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Policing in Wales



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# Policing in Wales Response to Children, Young people and Education Committee – Inquiry into Children and Young People on the Margins

## Introduction:

The Children, Young People and Education Committee have written to Policing in Wales via the chair to ask further questions to seek targeted written evidence from its key Policing stakeholders. They posed two questions for each OPCC and Police Force to respond to and the below is the Policing in Wales response to these questions from each force and OPCC.

### 1. **Strategic Direction:** How have you incorporated the issue of child criminal exploitation into your strategic direction for the Welsh police forces? What specific objectives have you set to address this issue?

#### Dyfed-Powys

**Dyfed-Powys OPCC and Police** state that there is a legal duty on all agencies, including the police, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children which includes sharing concerns at an early stage to encourage preventative action. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures detail the essential roles and responsibilities for practitioners to ensure that they safeguard children who are at risk of abuse and neglect.

**Dyfed-Powys OPCC and Police** are organisational partners of the regional safeguarding board ([CYSUR](#)). **Dyfed-Powys Police** alongside its partner agencies will protect children at risk of harm, abuse, and neglect in the following ways:

- Prevention or early help intervention to address any emerging concerns;
- Identification of concerns;
- Reporting these concerns to the Local Authority social services for the possibility of initiating section 47 enquiries under the Children Act 1989;
- Immediate protection to keep safe the individual at risk of harm;
- Provision of care and support to address unmet needs if the child is not found to be at risk or experiencing significant harm;

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- Care and support protection to address needs including keeping the individual safe if the child is experiencing and/or likely to experience ongoing significant harm.

To ensure the effective safeguarding of children, **Dyfed-Powys Police**:

- Contributes to safeguarding and promoting the well-being of the child alongside its partner agencies by the sharing of information;
- Contributes to intra- and multi-disciplinary working in order to better understand the individual child and their circumstances and their needs for care, support and safety;
- Establish and maintain co-productive working relationships with the child at risk, their family and carers to establish what matters to them and to ensure they feel respected and informed.

**Dyfed-Powys Police** applies a trauma informed approach to all incidents requiring a child protection or early help response. This will include the assessment and documentation of child resilience factors to be shared with partners as part of the child's ongoing assessments. **Dyfed-Powys Police** recognises the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

## Gwent

Reducing the number of repeat victims of child criminal and sexual exploitation is a key commitment for **Gwent OPCC** and is listed in their current [police and crime plan 2021-25](#). Jointly through the Serious Violence Duty and working with our commissioned services, this has helped develop our approach to preventing serious violence with an emphasis on understanding youth violence, where it occurs and who is affected. This evidence base has helped shape interventions we offer to children and young people in Gwent.

**Gwent OPCC** commission several services aimed at targeting children and young people at risk of exploitation. These services range from early awareness raising to 1:1 intervention for those most at need. For example, our commissioned services include St Giles Trust which uniquely provides lived experience mentoring support to young people and families at risk of CCE, CSE and serious organised crime. It also covers referrals made for young people known to be involved in knife crime or a pre-meditated serious assault. Quarterly evaluation reports are received from the trust which gives real insight and data around child criminal exploitation and youth violence. This enables interventions to be adapted and changed where necessary to produce positive outcomes. In terms of prevention **Gwent OPCC** has commissioned Crime Stoppers Fearless to provide schools and youth groups with workshops on topics such as County Lines, helping to spot the signs of the grooming and recruitment process, and understanding the impact and harm caused.

Through Positive Futures **Gwent OPCC** is helping support young people throughout Gwent using sport to engage them in positive interactions with qualified staff who are trained in trauma informed strength-based approaches. It is an open access provision with staff working in some of the most deprived areas in Wales helping young people often at risk of criminal exploitation.

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Working together with their commissioned services and **Gwent Police**, the **OPCC** take a collaborative approach to tackling this problem.

Due to the severity and often hidden nature of these crimes, **Gwent OPCC** note it is vital to work closely with partners to identify and respond to both victims and offenders. Collectively with their partners they adopt a strategic approach to ensure decisive action is taken that gets to the root causes of these crimes and prevents further harm.

In Gwent for several years we have been focused on gaining an evidence base of children and young people on the brink of criminal exploitation/displaying vulnerabilities. In 2020, the **Gwent OPCC** [traced the service histories and life experiences of a cohort of 13 children in Newport who had the highest number of recorded offences in the 2018/19 financial year](#). The information required for the research was gathered through multi-agency collaboration. The research consisted of a mapping exercise that revealed many missed opportunities for services to intervene earlier. This meant that the challenges experienced by children escalated before they could be addressed and so became more complex.

From the initial research and findings from the project, **Gwent OPCC** are currently carrying out an evaluation. The report will highlight key findings and offer up any recommendations and consider whether this should be embedded in existing school/agency structures.

The force continues to reassure the **OPCC** that work collaboratively is ongoing to target those perpetrating these offences, to prevent and disrupt offenders. Regular MACE Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meetings with partners internal and external are continuously improving to identify, detect and disrupt risks to children and young people in the community.

**Gwent Police** also state that each of the Welsh forces have incorporated the issue of child exploitation into their force strategic plans. Each has a strategic governance and within **Gwent Police** child criminal and sexual exploitation forms part of the force control strategy. It is also embedded within the regional strategic direction as a designated regional threat within Tarian (tri-force Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU)) and has a standalone Regional Threat Groups specific to Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE), Modern Slavery (MDS), Organise Immigration and Drugs which also ensures that the issue of child criminal exploitation is captured regionally. It also recognises the multi-faceted dynamic of serious and organised crime and the intrinsic links that this has to child criminal exploitation.

One of **Gwent Police's** strategic objectives is to protect the most vulnerable in society. Within the [2021 - 2025 Policing plan](#), this includes reducing the number of repeat victims of criminal and sexual exploitation by increasing the detection of hidden and under-reported crimes such as child criminal exploitation. There is a specific policy relating to all elements of child exploitation and covers policy and procedure for both Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation. There is acknowledgement that these crime types are often inter-connected. **Gwent Police** is developing a problem profile to look at the specific issues of child exploitation but to ensure that the organisation fully understands the issues faced by children and young people who are at risk of criminal exploitation and how they can better combat this problem. There the ROCU links directly with forces and undertakes a regional overview and has completed a regional problem profile to provide a regional specific and assist forces in

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highlighting themes and set specific thematic objectives based on regional and national intelligence and themes.

In order to ensure that there is accountability across all partner agencies, **Gwent Police** are leading on Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) and Missing Children to identify and co-ordinate any local themes identified and ensure that these are tackled in an expedient manner by all agencies with a statutory obligation to safeguard children and young people. **Gwent Police** has developed a Child Protection Delivery Plan which specifically includes missing children and child exploitation as areas to develop good practice and embed these into teams across the organisation. This aligns to national guidance and authorised professional practice (APP). The force also links with the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) amongst others to ensure that the strategic direction adapts to changes in types of exploitation of children.

### North Wales

**North Wales OPCC** provided an update on what their Serious Violence team does to tackle child criminal exploitation they also provided a series of documents with further examples of the work to tackle this issue and the resourcing behind it which can be attached with this response.

The Serious Violence lead said this issue is a top priority for all specified authorities in North Wales. Their extensive consultations, including the Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA), Strategy, and Mapping of Interventions, have revealed inconsistencies and gaps in existing efforts. For 2024-25, all specified authorities have agreed that prevention is the most critical need. The funding that they have utilised to support projects has been devolved to all the Community Safety Partnerships across North Wales who have utilised the SNA and Strategy together with the criteria in which to base their decisions on what projects are supported. This was a limited amount of funding for North Wales and for short term projects which have been listed in the separate documents.

Furthermore, they conducted a professionals and young people survey to gather insights into those children directly affected. This analysis, combined with their strategy, informed the criteria for projects aimed at supporting young people.

Notably, their analysis showed higher school exclusion rates in North Wales compared to the Welsh average. They have responded by developing projects to address this, but they have observed inconsistencies in approaches across local authorities. Unlike England, where legislation mandates specific actions, they rely heavily on collaboration and partnership. All stakeholders recognise the importance of this joint effort in tackling serious violence, and there is still much work to be done.

