

ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

28th October 2025

Protecting the Vulnerable

Presented by: DCS Tony HOPKINS

1. Police and Crime Plan

1.1 To provide the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) with a report on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

1.2 The Police and Crime Plan refers to safeguarding children/vulnerable adults;

1.3 West Midlands Police (WMP) to embed preventative policing, using problem-solving to reduce vulnerability and tackle offenders. This includes working with partners to identify and safeguard children and vulnerable adults, including those abused in their own homes and protecting repeat victims by promoting their welfare, ensuring a safer environment for all.

1.4 Collaborate with WMP, health services and local authorities to safeguard Children and Young Persons (CYP) and vulnerable adults, facilitating regional discussions to share best practices and address safeguarding challenges.

1.5 The Police and Crime plan refers to safeguarding children

- Strengthen relationships between children's care homes and the police, to support safeguarding while minimising unnecessary criminalisation
- Ensure safeguarding of those who return from a missing episode
- Collaborate with partners to ensure disruption and enforcement against perpetrators of organised crime, regenerate neighbourhoods and increase the resilience of local communities.
- Focus on protecting young people, particularly care-experienced, from criminal exploitation.
- WMP to recognise the potential for criminal exploitation when determining the best course of action for CYP at risk of or engaging in criminality. This should include a trauma-informed approach
- Campaign for introduction of a new offence of criminal exploitation of children to target gangs responsible for these crimes.
- Expand in-custody interventions, making use of a key "teachable" moment.

- Expect a balance of safeguarding and enforcement, ensuring that missing person protocols identify risks associated with county lines and criminal exploitation.

1.6 The Police and Crime plan refers to safeguarding vulnerable adults –Mental Health

- Work with partners to improve access to mental health services
- (To rehabilitate, prevent and cease re-offending) Work with partners and support initiatives that address the essential needs of people who've offended, including access to mental health services.
- Work with partners to ensure safe implementation of 'Right Care Right Person' (RCRP). I expect there to be an evaluation, focused on patient outcomes.
- Advocate for adequate availability of both beds within secure health facilities and Approved Mental Health Professionals, to enable timely assessment and appropriate support.
- Expand the use of positive requirements issued by courts, including Mental Health Treatment Requirements.

1.7 The Police and Crime plan refers to safeguarding vulnerable adults – Adult exploitation

- Lead a robust response to modern slavery, human trafficking and exploitation.
- Campaign for improvements to the National Referral Mechanism, to meet the needs of children trafficked within this country (in line with both the strategic plan and HO action plan).
- Campaign for improvements to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to better support all victims. (in line with both the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner [Strategic Plan](#) and the Home Office Action Plan)
- I will collaborate with and where appropriate challenge local authorities and landlords to tackle issues such as cuckooing.

1.8 This paper will look to answer a number of specific questions that have been asked in relation to safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in two specific sections. Section 1 being children (Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Missing and Exploitation including looked after children). Section 2 being adult exploitation and mental health.

2. **Section 1 – Children (CSE, Missing and Exploitation including looked after children).**

2.1 The Crime and Policing Bill is presently undergoing its second reading in the House of Lords. This bill proposes new offences relating to child criminal exploitation and coerced internal concealment and introduces a civil preventative order aimed at preventing the exploitation of children by criminal entities. Furthermore, the bill designates 'cuckooing' as a specific offence, thereby safeguarding vulnerable individuals whose residences are misused for unlawful activities.

2.2 Criminal exploitation of children is generally recognised as a form of abuse wherein minors are compelled to participate in criminal acts, frequently orchestrated by organised crime groups. This issue is often linked to 'county lines' drug operations, where children are coerced into transporting narcotics across the country. The PCC is aware of a dedicated team addressing county lines exploitation; the SHIELD initiative, formerly known as

Operation Skyclash, ensures that exploited children are discussed with key partners at monthly meetings.

