

**Rt Hon Alun Michael JP OStJ FRSA**

Comisiynydd yr Heddlu a Throseddu De Cymru  
Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales



14 April 2020

**POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER RESPONSE TO THE HMICFRS REPORT:  
'NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION INSPECTIONS: 2019 Thematic Report'**

I very much welcome the issues highlighted in this report. They address some of the key priorities I have committed to in South Wales in terms of children and young people, including within my own Police & Crime Plan, and subsequent project work within my team and in partnership with other agencies. I know that the Chief Constable shares this commitment and that his force Delivery Plan makes many clear commitments to safeguarding vulnerable people, including children.

I particularly welcome the references in the report to the need to work harder locally and nationally to address the underlining vulnerabilities of children and young people within the criminal justice system and in looked after care. I agree that early intervention is especially important and I am pleased that the report references the ongoing progress we are making in Wales with our Early Action Together programme, which jointly looks to tackle Adverse Childhood Experiences and their ongoing effects. This of course started in the South Wales Police force area, with our joint leadership with Public Health Wales, and is now being taken across Wales.

I am also pleased to be making significant progress jointly with the Chief Constable in other areas referenced in the report. For example, in March 2020, we jointly launched our Children's Charter, becoming the first police force area in England and Wales to do so. This outlines how we will work with children and young people's interests and needs, and it was positively received by young people at our recent launch. We are also in the process of agreeing a joint Children & Young People Strategy, which looks to advance progress on many areas within this report, including engagement, early intervention and prevention, preventing unnecessary criminalisation of children and young people, promoting an ACE aware and trauma-informed approach, and a number of other key issues.

Our new Joint Equality Plan also contains an objective on engagement with children and young people and we are already in the process of looking at how to deliver against this across the force and importantly within my own work as Commissioner.

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In addition, the newly established Violence Prevention Unit for Wales will be taking a public health approach to preventing violence across Wales. In order to guide preventative action, initial work will be undertaken with key partner agencies to generate a broad picture of available data, with a particular focus on a youth offending perspective. This will help to develop a problem profile for South Wales.

In general, I am proud of the amount of work and initiative that is going into investing in the protection of children and young people in the South Wales area. I welcome the report recommendations for Chief Constables and will look for ongoing updates on progress. However, I am of the view that we are already making significant steps to address many of the issues raised in the report, although I am not complacent and know that there is more to do.

This view is also reflected in the Chief Constable's comments on the report, which are as follows:

*'Child protection will always be a priority for South Wales Police and it is embedded as a key part of our Police and Crime Plan. We are committed to ensuring that all children have the opportunity to develop and thrive in a safe environment and are given the opportunity to reach their full potential. We fully acknowledge the recommendations made in the report, many of which are already in place in South Wales, and will strive to continue to adapt and improve our response in this ever-changing landscape.'*

*We recognise the benefits of early intervention and breaking the cycle of harm before it escalates. The introduction of the Adverse Childhood Experience initiative, in collaboration with Public Health Wales, is testament to our commitment in projects at the forefront of modern policing. This project aligns with the recommendation to reduce the criminalisation of children and young people and instead focus on diversionary and non-criminal justice outcomes.*

*However, we also recognise that we can continue to do more to prevent children from being unnecessarily criminalised or drawn into crime. Our workforce is being educated and upskilled in modern phenomenon such as 'sexting', for example, in an effort to understand the pressures our children are exposed to and prevent unnecessary prosecutions. We will also continue to invest in our youth offending teams to ensure an effective and proportionate approach to youth justice.*

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*We are also very aware of the hidden harm and potential of exploitation that our children face and will continue to invest our resources and energy into tackling these evolving issues, such as County Lines, Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and online crime. We have recently explored alternative responses to frequent missing children in partnership with our key stakeholders and have invested in trained advocates embedded in our Missing Person and Child Sexual Exploitation investigation teams. Our involvement in Operation Encompass is a further example of our commitment to comprehensive and safeguarding for children exposed to domestic abuse in the home and our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements further embrace multi-agency partnership working.*

*We will continue our focus on child protection issues and maintain a willingness to explore new and innovative ideas. Our approach to this area is centred around the child with their best interests and the 'voice of the child' at the forefront of our processes and decision making. We welcome the recommendations of the inspection and will continue to scrutinise our own processes and learn from our peers and partners'.*

I am grateful for the Chief's comments and feel they are a thorough and fair reflection of where we are. He rightly acknowledges progress as well as areas for continued improvement. I look forward to ongoing progress in this area.

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**Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales**