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Subject: Feedback from HMICFRS Group-Based CSE Inspection External Reference Group
Date: 20 December 2022 11:33:00

Hi all,
I joined Sophie at the HMICFRS Group-Based CSE Inspection External Reference Group (ERG) yesterday afternoon.
HMICFRS has carried out a thematic inspection of how the police respond to group-based child sexual exploitation in England and Wales, which was commissioned by the Home Office. Group-based CSE is a form of child sexual abuse characterised by multiple interconnected offenders grooming and sexually exploiting children. This includes forms of offending commonly referred to as 'street grooming' or 'grooming gangs'.
The HMICFRS inspection is designed to answer the following overarching questions:
• How effectively do the police and other law enforcement bodies respond to victims and perpetrators of group-based child sexual exploitation (CSE)?
• And how do their responses influence investigations and the ways in which children are safeguarded?
In their inspection, they have focused on:
• police assessments on the nature and scale of offending, and their collections of data on the characteristics of group-based CSE perpetrators;
• the attitudes of the police and law enforcement bodies towards victims of group-based CSE; and
• the quality of criminal investigations.
The External Reference Group was attended by a range of government bodies, academics, CSA experts and some police representation. It was held so that HMICFRS could feed back their initial findings and discuss these, identify any potential gaps or areas of ambiguity etc.
The fieldwork for the inspection is now mostly complete with only a few interviews remaining. HMICFRS visited six police forces as part of the inspection, but this didn't include the Met. Thames Valley Police was the closest force inspected. Originally the inspection was to include lived experience research to reflect the voice of victims. However, this was not carried out due to time constraints. This was heavily criticised at the ERG by those groups representing victims.
<u>Emerging Themes</u>

1. The nature and scale of group-based CSE offending is not well understood by forces largely due to a lack of reliable data gathered, analysed and evaluated by forces. This is inhibiting a proactive policing response.
    - Not all forces submit CSE data annually to the Home Office, with quality of submissions being inconsistent.
    - Current crime classifications also mean that identification of group-based CSE is not easily achieved.
    - Recording of the characteristics of CSE offenders is inconsistent, and sometimes absent.

We know that some, if not all of these, are also issues for the Met given concerns around how the Met is recording and analysing CSE data. The progress around this is due to be discussed at the next Met Oversight Board in January.

2. Although policing attitudes to victims have changed over time, HMICFRS saw occasions where victim-blaming language is still in use. This was generally from the front-line officers. However, they did not see any examples of victims being criminalised.
3. Investigations are generally reactive, with limited use of civil orders and tools seen; disruption

activity is often limited to single investigations and not part of wider strategic plans.

4. Police and law enforcement are working to different definitions of group-based CSE.

This compounds the issues regarding data under point 1 above.

5. There is an emerging shift in focus from CSE to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE).

There was a discussion as to the reasons for this and whether it was due to a change in funding, resource, strategy or priority.

6. HMICFRS saw examples of positive contribution to tackling CSE, such as the Hydrant Programme (an NPCC support and guidance offer), TOEX (Tackling Organised Exploitation Programme – a national partnership between regional organised crime units to build a stronger intelligence picture and co-ordinated response to disrupt organised crime) and VKPP (Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme – national programme to promote knowledge transfer in respect of public protection).

<u>Next Steps</u>

The ERG will be reconvened in March 2023 to review the inspection recommendations. There is no final publication date yet for the Inspection Report, although originally the target was April 2023.

Thanks

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