While the landscape is complex, the lead does believe the duty has been instrumental in mandating collaboration and ensuring a community-wide approach that goes beyond policing alone.

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**North Wales Police's** vision is to be the safest place to live, work and visit in the UK. Their Force strategic plan 2023-2026 sets out their plan centred around their priorities of:

- Being visible and engaging with their communities
- Focusing on the basics of fighting, preventing, and reducing crime
- Providing an excellent service to victims.

Underpinning their priorities are their five key areas of focus which are required to support their successful delivery for the communities they serve.

- Their people
- Partnerships
- Prevention
- Continuous improvement
- Value for money

**North Wales Police** has a vulnerability strategy. They are aware that a National Vulnerability Strategy is to be released imminently. Once published, they will seek to adopt the National Vulnerability Strategy and review their plans to ensure consistency. Their Protect Vulnerable People Unit (PVPU) has a strategic control strategy and tactical action plan for child protection incorporating CSAE which is framed in line with the National Vulnerability Action Plan (NVAP) 7 themes.

Their CSAE strategic objective is: "To prevent incidents of child abuse and harm, through prosecution, disruption and education, whilst ensuring victims can access help and support with ease." The actions within the tactical action plan in support of the strategic objective are taken from identified national good practice, guidelines, recommendations from peer reviews and HMICFRS Inspections so that there is a focus on continuous development. A Detective Inspector within PVPU leads on the CP Portfolio and ensuring its progression.

## South Wales

The **PCC** and **South Wales OPCC** will be working with partners across Wales and in particular with Policing and Welsh Government, as well as UK Government to ensure that tackling child criminal exploitation is a priority for all. Far too many young people are being exploited and the **OPCC** need to take the opportunity to address this. Work to develop the Police and Crime Plan is currently underway, with a commitment to prioritise community engagement within this development and to give due focus to prevention.

In November 2023, Action for Children launched the [Jay Review of Criminally Exploited Children](#) to gather evidence from expert witnesses on the scale and nature of the criminal exploitation of children, the legal and policy response across the UK and the support available to victims. The

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Violence Prevention Unit (VPU) team gave evidence as part of the review, and the review panel concluded that a new system is required, designed with the explicit purpose of tackling the criminal exploitation of children. The Head of the Violence Prevention Unit will be working with Action for Children to explore the opportunities to take on board their recommendations for a new system.

The Wales Without Violence Framework plays a key role in the strategic direction for the **OPCC** and VPU and outlines key elements needed to successfully develop primary prevention and early intervention strategies to end violence among children and young people through a public health, whole-system approach, aiming to address risk factors and encourage protective factors among children and young people.

**South Wales Police's** policing purpose is to pursue criminals, prioritise victims and protect vulnerable people, delivered through the [Chief Constables Delivery Plan \(CCDP\) 2021-2025](#). The operational pillar of the CCDP has objectives focused on preventing harm from serious and organised crime, focus on victims, and protection from exploitation, specifically taking an early intervention and preventative approach with partners to tackling child exploitation and abuse, both physical and online.

Year on year utilising the Management of Risk in Law Enforcement (MoRiLE) methodology, child criminal exploitation, (alongside child sexual exploitation) has featured in the top 10 of identified risks to the organisation, this resulting in a dedicated control strategy to better understand the risks presented and plan to mitigate them, through prevention, use of intelligence, enforcement activity, and public reassurance. More broadly in 2024, the control strategy has become one of Child Protection due to the intrinsic links between missing from home incidents, sexual and criminal exploitation, partnership safeguarding arrangements and the desire not to unnecessarily criminalise children. The control strategy is supported by a Child Protection Delivery Plan.

A child sexual and criminal exploitation problem profile was published in 2023 in support of the creation of dedicated child exploitation investigation teams. A wider child protection problem profile was commissioned in the autumn of 2023 where the findings have been utilised to understand the scale of risk to children and young people through good quality data (including protected characteristics) and enhancement of the capability and capacity to meet demand.

In addition to the guidance and support provided through the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP), and the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP), they also have a 'Child Protection and Safeguarding Children and Young People policy' which directs officers responses and includes safeguarding and investigative advice for cases of child criminal and sexual exploitation.

The link between children missing from home and exploitation (criminal or sexual) and the shared responsibility of all partner agencies was highlighted in the Missing Children Summit hosted by South Wales Police in April 2024. The multi-agency summit provided the platform to share the collective challenges faced across agencies and resulted in them pledging to work together to safeguard those at greatest risk. The event also highlighted the 'Not for Profit' concerns emanating from the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill 2024, to eliminate profit from

private care settings, with the aspirational timescales presenting an increased risk to children looked after and their susceptibility to exploitation.

## 2. **Resource Allocation:** How are resources allocated to tackle child criminal exploitation? Are there any specific funding or resources that have been particularly helpful in supporting the work of frontline officers and investigative teams?

### Dyfed-Powys

In relation to the resource allocation, **Dyfed-Powys Police** has an exploitation desk in the Vulnerability Hub who assist with the strategic direction of the organisation but also operationally by overseeing the review of nominals via regular divisional meetings, including the Force's Intelligence Bureau. In relation to resulting criminal investigations, these are adopted by existing structures within the Force. **Dyfed-Powys Police** does not have divisional teams dedicated solely to criminal exploitations. **Dyfed-Powys Police** has a partnership integrated triage trial currently underway in Pembrokeshire, which aims to prevent and reduce harm and exploitation of children with a more targeted approach to early help across all agencies. There is early indication that this trial is successful and there are plans to evaluate and potentially consider the continuation and expansion of this approach more widely across the Dyfed-Powys region.

Dyfed-Powys' PEEL Assessment can be viewed here:

#### **PEEL 2023–25 - An inspection of Dyfed-Powys Police - November 2023**

- [Report](#)
- [Response](#)

For further context, some thematic inspections for which the PCC has responded to recently:

#### **Joint Inspection of the Multi Agency response to abuse and neglect of children in Powys - February 2024:**

- [Report](#)
- [Response](#)

#### **Group Based Child Sexual Exploitation - December 2023**

- [Report](#)
- [Response](#)

**An inspection of how well the police and National Crime Agency (NCA) tackle the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children - May 2023**

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- [Report](#)
- [Response](#)

**Dyfed-Powys Police** has a child protection problem profile. In May, through the Force's Vulnerability Portfolio Performance Report, there was a spotlight on child sexual abuse and exploitation. These documents are not available to share widely, but the **OPCC** has had sight through work where the PCC holds the Chief to account.

**Dyfed-Powys Police** has a robust Exploitation Policy, Vulnerability Policy and a Child Abuse and Child Protection Policy. The force also has a workflow detailing the response to reports of Child Exploitation.

**Dyfed-Powys Police** follows a number of national policies and procedures.

- [Cysur | National Policies & Procedures](#) – a list is provided within the Regional Safeguarding Board. This is in the public domain.
- [Child exploitation disruption toolkit \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)- Home Office Disruption Toolkit. This is in the public domain.
- <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/child-sexual-exploitation/#legislation-and-the-law>- College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice - this is in the public domain.

CYSUR – regional safeguarding board, attended by both **Dyfed-Powys Police and OPCC**. This is not an exhaustive list (full list can be seen on the CYSUR website):

- <https://cysur.wales/media/tr3denpk/mawwsb-multi-agency-child-exploitation-meeting-terms-of-reference.pdf> Regional guidance on Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meetings. This is in the public domain.
- <https://cysur.wales/media/a4lberr4/child-exploitation-strategy-document.pdf> Regional CE Strategy. This is in the public domain.
- <https://cysur.wales/media/qmfbknr1/child-and-adolescent-young-person-vulnerability-guidance-on-the-use-of-appropriate-language.pdf> Regional guide to support staff, practitioners, professionals and partner agencies working with children, young adults and families and the community to use appropriate language with specific reference to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child Criminal Exploitation. This is in the public domain.
- <https://cysur.wales/media/kagnhfoy/mawwsb-reducing-the-unnecessary-criminalisation-of-care-experienced-children-and-young-adults-practice.pdf> Reducing the unnecessary criminalisation, regional document. This is in the public domain. This directly relates to [All Wales Protocol \(gov.wales\)](#), which sets the expectations for practice across agencies to reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of care experienced

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children (up to the age of 18) and young adults (up to the age of 25). This is in the public domain.