- 2.3 Operation SHIELD offers a structured approach facilitating collaboration among stakeholders to address the exploitation of vulnerable individuals through county lines on a 2 weekly meeting basis. Its objectives include maximising outcomes within the criminal justice system, identifying and progressing safeguarding opportunities, enhancing referral pathways, advancing professional practice within stakeholder organisations, fostering telecommunications-based solutions, and informing outreach strategies directed at prolific drug line clients. Invited and regular attendees are every Local Policing Area (LPA) alongside their respective Childrens Services partners, Catch22 (NCLCC – Home Office allocated diversionary pathway for child criminal exploitation (CCE), Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU) social media and missing persons Locate team.
- 2.4 At present, CCE is not specifically addressed in current legislation, nor is it identified as a distinct criminal offence. There are no official statistics documenting its prevalence. The proposed bill seeks to establish child criminal exploitation as a new criminal offence and create novel civil orders applicable to adults engaged in such exploitation. Existing legal frameworks, including offences related to encouraging or assisting crime and those under the Modern Slavery Act, are regarded as inadequate and insufficiently utilised to address these concerns.
- 2.5 Through the CONNECT system, WMP employs flags and markers to identify offences considered linked to CCE and to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) though these identifiers are manually applied, occasionally resulting in reporting inaccuracies. CCE offences will be counted from various crime types, whereas CSE will need manual markers to be added. The creation of a defined criminal offence will enable WMP to generate more accurate performance data for CCE, which can be integrated into various force-wide meetings to analyse CCE-related victims, suspects, and other relevant datasets.
- 2.6 The introduction of CCE prevention orders will complement the existing suite of civil orders available to WMP. These orders will be monitored via the Qlik business application, which will feature in briefings for neighbourhood and response officers. It is anticipated that records will be maintained locally within the CONNECT system and mirrored in the Police National Computer (PNC) to facilitate cross-border enforcement.
- 2.7 In alignment with the National Child Protection Inspection (NCPI), WMP continues to operate both a Child Protection Improvement Board and a Child Protection Executive Oversight Board, ensuring that ongoing training and knowledge dissemination take place throughout the force. All response officers are receiving in-person instruction on topics related to CSE and CCE. Moreover, new guidance has been issued regarding financially motivated online sexual exploitation, a form of blackmail in which offenders coerce victims into providing money or meeting financial demands by threatening to release explicit or manipulated images.
- 2.8 The Philomena protocol was implemented in July 2024 after consultation with Local Authorities and child placement providers, with joint delivery and rollout by the Public Protection Unit (PPU) Locate and force Contact functions.
- 2.9 Following its introduction, monthly reductions of over 200 missing reports were observed up to November 2024. At launch, Philomena was managed via the PPU Locate Triage process to ensure proper application and to identify safeguarding opportunities. Team 4

staff reviewed previous 24-hour logs to oversee the process, identify concerning cases, and raise these in missing strategy meetings with relevant children's services.

- 2.10 Any concerns identified during this 24-hour review resulted in either a missing COMPACT record being created, a (Multi Agency Referral Form) MARF being submitted for partner awareness, or an intelligence report being filed. This method ensures partners are informed about children at risk and that STRAT meetings occur with comprehensive knowledge of the risks involved. It also supports improved record-keeping about concerns for children within WMP systems, rather than only closing reports within Control Works systems, which may not be included in broader exploitation and vulnerability meetings across the force.
- 2.11 Currently, there is no specific strategy or protocol addressing incidents of internal concealment. The force's stop search policy has recently been updated and provides guidance regarding searches involving children and the importance of capturing the child's perspective. According to the College of Policing Approved Professional Practice (APP), when a suspect is believed to have ingested or concealed drugs internally, they must be transported directly to a hospital. If a detainee declines to cooperate or refuses treatment, acceptance into custody and subsequent treatment are determined by MITIE, who provide forensic medical services. Safeguarding the child remains a priority to minimize harm from concealed items and potential exploitation. Consideration for a MARF, emergency STRAT meeting, and/or use of police protection may apply in such circumstances.
- 2.12 WMP collaborated with Kent University using a training programme developed by Kent Police. This programme targets officers, supervisors, and senior leaders dealing with victims and offenders of CSE. The Robyn and Molly simulation training is intended to help police officers engage with young people who have experienced CSE in a trauma-informed manner, aiming to prevent re-traumatisation and support improved prosecution outcomes. Three one-day pilot courses for 60 staff were held in 2025, and an updated module is being considered with PPU and Learning and Development (L&D) for further rollout and use.
- 2.13 A dedicated training module on CSE is being delivered to all new student pathways. Multi-agency training through the seven children's services is being explored to ensure that frontline responder training across agencies reflects changes in legislation and addresses both CSE and CCE. Force contact personnel have received tailored training for Operation Makesafe. Additional training will be provided regarding changes to crime recording and the civil order application process when more information becomes available from the Home Office.
- 2.14 Senior leaders have received input from NWG Network (NWG), and 250 licenses for their products have been distributed throughout the force to support ongoing localised CSE activity. An intranet page focused on CSE is accessible to all officers and staff, providing resources on recognising CSE, appropriate language, and AWARE—which aims to enhance the understanding of children's experiences and provide greater insight into supporting exploited children.

