



Ms Zoe Billingham
HM Inspector of Constabulary
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service
6th Floor – Globe House
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29 April 2020

Dear Zoe

HMICFRS – National Child Protection Inspections 2019

I write in respect of the recently published findings in the National Child Protection Inspections thematic report 2019. I welcome the opportunity to comment on Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report and have carefully studied its findings and recommendations.

I am pleased that the inspection report recognised that every police force area, previously inspected, has made progress to achieve better results for children at risk of harm and that the police service is becoming more aware of the need to use 'child-centred' approaches for the policing of children and young people.

The report also acknowledged that a greater focus on safeguarding and the protection of vulnerable people has led to a better understanding and sense of responsibility, both in terms of the recognition of risk and vulnerability and the potential for exploitation when children go missing.

I shared HMICFRS' concerns about the "inconsistent" approaches in place throughout forces in England and Wales to examine devices that are suspected of containing indecent images of children caused by "costly and time-consuming digital forensic examinations". In recent years, I have continued to improve the policing response to those who pose a risk to children and young people by doing all I can to modernise and strengthen local policing in Sussex by raising additional funding through the precept. This investment has increased the resources available in the Safeguarding Investigation Units to respond to vulnerable and children at risk.

The Howard League for Penal Reform report confirmed that 69% fewer child arrests were made by Sussex Police between 2010 and 2018 – reducing from 5,779 in 2010 to 1,766 in 2018. These year-on-year reductions in the number of child arrests are attributed to the Force promoting a child-centred approach to policing and doing all it can to reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of children and young people.

Much of the improved performance in this area is attributed to the introduction of 150 Youth Ambassadors – made up of police officers and staff from across the organisation tasked with challenging colleagues and changing perspectives in respect of children and young people – and 25 Prevention Youth Officers (PYOs) working with children and young people, their families and partner agencies to coordinate activity in respect of interactions, referrals, escalations and de-escalations.



The PYOs also develop and maintain working relationships with schools and other educational establishments and are one of the five stages of REBOOT – an early intervention youth programme – introduced by my office to engage positively with those aged between 10-17 years of age, at risk of committing serious violence and those who have already come to the attention of the police through anti-social behaviour and low-level crime.

REBOOT is a five stage supportive intervention model, with the level of support and intervention escalating through the stages if the young person continues to find them self at risk. During 2019/20, 938 young people were accepted onto the programme and progressed through the five stages. Due to the success of REBOOT, I have extended the funding for the programme further in 2020/21.

The creation of two new outcome codes (the end result of an arrest) for children and young people charged with sexting (outcome 21) and an alternative option where a child or young person has completed an educational and/or diversionary activity (outcome 22) have both contributed positively towards children and young people not being criminalised unnecessarily in Sussex too.

I am pleased with the progress made by Sussex Police in recent years to keep children and young people out of the criminal justice system and I will continue to support the Force in order to maintain this trend and reduce these numbers further still.

It is also important to recognise that the police service are not always the primary agency to respond and that a partnership-based approach is required to ensure that the best-possible outcomes are realised for children, balancing the needs for safeguarding and protection with criminal investigations.

The 'Think Child' campaign, launched by Sussex Police in February 2019, has raised awareness of child protection amongst police officers and staff by providing them with a consistent set of internal communications messages and has challenged their thinking around safeguarding responsibilities. This has included a specific focus on the importance, purpose and requirement to capture the voice of the children and young people at all times.

The inspection report also made six recommendations, three of which related to Chief Constables, with two of these specifically relevant to Sussex Police. I am reassured that the Force is working hard to address both of these recommendations and I remain grateful for the energy, commitment and activity that has already been expended to improve performance in this important area. I plan to discuss the progress made to address these recommendations with the Chief Constable at one of our webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meetings.

I will continue to monitor closely the progress made by Sussex Police and partners to protect children and young people and to secure improvements for the future in this area.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Bourne', written in a cursive style.

Katy Bourne OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner