

The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP

The Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our ref: MOPAC060224-D4868

13 March 2024

Dear Home Secretary,

An Inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service's handling of the sexual and criminal exploitation of children.

I welcome the final MOPAC commissioned report which inspected the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS's) handling of the sexual and criminal exploitation of children, published on 9th February 2024. The report finds that "the force isn't doing enough when children are suffering from, or at risk of, exploitation". The serious concerns include a lack of understanding of the nature and scale of child exploitation and the link to going missing, inadequate investigations and a lack of a child centred, safeguarding approach to victims.

The Mayor and I understand that the findings of the inspection are stark. There is clearly a lot of work to do to change the culture within the police, so that officers place greater emphasis on treating young people not as threats, but as children who need protection from harm. This must improve drastically so that any victim blaming is challenged within, and training for officers and supervisors boosted so that warning signs are acted upon quickly to protect and safeguard young Londoners.

In his letter to the Mayor, on the day the report was published, the MPS Commissioner was clear that the force has accepted the report's findings in full and is committed to improving its service to children. He noted that the findings reflect the MPS's own internal audit, and that a package of actions to address priority concerns has commenced. These are in addition to investment in wider public protection reform commitments set out in the New Met for London plan, including strengthening specialist teams working to protect children from harm.

As you know, the full report follows on from the two 'accelerated causes for concern' which were published in October 2023, stating that the force needs to improve how officers assess risk and respond to missing children, and the quality of child exploitation investigations. Through our regular oversight activity, we know that the MPS has made important improvements to address these concerns including: consolidating and training the staff teams who first respond to missing incidents; senior oversight of risk grading and case progression; 1200 frontline officers trained in identifying child exploitation, information sharing, victim blaming language and perpetrator focused investigations; an officer uplift of 36, with a further 36 by the end of March. Since these changes, double the number of missing child incidents are being assessed as high risk, and there has been a 50% increase in the volume of child exploitation concerns identified and investigated by Child Exploitation Teams.

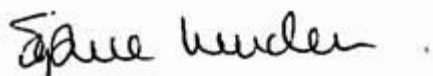
The full report includes a 'further cause for concern' requiring the force to eradicate the use, by all ranks, of victim blaming language. It has an additional 8 recommendations which, overall, call for improvements in officer expertise in responding to children at risk of harm, effective communication and safeguarding, partnership working, and data recording. In response to this the MPS have produced a detailed improvement action plan, which builds on their one from October 2023. The headline elements of the plan focus on:

- The creation of a new operating model for public protection.
- Increased oversight by the Senior Leadership.
- Improved, focussed training, with online guidance and toolkits developed to support practice.
- The development of a 'Central Vulnerability Hub' (CVH). The trial, which creates a new process for the MPS first response to missing incidents, will be evaluated by the end of March and, if successful, considered for full roll out.
- Delivering a 'Child First Strategy', to ensure that all policing interactions and communication with children take a 'child first' approach.
- Audit – monitoring of progress by the MPS Dedicated Inspection Team as well as through established oversight mechanisms, such as MOPAC's Directorate of Audit, Risk and Assurance (DARA).
- Working with safeguarding partners to improve Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) processes - referrals, information sharing and prevention activity.
- IT – the new CONNECT IT system is now live and is expected to improve data capture and system processes.

MOPAC continues to support the MPS in a number of ways; including bringing in Professor Neal Hazel – leading academic on Child First – to support MOPAC and MPS thinking about how to move to a more Child First MPS, and sharing good practice on child participation. Over the last five years MOPAC has commissioned critical services to support children that experience exploitation; London Gang Exit, Rescue and Response and Empower. In June this year we will launch a successor service that builds on the impact of previous services - a new alliance-led London children and young adult violence & exploitation support service which is anticipated to provide specialist support to 600 of London's most vulnerable children and young adults.

The Mayor and I are committed to supporting and challenging the MPS on these reforms to protect children. We sought assurance from the Commissioner on progress through our bilateral meeting in February of this year, and in public at the March London Policing Board. These improvements also fall under the inspectorate's ENGAGE monitoring process and are subject to oversight at their Policing Performance Oversight Group (PPOG). Additionally, MOPAC and the MPS attend the London Safeguarding Children Executive to engage with senior safeguarding partners on these reforms. Through these mechanisms I will continue to hold the Commissioner and his senior team to account on this important issue for Londoners.

Yours sincerely,



Sophie Linden
Deputy Mayor for Policing And Crime

Cc: Lee Freeman KPM
HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services