2.15 WMP CSE data is collated and discussed at a monthly Child performance meeting, PPU performance meeting, and features as a standard agenda item in the Deputy Chief Constable (DCC) Performance Day slide pack. This includes the following;

- Crime comparison data for CSE crimes
- Number of positive outcomes for CSE crimes
- Crime comparison for Group based CSE crimes
- Number of positive outcomes for Group Based CSE crimes
- Data on repeat CSE victims
- Data on repeat CSE perpetrators
- Number of Intelligence logs linked to CSE

2.16 The data collection reporting mechanisms are currently under review with an ambition to enhance the data collected and discussed to include data relevant to the Home Office Toolkit. Partnership data is key and the CSE Co-ordinators are being realigned to ensure that WMP has access to this. We are working with all children services to establish if we can find an IT solution which will enable a two-way function of child MARF submissions and responses. Future data collection will look to include;

- Number of Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWNs) administered
- Number of disruption notices issued
- Risk levels linked to victims residing in WMP area (partnership data to be utilised)
- Number of children taken into Police Protection
- Number of child criminal exploitation prevention orders
- Number of missing episodes
- Development of a risk assessment for CSE perpetrators.

2.17 Information covered in the PPU performance meeting is systematically transferred to Local Policing Area (LPA) Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group (TTCG)/vulnerability meetings, which subsequently informs a new monthly strategic CSE meeting chaired by the Child Superintendent. This monthly CSE meeting provides input into the force threat grid meeting and the force TTCG. It reviews a range of performance metrics, focusing primarily on victims, suspects, and investigations, and establishes a tasking process to deploy the most suitable force resources for particular cases or individuals. This meeting plays a critical role in ensuring the force has a comprehensive understanding of threats and risks relating to CSE from sources including LPA Teams, major crime units, intelligence, and the PPU Locate function.

2.18 The LPA partnership teams conduct regular one-to-one meetings with Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) at schools, coordinated with children's services staff to deliver a unified response. Training initiatives have empowered schools to utilise Force Intelligence Bureau (FIB) forms, resulting in increased intelligence submissions concerning children of concern from educational perspectives.

2.19 County Lines awareness sessions are presented directly to school year groups by Schools Intervention and Prevention Officers (SIPOs) during assemblies or classes, and

source handlers are engaged with young people who express interest in contributing to the broader intelligence framework.

2.20 In Q1 of 2025, the “No More Knives” roadshow reached 4,500 students in Coventry, featuring presentations from police on topics such as gang culture, drug-related exploitation, and County Lines. Future plans involve collaborating with partners to develop a new roadshow focused specifically on CCE and County Lines across all of WMP.

2.21 For incidents or young people identified via a (Child Abuse Non-Crime) CANC or Control Works Logs outside of school, SIPOs liaise with the relevant school to review the situation and determine whether MARF referrals through Early Help or Serious Organised Crime and Exploitation (SOCEX) teams are appropriate. Multiple SIPOs have now achieved formal certification as DSL L2 safeguarding officers, following targeted training sessions.

2.22 Performance meetings monitor and analyse various CSE/CCE metrics, breaking down data by specific teams and geographical areas. Metrics tracked include volume of crimes (including group-CSE), positive outcomes, charge rates, outstanding offenders, repeat victims and suspects, and actionable intelligence. The implementation of markers and flags has improved following recent training, enhancing officers’ and staff’s ability to apply them effectively. CSE data is not routinely shared with partners but through the West Midlands exploitation and missing board this could be an avenue in which performance data and statistics is shared.

2.23 The Locate function within PPU manages all missing persons cases, utilising a triage system to ensure safeguarding opportunities are maximised. Each Local Authority (LA) has a designated single point of contact (SPOC) within Locate. The Missing and Found Under-18 Daily Triage process—conducted by WMP across seven LAs—involves daily meetings Monday to Friday chaired by LA Missing & Exploitation Coordinators. Six out of seven authorities discuss both missing and found children recorded in COMPACT.

