



Norfolk's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) response to inspections published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Section 55 of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 37 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017) requires local policing bodies to respond and publish comments on all inspection reports pertaining to your force within 56 days of report publication.

Inspection Title:

Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children

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Publication Types:

Joint targeted area inspections and serious youth violence

Police Forces:

All local forces in England and Wales

Link to Report:

[Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children - GOV.UK](#)

Section 55 Response Deadline:

15 January 2025

Key Findings

Between September 2023 and May 2024, Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) carried out a joint targeted area inspection on multi-agency responses to serious youth violence which was conducted across six areas nationally (Leeds, Coventry, Somerset, Manchester, Merton and Lancashire).

The inspection focused on three themes:

- Strategic responses to serious youth violence.

- Work with children, both individuals and groups, affected by serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation.
- Intervention in specific places to improve safety for children and communities.

The inspectorate sampled and tracked the experiences of hundreds of children and most of the findings refer to this large sample. From this, inspectors selected a smaller sample of 36 children whose experiences they tracked in further detail.

As part of the inspections conducted, children and families affected by serious youth violence were spoken to. The inspectorate also commissioned the children and young people's charity Safer London to consult with children and parents affected by serious youth violence. The inspectorate also:

- Carried out a literature review of current research, including looking at national and local data.
- Held focus groups with the multi-agency inspection teams that led the six inspections.
- Consulted stakeholders from organisations that work in the field of serious youth violence to help develop the methodology.

The inspectorate found that too many children, including some as young as eleven, are carrying knives because they feel unsafe and see this as a form of protection. The number of children and young people who lose their lives to violence is higher now than it was ten years ago, and so is the number admitted to hospital for knife assaults. In 2022/23 in England and Wales, 42 young people aged 16 to 19 were victims of homicide by a sharp object. In 2022/23 in England, there were 467 instances of children being treated in hospital for injuries caused by a knife or sharp object, which equates to a 47% increase from ten years earlier.

A failure to consistently identify serious youth violence as a safeguarding issue is leaving too many children at serious risk of harm. Lack of comprehensive guidance from the government on how partners should address harm outside the family, including serious youth violence, is exacerbating this, as is a lack of focus by Local Safeguarding Partnerships.

The government and local agencies must prioritise the needs of children who are disproportionately at risk of harm from serious youth violence. The government should equip local agencies to ensure these children have access to timely assessment and appropriate support.

There were examples of local partnerships doing effective work to reduce harm to children from serious youth violence, but this is not happening in all areas.

Multi-agency work was most effective when serious youth violence was a strategic priority. Effective partnerships had a shared understanding of local need. In some areas, partners worked together well to meet the wider needs of children affected by serious youth

violence. They had shared understanding of the children's backgrounds and experiences, including trauma and abuse.

Local partnerships need to do more to evaluate approaches to addressing serious youth violence, to use available research about what works and to share learning across areas to drive improvement in practice.

Children's access to support to address serious youth violence varies too much between local areas. Some areas have Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), and some VRUs were making a positive difference for children.

Projects aimed at preventing serious youth violence often receive short-term funding. This limits partners' ability to evaluate their effectiveness and compromises long-term planning.

Engagement with the community, children and parents is essential. There were some strong practices where partnerships worked to reduce harm and build stronger community support for children.

Recommendations

There are no recommendations made.

Areas For Improvement

There are no areas for improvement made.

PCC response to report and any Recommendations/Areas For Improvement

The HMICFRS report "Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children" identifies a series of issues arising from a joint targeted area inspection conducted in locations outside Norfolk. It is disappointing that no recommendations have been made in this report. The addition of recommendations would have strengthened the report's credibility and ensured that lessons learned would be more likely to be incorporated more widely.

That said, there is useful content within the report. In providing this written response I have therefore consulted with various organisations in order to reflect the current situation in Norfolk.

I note the report's findings with respect to adultification and disproportionality. The Local Criminal Justice Board has identified a need for work in relation to disproportionality. I will ask that adultification be specifically considered also. This will take account of the CPS work on disproportionality which has recently been completed.

I also note the report's findings with respect to girls with hidden harms not being recognised by professionals and services. This warrants some closer examination in Norfolk, particularly with respect to the police service's consideration of girls' exploitation and their involvement in county lines for example.

With specific regard to policing, the report identifies the following lessons learned:

1. Timely referrals to children's social care to get help and support. No routine process for making a referral when children come into custody or were interviewed about criminal activity. Cumulative harm to children who are repeatedly exposed to risks in different incidents is not recognised.
2. Police referrals do not always include all the information needed to ensure the child gets an appropriate response. They do not always make it clear why they are making the referral.
3. Often a lack of quality assurance or police management oversight to ensure that children affected by serious youth violence are referred for support.
4. Investigators in general CID may not have received training to identify children's needs or harm done to them.

I will raise these lessons learned with the Chief Constable to ensure that Norfolk Constabulary's response to exploited children takes account of these issues. However, it is notable that Norfolk Constabulary works with other partners including Norfolk County Council to provide a consistent approach to serious youth violence. On review, I have been satisfied that serious youth violence is considered and treated as a safeguarding issue in Norfolk although there are undoubtedly areas which could benefit from an improved response. Given historic funding shortfalls as well as the provision in the county, it is likely that particular areas of work will be associated with young people's early access to therapeutic services, the consideration of girls with respect to serious youth violence and county lines in particular, and developing a better understanding of referrals into services across the charitable and voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

The report identifies that in all but one area, police force leaders actively supported and contributed to effective multi-agency strategic approaches to tackling serious youth violence. Some police forces endorsed the public health approach, and this was demonstrated in a range of approaches to prevention, and some effective work between the police and schools and other education providers to reduce harm from serious youth violence. There would appear to be a range of different approaches to prevention work in schools and I will therefore be considering work that can be undertaken to enable school safeguarding leads to be better informed on evidence-informed prevention approaches.

For Office Use Only:

- Response forwarded to the Chief Constable.
- Response forwarded to the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.
- Response submitted to the HMI-CFRS monitoring portal.
- Response published on the OPCQJ website.