

Performance and Risk Oversight Board

10 February 2023

Protecting People from Exploitation and Harm

Report by: Commander Kevin Southworth on behalf of the Commissioner

Purpose of this Paper

The purpose of this paper is to brief the Oversight Board of the Metropolitan Police's approach to public protection and the initiatives in place to improve service provision. While it does not encompass all aspects of public protection, it does outline the MPS' activity in relation to MOPAC's specific asks. The MPS is committed to improving service provision for Londoners on public protection: the findings of the HMICFRS in their PEEL inspection is driving much of our work to deliver a better service for London.

Information for Consideration

Call Handling and THRIVE

The Met's Command and Control team (MetCC) is currently reviewing the use of THRIVE+ to assess re-graded deployments as well as closing of incidents not deployed to. This change to process is currently in review stage before being implemented after we have assessed the impacts.

We are using targeted training and assurance to improve the recording of THRIVE+ at the initial call phase in line with current usage for deployment decision making. MetCC have already embedded this assurance process. THRIVE+ training package has been mandated for all MetCC staff (85% have undertaken it to date, and MetCC plan to achieve 100% by January 2023).

The Quality Assurance Review Team is leading on assurance processes to monitor compliance and quality, work has commenced in designing this process. The revised QA process will be implemented in January and fully established by March 2023.

THRIVE+ has been added to the Line Manager QA form to drive greater compliance and build Continuous improvement. This action is complete.

More efficient reporting tools are yet to be introduced and technology will be looked at to better equip MetCC to record the process. Digital Policing lead on this enabling stream.

A Time and Motion Study has been commissioned to assess how long it takes to record THRIVE+ to enable a full impact assessment to be undertaken on demand. The Time and Motion study started in November to assess Call Handling Times and Overall Call time, which includes “aftercall”. The findings will be fed into the new demand analysis tool, which will determine if further resource is required within MetCC.

The Integrated Design Delivery team have completed the customer journey process flow to map out blockers and opportunities and the operator experience to highlight opportunities to give good advice to the customer. This will be used to build the plan for required improvements to minimise impacts of additional activities being undertaken by the operator.

Online Exploitation

The demand from online child sexual abuse and exploitation continues to increase year on year, both in terms of reported crime and demand discovered by law enforcement. The exceptional impact of COVID19 has had a bearing on the degree and nature of offending in the online environment. The volume of CSA offending identified from industry has grown due to increased use of the internet and improved detection techniques by the online service providers. Post COVID, we have seen a worrying increase of indecent imagery generated by children. This accounts for over 30% of our current reports coming into the MPS, with the average age of children involved being 13, but we have reports as young as six.

As a result of the year on year increases the MPS had a significant backlog of referrals coming from the National Centre of Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) via the National Crime Agency (NCA). This in turn caused delays in developing and disseminating packages across the MPS. In October 2021 we had a peak of over 1,300 referrals in that backlog. This was treated with urgent focus and a Gold Group under Operation Hariti was created. A full review was undertaken and immediate measures to bring efficiency to the process, with additional funding and an uplift of temporary and permanent staff injected into the intelligence unit. These measures have been incredibly successful, with the backlog as of December sitting at 49. Of note, the backlog will never be at zero as there will always be a number of referrals awaiting allocation. This reduction means that intelligence can be reviewed more quickly, developed and disseminated to the operational teams to give them the best opportunities to safeguard children who are victim of online child sexual abuse, recover evidence and achieve better outcomes by bringing offenders to justice.

Over the last 12 months the MPS have received 265 referrals from NCMEC on average per month. We are currently looking at innovative opportunities to streamline referrals from NCMEC to the MPS. There have been recent pilots with other forces to utilise the NCMEC’s Case Management System (CMS). The MPS are in discussions with the NCA and other third parties to develop these opportunities and ensure that

we can obtain referrals at the earliest point. This will also enable opportunities around the use of the Child Abuse Image Database.

With the increase in self-generated imagery and reducing age of children involved in online offending, we are developing our work with statutory partners to ensure our information sharing with children's social care and education maximises the opportunities to safeguard children at the earliest point. We have formalised this process, but continue to review and develop with leads. Several BCUs are leading prevent initiatives with the Designated Safeguarding Leads.

We are working with Lucy Faithfull Foundation to understand the emerging increase of young offenders in the online space and how as police we can effectively manage risks posed to others and the child itself. Lucy Faithfull have been offering support to understand behaviours for the individuals and their parents/carers. We also recognise the increased risk of self-harm and suicide for suspects in this crime type. We have developed a pilot with Lucy Faithfull providing direct referrals for suspects to access immediate support and have started work with Safer Lives.

We recognise that digital forensics play a huge part in these investigations and the developing technological advances with devices means the demands on forensic examiners are increasing. We have sought to develop initiatives through the CAID, View & Grade and ADF project. Digital Forensics have delivered kiosks to each of the BCU OCSAE teams which has given them more capacity. BCU hubs now have access to grading equipment through the Digital Forensic Hubs with their own dedicated provision. This significantly improves Safeguarding by reducing the timescales to triage images, identify potential victims/suspects and initiate police activity.

Our digital tools have recently been enhanced and we have delivered mobile triage kits to the teams, which should reduce the numbers of devices being seized by police. This capability will be reviewed next year. We are currently running a trial with digital forensics where examinations of mobile device exhibits for a case will be conducted at the same time as the computer exhibits, using exactly the same method as for the computer exhibits. The expected benefits being faster turnaround times; a single set of results provided for all submitted exhibits at the same time; results provided in a consistent format regardless of whether they are for mobile devices or computers; anticipated faster safeguarding response due to decreased turnaround times.

It is accepted that advances in technology and offending motivation means there are constant changes in behaviours and how perpetrators conceal their identity and offending. Due to this we are working with partners to upgrade and improve our capability. The unit is developing its training capability to invest more in staff skills in house to tackle this threat.

With advances in technology we recognise the challenges we face where increasingly large data storage capabilities on the average device means we seize increasingly large caches of data. We have developed opportunities to review and interrogate that data at pace through the use of Elastic Search. The team have successfully utilised the software to facilitate the review and risk assessment of 641,000 messages in 35 minutes. A stark contrast to 13,000 messages previously taking five staff seven weeks

to review. Additionally this methodology has assisted with risk assessing a suspect in custody following the identification of contact abuse with his sister, triaging large volumes of communications data to offer assurance to investigators that no wider unknown risk existed. We will continue to build on this capability.

Identifying and safeguarding victims takes primacy in this area of investigation. Within the Central team we have secured a high speed line into to the Child Abuse Image Database (CAID) with the support of the Home Office. This has significantly improved capability and enabled the victim identification team to work effectively, reducing risk of unidentified victims and increasing opportunities to safeguard victims. We have trialled the use of AI to engine to classify unknown images into the UK Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse categories A, B, C, 6 (Indicative) and 8 (Ignorable) to streamline the grading process. We are increasing the use of machine learning and tools to support the viewing and grading of images to increase reliability rather than relying on the human eye and in turn reducing the impact on our staff who will have to manually grade thousands to millions of child sexual abuse material.

Welfare and wellbeing of staff continues to be a priority. This ensures we have staff that are well supported and prepared to undertake roles in this area of investigation. The psychological screening questionnaire has been reviewed and improved to ensure it is effective. This was relaunched last month. We have increased the use of in person clinician assessments. We have increased the enhanced provision for staff to ensure they will continue to be psychologically monitored after they leave a role in OCSAE and we have created a package, working with partners from NCA, College of Policing, OH and the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) to provide an introduction package and training to prepare staff. We continue to review and test automation and AI tools to reduce staff exposure to child sexual abuse material.

IICSA

Operation Winter Key was formed in 2015 as a response to the Met being a core participant in IICSA and to investigate allegations of non-recent child sexual abuse involving people of public prominence and/or institutions. Some 233 investigations were completed and 350 charges secured. Operation Winter Key then merged with Complex Case Team in Central Specialist Crime in October 2021 to form the Complex Investigation Team (CIT). CIT have an expanded remit but still retained the expertise, disclosure team and Major Incident Room that made Op Winterkey such a success.

Following the conclusion of the Lambeth IICSA strand and the publication of its report in 2021, the MPS acknowledged it was clear that at different times we missed opportunities to identify offenders and investigate further. Some of the treatment of children was also unacceptable and that we were sorry for when we let children in the care of Lambeth down.

Referencing the Lambeth strand report, the MPS stated; we have changed the way we investigate allegations of child sexual abuse, with better training for officers, greater collaboration between social care partners, and putting the victim at the heart of the investigation. We highlighted we are building a culture of professional curiosity within the Met to ensure any officer with concerns about a child acts promptly and

appropriately. Finally, we encouraged anyone who has been the victim of child sex abuse to come forward and speak with us.

CSE Data

The MPS temporarily suspended the provision of data to MOPAC and the Home Office for the annual data return due to data quality and recording issues. The MPS Data Office, MO2, LRO, TPA and CPIC formed a working group to improve this key area. Clearer definitions for CSE flags and guidance documents were created for all officers and widely circulated via an intranet article and an operational notice. Data is now provided to BCUs on a weekly basis for review and flagging amendments where appropriate. The returns are monitored by the working group with the aspiration that this guidance and data accuracy drive will improve CSE recording.

CSE High Risk Predatory offenders

Operation Bassano is a MPS-wide initiative to identify unmanaged repeat sexual offenders and deliver positive intervention. It is delivered by Specialist Crime. Op Bassano uses crime data to identify subjects named on multiple crime reports who have not been convicted of a relevant offence. The matrix is based on an algorithm focussing on recency/gravity/frequency of offending. A High Harm scored is generated and the top 1000 subjects are included for further review. Officers across specialist crime review individual subjects and seek positive intervention opportunities. These include, civil orders (SROS and SHPOs), execution of outstanding EWMS warrants, review of closed cases and review in relation to linked series.

It also looks at Achilles heel tactics to impede offending including revocation of driving licences when vehicles are used as part of the offending. A 10% intervention rate of allocated subjects is the operational goal and this has been exceeded in the first 3 phases (quarters) that the operation has been running. To date the operation has resulted in 46 Sexual Risk Orders, 36 Sexual Harm Prevention Orders and 32 arrests of persons featured on the Op Bassano list.

CSE – The Pan London Child Exploitation Protocol, Partnership and Training

The London Child Exploitation Protocol was launched by the MPS in conjunction with London Councils and the NHS on March 18th 2021. Between March 2021 and December 2022 The MSCE Training Team in central specialist crime have trained 5,767 MPS Front Line officers and staff on the Child Exploitation Pan London Protocol Mar-Dec 2021.

Between April 2022 and December 2022 Child Exploitation Training has been delivered across London to BCUs as one day multi-agency events. The MSCE Training team have delivered 141 of these MSCE Training events so far this year. 68 of the 141 events have included partners such as local authorities, children services, NHS, Education & NGOs. 2,678 MPS staff have been trained. 1,884 partners in statutory and non-stat services have received training.

London Child Protection Improvement Programme

The MPS strategy for ensuring Public Protection in the round, and particularly to protecting our most vulnerable people, is to undergo transformational change in order to meet the increasing and complex challenges of today's London.

We must build on recent HMICFRS PEEL Inspection findings and learn from the IICSA and Telford CSE Inquiry recommendations, the CSPR Panel findings in relation to the tragic deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and other recent incidents which have identified further, significant risks for UK policing.

It is clear that now more than ever, we need to deliver a generational step-change in our approach to Child Protection in all its forms; whether safeguarding young people from intra-familial or domestic abuse, preventing young people from repeatedly going missing, or protecting them from contextual harm - be that criminal or sexual exploitation, 'real-world' or online.

In order to achieve this, a wide-ranging Transformational Change Programme is being initiated to deliver an enterprise approach to protecting vulnerable children and young people, which will be one of the most substantial ever undertaken in policing. At its heart will be the need to ensure precise, data-led policing – drawing in our partners' skills, knowledge and data – to ensure that we are able to exhaustively 'join up the dots' of vulnerability, threat and harm in every instance.

In doing so we will develop the most holistic and comprehensive picture of who is most at risk and thereby best focus and shape our multi-agency interventions and, in terms of those who prey on the most vulnerable in our communities, we will surgically target our proactive enforcement capabilities.

In addition to overhauling our strategy, revisiting our infrastructure and workforce challenges, and further invigorating our partnership arrangements, we will either identify or develop the best technological solution to centralise and exploit against our data at scale. This will require the creation of a dedicated public protection Data centre with an omniscient overview of London's safeguarding challenges relating to Children and Young People. This will likely require the procurement or repurposing of premises, workforce development and the development of a technology solution which embodies the very latest innovations to help us get ahead of the significant challenges we will face in the years ahead. The LCPI programme requests funding of £810k for project professionals and Subject Matter Experts, as outlined to MOPAC recently at Public Protection Improvement Board.

Custody / Search and Child-centred approach

The MPS is in full agreement with the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review that the incident involving Child Q should never have happened. It is truly regrettable and we have apologised to the child concerned, her family and the wider community. We still await the outcome of the IOPC investigation in to this matter.

We accept all recommendations within the safeguarding review and have developed a comprehensive action plan to respond to them. We are absolutely committed to learning from this incident and working with partners to ensure that the action the Met

takes responds to the criticisms and concerns that have been raised. Measures were also put in place as soon as this incident came to our notice, including a reminder of the More Thorough Intimate Parts (MTIP) policy to frontline officers and the development of a 12 point checklist for MTIP searches.

Since starting this response in March 2022, we have identified a number of further complaints and concerns relating to MTIP searches, which we have voluntarily referred to the IOPC.

We recognise that MTIP Searches or Strip Searches are traumatic for those searched and this tactic should only ever be used where absolutely necessary. The rights and needs of children must be at the forefront of officers' minds but research has shown this tactic is necessary to prevent the criminal exploitation of children as drug mules and to safeguard in circumstances where children might conceal a weapon. Sadly, it is our experience that the tactic is necessary.

In terms of measures we have already put in place, I can summarise as follows:

We have made clear in our policies and all communications that any search, MTIP or Strip Search, must consider the child first and as a vulnerable individual. A safeguarding approach must be taken and consideration of the proportionality and necessity of such a search versus the impact and trauma it might cause.

We have been clear that an Appropriate Adult **MUST** be present in every circumstance unless there is an immediate threat to life.

We have reviewed our policies and provided updated guidance to officers; as well as a ten point checklist, briefing videos and aide memoirs.

We have briefed national leads within the NPCC on the issues faced to improve consistency nationally (NPCC leads for VAWG, Children and Young People, Stop and Search and Safeguarding).

On the 1st April we introduced new measures to ensure grip and oversight of MTIP searches, which include the requirement for an Inspector's authority from the local BCU prior to every MTIP taking place, the submission of a Merlin (Child coming to Notice) report for every MTIP conducted and for a Computer Aided Dispatch form (CAD) to be created, so that we can accurately monitor their use.

Since this time, we have set up a process to review EVERY child MTIP search conducted to ensure we are satisfied it was appropriate and conducted in line with guidance.

Training to alert officers to adultification bias has been delivered to Schools Officers and frontline officers in Hackney. We are also currently working through how we can roll that out more widely.

We found evidence of compliance sometimes being poor in terms of searches in custody, and when it became apparent that there were similar issues with compliance with strip searches in custody, we immediately brought this issue into a Gold Group, under the banner of Op Redwood which has been addressing these matters.

As a result, from 1st July 2022 we implemented the same measures as MTIP - requirement for an Inspector's authority, a review of every strip search conducted, the necessity for an Appropriate Adult to be present, unless urgent (and then Insp authority), and to ensure a safeguarding approach is taken.

In addition to the work of Op Redwood, our custody command have also been working on refreshed safeguarding guidance for custody officers.

We are currently carrying out analysis to understand disproportionality in Strip searches in custody and this will be expanded to MTIP searches. In addition, we have invested in new technology to increase data capture and accuracy. This will improve our ability to effectively record information such as location of MTIP searches and address issues of officers failing to record the presence of an appropriate adult rather than one not being present. Improving our data accuracy and recording of child strip searches are priorities for us.

Op Redwood will continue until such time that we are satisfied these tactics are used proportionately and in line with policy. We should not simply stop them as we know this will expose vulnerable children and young people to exploitation by gangs and organised crime groups. Recorded MTIP searches on those under 18 since our policy change on May 25th have fallen significantly and are expected to be **around 66% lower than the previous financial year**, with increased positive outcomes.