2.24 Locate will review the COMPACT record for the child in question and have an overview of the Missing circumstances and investigation and the recent tasks completed. From COMPACT they review the child's Notes/STRAT section to understand the wider safeguarding meetings taking place. They will review CONNECT and WMP intel systems to support the intelligence picture for the child. It will be identified at this point whether a 3 in 30 days or 72 hours Missing strategy meeting is required. The team will obtain the care status and allocated social worker details and establish if the young person is open to the LA.

2.25 Return Home Interviews (RHI) (Preferred by children's services to be return home conversations) - There are variations for each LA however their statutory obligation is for an RHI to be offered to every child within 72 hours, but this can be declined by either the parent or child. If the child is subject of a care order a RHI typically takes place and information from these may be discussed in triage. Prevention Interviews (Police found debrief) - This is the debrief that should take place between the found child & police officer in attendance or making the telephone/ video call. This will be detailed within the Found report on COMPACT.

2.26 Of the recommendations identified within the CSE problem profile, nine pertain to actions required by WMP and partner agencies, which are currently being addressed by the Child Superintendent. These actions have been communicated to both the Regional Exploitation and Missing Subgroup and the Regional Safeguarding Meeting. Additionally, it has been recommended that a task and focus group be formed, incorporating key stakeholders from all seven local authorities.

- Appropriate partnership governance arrangements are already in place to drive activity and share information; WMP to re-visit or develop in line with potential new information sharing requirements
- PPU and FIB to create a term of reference to support clarity around partnership data collection; including consistency around data fields, data collection periods and expectations around data delivery. Once data sharing arrangements are agreed, FIB to create an Intelligence Collection Plan to share with partners in order to support enhanced and meaningful analysis.
- Check that WMP is aligned with best practice against the Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit and ensure this is embedded and widely understood and used by PPU and LPAs via their 4P plans.
- Exploitation hubs to incorporate the data of online platforms used into their education and awareness raising through school and other outreach work. This raises awareness and supports parents and carers to engage with children to maximise their online safety.
- Explore the totality of LPA knowledge around process initiatives and partnership working.
- WMP to increase in educational opportunities within and without WMP for adults and children to recognise the signs of abuse or exploitation. Pathways to report abuse or exploitation to be made more obvious.
- WMP to consider additional education, including media campaigns, to be based around sexual activity offences, in order to prevent potential future victims.
- WMP to approach partners to enquire whether existing or future SLAs hold potential to unlock a greater range of victim and suspect details, including ethnicity.
- Where repeated addresses that are not victim home addresses begin to surface in repeat offences, especially with multiple victims, a group-based methodology of offence should be considered. These will need to be tracked through the LPA governance structure and partnership intervention initiated.

2.27 WMP serves as a key stakeholder within the Regional Exploitation and Missing Subgroup and the Regional Safeguarding Subgroup. These multi-agency meetings include representatives from the seven LAs and Health Bodies. Through the Families First Programme (FFP), WMP has dedicated staff seconded to project boards, supporting safeguarding initiatives under the new multi-agency child protection teams (MACPT).

2.28 These forums address emerging themes and trends related to safeguarding challenges, facilitating the development of effective solutions and promoting best practices

across the region. Additionally, WMP plays a significant role in the Regional Contextual Safeguarding meeting, which focuses on advancing best practices in responding to extra-familial harm.

2.29 The primary responsibility for the management of children's care homes and daily relationships lies with the LPA teams, with additional support provided by the Locate Missing, Safeguarding, and Intervention Manager. All LPAs are encouraged to establish local care home forums for providers through the Missing Operational Group (MOG). Partnerships have been further strengthened via the Multi Agency Missing Meeting (MAMM). Any placements that raise concern are escalated at MOG and Strategic Missing Operational Group (SMOG) meetings as appropriate. Furthermore, there is a monthly meeting between Locate and Ofsted to review and discuss any placements of concern.

3. Section 2 – Adult exploitation and mental health

3.1 WMP is currently implementing new practices aimed at improving data accuracy. Within the contact centre, a decision form is being developed to ensure consistency in decision making. This form will enable a broader search criterion, particularly focusing on RCRP absent without leave (AWOL), RCRP Concern for Welfare, RCRP Transportation, RCRP S135 Mental Health Act (MHA), and RCRP use of 136 MHA. The form will also record when police attend or do not attend an incident, as well as indicate if escalation was required before deployment decisions were made.

