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Mr Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM
HM Inspector of Constabulary
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service
6th Floor – Globe House
89 Eccleston Square
London
SW1V 1PN

10 December 2025

Dear Roy,

HMICFRS – An inspection of the effectiveness of police and law enforcement bodies' response to group-based child sexual exploitation

I write in respect of the recently published findings from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) following your inspection of the effectiveness of police and law enforcement bodies' response to group-based child sexual exploitation and have carefully studied the constructive recommendations contained within.

I recognise the comments made in the report that *"the police service has made notable progress in its commitment to tackling child sexual exploitation and group-related offending, but more should be done to provide the comprehensive, coordinated response that victims need and deserve."*

I discussed the inspection report with Assistant Chief Constable Ross at my webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meeting (PAM) on 20 November 2025, alongside some of the more specific findings contained within the report. This PAM session and the summary notes captured is available to view on my website through the following link:
https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/how-we-work/watch-live/

I am reassured to note that Sussex Police has adopted the national definition of an 'organised network' as a description of group-based child sexual exploitation following the publication of the final statutory report from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in October 2022.

The Assistant Chief Constable was confident that this definition is fully understood by the analysts within the Force who create the strategic problem profile assessments about group-based child sexual exploitation, and which drives the policing activity delivered in this area. This understanding has been strengthened further still by the completion of mandatory training developed by the College of Policing and the Hydrant Programme.

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I am reassured to note that the problem profile assessments created by the analysts are evaluated through a quality assurance process to ensure that they are based on credible, reliable and accurate information. These analytical products are assessed by running multiple queries on relevant offences before reviewing the results generated from these searches and checking the accuracy of the data provided. Specialist officers and senior management teams also provide further oversight and assurance to ensure that the scale and nature of this offending is fully understood.

HMICFRS found that *"police forces who use the Hydrant Programme template develop better strategic assessments of child sexual exploitation."* I am pleased to confirm that Sussex Police has adapted the Hydrant Programme problem profile template used to develop strategic assessments to identify the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation and group-based offending to make this bespoke to Sussex. As such, five separate problem profile templates have now been created to assist the Force in its response to child sexual exploitation [including assessments for group-based contact offences; non-contact offences; repeat victims; intrafamilial harm and the use of Snapchat in sexual offences against children], with this proactive approach commended by HMICFRS [October 2025].

Sussex Police also have a dedicated senior intelligence analyst responsible for providing a holistic overview of the Force response to child sexual exploitation through the identification and flagging of child sexual exploitation cases on the police management systems used locally. The Force has improved its accuracy in identifying and responding to child sexual exploitation through the creation of this dedicated analytical post because this individual routinely undertakes threat assessments and develops intelligence collection plans to ensure that the police response is directed and targeted accordingly.

I am reassured to note that Sussex Police are seeking to maximise the preventative effects of Operation Makesafe – the national police initiative – by working with partners to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation amongst the business community and providing business leaders with information, advice and guidance to assist them in identifying the signs of exploitation of children and young people, alongside the relevant contact details to report any suspicious circumstances or concerns identified to help prevent and disrupt offending behaviour.

During 2024/25, the Force participated in a regional pilot with The Children's Society to improve the safeguarding responses provided by hotel chains operating within the South East region. These coordinated visits were undertaken by child sexual exploitation coordinators and officers from Neighbourhood Policing Teams with an exploitation risk matrix used to capture the findings and identify any areas for improvement.

Whilst not covered in the national inspection report, I am also pleased to confirm that Sussex Police has introduced Operation Swordfish to improve the oversight and coordination of investigative responses where children assessed to be at high-risk of exploitation are subject to two or more investigations. This initiative was established by the Force after recognising that a more coordinated and holistic approach could be adopted across this complex area of policing to maximise the effectiveness of partnership working, ensure appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place and generate further opportunities to disrupt any criminal behaviour identified.

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Sussex Police has streamlined the number of officers involved in investigating offences of child sexual exploitation by 80% to ensure that this activity is now coordinated by circa. 60 officers who are fully trained in the complexities around children who may be at risk of being exploited – either as a victim, suspect or both – to ensure that the Force can safeguard better and protect high-risk children at risk of exploitation and prosecute more offenders. This emerging practice to safeguard better high-risk children at risk of exploitation was also recognised positively by HMICFRS in the most recent Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) inspection report [July 2025].

The December 2023 inspection report [of the same name] made four recommendations for chief constables. The Assistant Chief Constable confirmed that Sussex Police has completed two of these recommendations [8 and 9]. It was also highlighted that recommendation 2 [problem profiles for child sexual exploitation] is now ready to be signed off as completed by HMICFRS. Recommendation 4 [identification of group-based child sexual exploitation on police record management systems] is still reliant on changes being made to the searchable fields within national platforms and is anticipated to be completed during 2026.

Another six new recommendations were specifically identified for chief constables and police forces in the latest HMICFRS report to help build on the progress made and make sure victims receive the response they deserve. I am pleased to confirm that Sussex Police has already completed recommendations 1 and 2 and that action plans have been developed to address the other two recommendations [4 and 6] by July 2026.

In my role as Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner, I will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account for the performance of the Force in this important and complex area of work to help prevent, disrupt and tackle the threat of child sexual exploitation and protect better those children and young people at risk.

Yours sincerely

Katy Bourne OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner