspectorate and has offered her deepest apologies to any child that North Yorkshire Police have let down or could have protected more effectively. Further, North Yorkshire Police recognise that protecting children is one of the most important things that the police do. As a Force they are working to ensure that the right systems and processes are in place to support officers and staff protecting and safeguarding every child.

The Commissioner is reassured that the Chief Constable is focused on ensuring North Yorkshire Police is doing everything possible to protect children and has been working at pace to address the issues that were identified in the Inspectorate's report.

The Commissioner will ensure that the Chief Constable is held to account on the delivery of the improvements.