3.2 Regarding the use of police powers to detain individuals experiencing a mental health crisis—a frequent focus of national data reporting—WMP has revised its data collection processes. All relevant data are now collected directly from the force's mental health application. This eliminates double keying and is expected to increase accuracy. Any areas not captured by the application are recorded through a process coordinated by the contact centre and corporate development. Corporate development now oversees the collation and reporting of all related data to maintain a single authoritative source of information.

3.3 For partnership data sharing, engagement with partner agencies is ongoing to address data sharing challenges and explore methods for improved interagency information exchange. The intended outcome is the establishment of a system data dashboard, but this requires time and funding to develop.

3.4 Access to mental health services within custody is overseen by the custody sergeant. All individuals under police care have access to a health professional, a service currently provided by Mitie.

3.5 The Health Care Professional's (HCP) role in supporting those experiencing mental health issues includes assessment, referral, and facilitating access to mental health services. They can also utilise commissioned services such as Liaison Diversion and local mental health services via a single point of contact number provided by each integrated care board. This enables determinations regarding fitness to interview, fitness to detain, and advice on reasonable adjustments. These measures aim to ensure WMP compliance with obligations under PACE (Code 2 chapter 9).

- 3.6 Custody processes place an emphasis on care, including the ability to transfer individuals to health-based places of safety under section 136 of the MHA when appropriate. Engagement continues with mental health partners to enhance responsiveness to individuals in custody and further develop care both during custody and post-release.
- 3.7 Adult exploitation cases are recorded through seven LPA portals, which refer concerns to a vulnerability officer. This officer reviews referrals, assesses local provisions, and determines appropriate safeguarding pathways. Cases are documented in local systems, and policing teams work alongside vulnerability teams to notify exploitation teams about vulnerable individuals, recording activities in CONNECT or under “vulnerable adult non-crime” entries.
- 3.8 The force plans to introduce a vulnerable adult multi-agency referral process, similar to existing child referral processes. This aims to provide greater visibility for officers and staff regarding referrals to partners and related safeguarding activity. Once implemented, CONNECT will serve as the authoritative system for all child and adult referrals.
- 3.9 Exploitation meetings occur in all seven local policing areas, involving multiple agencies to discuss individuals identified as at risk. Operation SHIELD generates activity for those targeted by home invasion, allowing cases to be considered and discussed across various processes. A force-level Modern Slavery Human Trafficking (MSHT) meeting is being established, chaired by the Chief Superintendent of PPU, to support modern slavery investigations.
- 3.10 This meeting, currently in its development phase, provides oversight of all MSHT leads in LPAs and tracks current investigations. Evidence-based prosecution training has been introduced across the force; while notable advancements have occurred in Domestic Abuse cases, the goal is to apply this approach to additional offence types.
- 3.11 Operation Sandstar directs the force’s response to sexual exploitation in indoor sex work locations, addressing risk management for workers, enhancing intelligence, and targeting organised crime groups operating these venues. The initiative is operational force-wide and has received recognition from the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the Home Office, with several external forces adopting the model.
- 3.12 Operation Sandstar 2, which addresses street-based sex work, is currently in planning. Training has been delivered to personnel involved in these operations and investigations.
- 3.13 Specialist investigator training for Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime (OIC) is scheduled for January, February, and March. This five-day course supports investigators and advisors handling complex MSHT and OIC cases and aims to train 50 officers throughout the force. Content covers relevant legislation, best practices, guidance, and advisory support applicable to investigations.
- 3.14 Contact has been initiated with the MSOIC Project Turnstone training specialist to expand understanding of the three pillars (see below) and inform subsequent training delivery. After the specialist training, regional OIC Hydra training will be offered to approximately 60 officers from various departments—including Investigations, Force

Contact, and LPA Response—with dates pending national trainer availability and expected delivery in early 2026.

3.15 We are a lead force for best practice for Operation Sandstar, which supports focuses on supporting pillars one and two.

- Pillar One - Turning the Stone – Identify hidden harm, awareness, tools, interventions, intelligence
- Pillar Two - Victim Engagement – Trauma-informed, survivor-centric, tools & cultural insights
- Pillar Three - Offender Management – Disrupt networks, prosecute offenders, financial disruption, emerging risks

Author(s): **Detective Chief Superintendent Tony HOPKINS**

Job Title: **Head of Public Protection**