- [Working Together to Safeguard People \(gov.wales\)](#)- Wales Safeguarding CSE Guidance. This is in the public domain.

### School Police Service

In the year ending 31 March 2023, **Dyfed-Powys Police** was active in 318 schools across its area, reaching more than 83,000 children through the all-Wales School Police Programme. Due to a change in funding arrangements from Welsh Government, **Dyfed-Powys Police** is now working to provide a similar service within the Dyfed-Powys area. The force has invested in specially trained school-based officers who provide schools, children and young people with up-to-date information about a range of topics including: the dangers of substance use and misuse; county lines; domestic abuse; exploitation; bullying; antisocial behaviour; internet safety; weapons; radicalisation; and community cohesion.

Work on a three-year Force review is underway (within second year of the review). Service demands continue to grow and become increasingly complex. The Force continues to experience year-on-year increases in recorded crime, with incidents involving mental ill-health and more complex inquiries into child sexual exploitation and cybercrime. Changes to the way that crimes are recorded nationally have impacted on published crime levels and account for some of the increase. Work continues to improve crime data integrity and the Force's focus on vulnerability over the last year has realised a positive increase in the reporting and recording of crimes. Current demand challenges impacting workforce capacity and capability include:

- Increasing demand on Force Control Centre resource;
- Response Officer levels across each Local Policing Area;
- Crime and Incident Hub work and impact on resources;
- Neighbourhood Policing Teams;
- Crime Investigation and Recording linked to new crime types such as stalking and harassment, and changes in recording practices;
- Shortage of PIP2 accredited Detective Constables;
- Analytical capacity - increasing demand for analysis and reporting;
- Project Management capacity - increasing requests for project assistance.

Detail on the financial landscape of **Dyfed-Powys and OPCC** can be seen in the precept and medium term financial plan: [https://www.dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/media/mjmbmvk/precept-and-medium-term-financial-plan\\_english.pdf](https://www.dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/media/mjmbmvk/precept-and-medium-term-financial-plan_english.pdf)

## INTACT

The force's INTACT team works with young people identified as being at risk of committing, or becoming a victim of, serious violent or organised crime. Over the last 2 years, the INTACT team has offered targeted interventions to more than 600 children, young people and vulnerable adults. This includes boxing clubs and other diversionary schemes. The force has estimated that 72 percent of the people who took part in INTACT diversionary schemes had no further police contact for at least 3 months afterwards.

In 2022, the INTACT team received a safeguarding practice award. This was evaluated by Aberystwyth University, and was included in an 'In Focus' APCC innovative practice circulation: [In Focus: Innovative and Effective Approaches to Tackling Serious Violence \(apccs.police.uk\)](https://apccs.police.uk/).

## Police and Crime Plan

[policy-and-crime-plan-2021-2025.pdf \(dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk\)](https://dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/policy-and-crime-plan-2021-2025.pdf)

The Police and Crime Plan sets the strategic direction, which includes Serious Organised Crime and Exploitation. The PCC has committed in his plan to invest in services that support children as victims and prevent or reduce their risk of exploitation.

The **PCC and OPCC** works with his Youth Ambassadors on topics that they raise as challenges within their communities – there are plans for the Youth Ambassadors to hold the Chief Constable to account at an extraordinary Policing Board meeting in September, where they will represent the children and young people within their communities.

The **PCC** has commissioned an independent debriefing, support and mediation service for children and young people who have been reported as 'missing' and at risk of sexual exploitation or victimisation: [Dyfed-Powys Police & Crime Commissioner \(dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk\)](https://dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/).

The **PCC** has provided some funding to organisations and partners in line with the Police and Crime plan to support efforts to reduce risk of exploitation. Decision logs are available on the website: [Dyfed-Powys Police & Crime Commissioner \(dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk\)](https://dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/)

The **PCC and OPCC** is committed to early intervention and prevention, and has become a Wales PCC joint children and young people portfolio lead recently.

The **PCC and OPCC** is committed to being trauma-informed and ACE-aware.

The **PCC and OPCC** have a strong working relationship with youth justice partners who inform on trends and cases within the area, supporting the PCC in his duties to hold the Chief to account.

## Policing Board

The Policing Board is where PCC Llywelyn holds Chief Constable Dr Richard Lewis to account. Minutes and agendas can be viewed here: [Dyfed-Powys Police & Crime Commissioner \(dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk\)](https://dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/).

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Some recent meetings where related topics have been discussed:

- **24<sup>th</sup> February – Related Meeting Topics Discussed:** Group-based child sexual exploitation.
- **14<sup>th</sup> March – Related Meeting Topics Discussed:** Joint inspection of the multi-agency response to abuse and neglect of children in Powys.
- **11<sup>th</sup> of June – Related Meeting Topics Discussed:** Child sexual exploitation; All-Wales Protocol for reducing criminalisation of care experienced children & young adults; Secure accommodation for children; Outcome 22 and disproportionality within youth justice.

## Gwent

Tackling child exploitation is a **Gwent Police** force wide priority and resources are allocated depending on the nature of the report or investigation. For example if there is immediate threat, risk and harm then an immediate response would be dispatched from a response team and any resultant investigation allocated to specific teams. This could take the guise of one of the dedicated exploitation teams, one of the public protection teams, MDS team or proactive SOC teams, CID or Major Incident Team, depending on the nature of the incident. Where investigations are allocated for cases that are investigated outside of public protection, there are safeguarding resources allocated as integral to the investigation to support the young person and link with partners for a multi-agency safeguarding approach.

Through the Serious Violence Duty the Gwent OPCC along with partners has developed a strategy and a strategic needs assessment. It has adopted a data driven approach to preventing serious violence with an emphasis on understanding youth violence, where it occurs and who is affected. It also addresses the risk factors for youth violence with evidenced based interventions with are frequently evaluated through the commissioning process.

There are also bespoke resources allocated to the wider objective of tackling child criminal exploitation and these officers work across the force area to ensure that the communities of Gwent have resources allocated to this issue. Gwent Police is split into two Local Policing Areas (LPA). Each LPA has an exploitation team. These are part of the Public Protection Teams and work within the two Public Protection Units. The department is overseen by a Detective Superintendent and in each area, the DCI has overall responsibility for bringing together the collective partnership response to child exploitation through MACE meetings.

Each Exploitation Team also has a dedicated DI within each LPA. The DI has daily oversight of the exploitation teams, which are made up of 2 DS' and 12 PC's across the force who deal with child sexual and criminal exploitation. The Teams use the 4P template to record activity in line with the prevent, protect, prepare and pursue methodology and record disruptions undertaken under these headings.

The force takes a trauma informed approach to vulnerability and its work on criminal exploitation, building on from the work on Adverse Childhood Experiences it has invested in dedicated vulnerability training and has a dedicated trainer to drive a trauma informed approach throughout the force. The force training days deliver training in this area all of which helps the force to support front line officers and raise awareness. Additional to this, **Gwent Police** funded

2 exploitation trainers to deliver training internally and externally to ensure that local businesses were trained in accordance with Operation Makesafe. These inputs have largely provided awareness to partners but has been of benefit in supporting the work of frontline officers and investigative teams.

## North Wales

**North Wales Police** has a Crime management plan which ensures that there are clear remits of ownership for specific crime types. The force has an automated daily report which ensures that crimes such as CSAE are highlighted each morning. A Detective Sergeant will triage the crime to determine ownership with any Child Sexual Assault and Exploitation (CSAE) crime being allocated to either child protection teams, Onyx (Child exploitation) Amethyst team (RASSO) or CID.

**North Wales Police** has a dedicated child exploitation team. Their remit is to work with children at risk of all exploitation in partnership with statutory and non-statutory agencies. There is an offender focused approach with the team which includes conducting investigations or identifying where there are concerns meriting further investigation and preparing intelligence packages. Onyx also take the lead on management and monitoring of any CAWN (child abduction warning notices) given, as well as providing advice to other officers in applying for any civil orders.

The force OCAIT is a team investigating online indecent images of children. The teams' remit includes taking ownership of OCAG (online child abuse activist groups) referrals (sometimes referred to as vigilante groups) referrals which is not standard practise nationally, but they feel the team have the right skill and expertise as well as capacity to do so. OCAIT conduct proactive operations working with North West ROCU to target people who are suspected of being willing to travel and meet children following online grooming.

These specialist teams feed information into their daily and monthly tasking processes to highlight the highest harm perpetrators, and request specific actions, intelligence gathering, disruption or bid for additional resources. Higher harm cases such as group based offending perpetrators, or a perpetrator of multiple children could be referred into L2 TTCCG.

The resourcing of child criminal exploitation is not confined to PVPU Teams. There have been cases which have been discussed at their tasking meetings and ownership has been transferred to their Serious Organised Crime teams, thus demonstrating that child exploitation is a priority for all **North Wales Police**, not just child protection teams.

Some of their operations have demonstrated their understanding of children having been exploited into criminality with strong decision making around not prosecuting children, for example in drug supply offences. Examples are Operation Tylluan which saw people charged with drug supply offences and the human trafficking of a 15-year-old child who had been exploited into supplying class A drugs. The child was seen and treated by police as a victim from the very start and never prosecuted for any offence.

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Operation Mamba was an operation in response to a cohort of children who were seen as disruptive and abusive, often presenting intoxicated in public or being reported missing. The operation by the Onyx team recognised this behaviour as signs of exploitation and adopted them as victims of crime rather than perpetrators of disorder/ASB. Through months of persistent engagement, the children made disclosures of abuse. Several arrests and criminal charges against adults followed.

The force is continually seeking to improve multi-agency working across the force, particularly around multi agency safeguarding hubs. There have been significant developments in implementing these partnership working agreements in 2023/2024.

## South Wales

**South Wales OPCC** state that the Violence Prevention Unit have funded Safeguarding Adolescents from Exploitation (SAFE) and Contextual, Missing, Exploitation, Trafficking (CMET) Coordinators for several years to help local organisations to operate within the local contextual safeguarding framework through a range of methods including Strategic Panels, and Policy and Partnership meetings.

Currently, there is a Coordinator funded in Cardiff & Vale (SAFE) and Swansea (CMET), with additional funding set aside to support a Coordinator role in Cwm Taf Morgannwg to ensure there is work being done right across the police force area. Coordinators are responsible for embedding a localised, multi-agency collaborative approach to protect young people at risk of, or who have been affected by violence and child criminal exploitation. They ensure that specialist interventions are kept up to date with information, known best practice, produce various guidance documents and collate training packages or advertise training sessions relevant to specialist interventions regularly through CMET and SAFE newsletters.

Data recording and sharing has improved significantly in Cardiff, and Swansea since the Coordinators have been in post – data recording has been aligned across various interventions and updated information sharing agreements have been adopted by interventions going hand in hand with clear referral pathways to not only improve data quality and quality of support, but also to reduce re-traumatisation in young people who are engaging with a mix of statutory and specialist services.

Two Youth Outreach Workers are also funded within ‘Fearless’ for Crimestoppers, who delivery sessions to groups of young people across South Wales, with one session focused on child criminal exploitation.

**South Wales OPCC** also provides annual funding to South Wales Victim Focus (Victim Support) who provide support to victims of crime, including child criminal exploitation. During 2023-24, South Wales Victim Focus supported 466 individuals in relation to child criminal exploitation. The availability of support for victims and/or their parents can be integral in facilitating continued engagement within the criminal justice process.

According to **South Wales Police** the response and allocation of resources is based on the identified threat, risk and harm at the time of report. Although uniformed officers may attend an

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initial report of suspected child criminal exploitation, it does not mean they will retain the incident for ongoing management and investigation.

In October 2022, **South Wales Police** established dedicated child exploitation investigation teams, whose remit has evolved from child criminal and sexual exploitation, to now include adult exploitation cases under a prescribed terms of reference, as there are occasionally those cases which may be better managed through Organised Crime Teams, Criminal Investigation Departments in addition to Rape Investigation Teams, notwithstanding those cases with a clear on-line element which may fall to the Police On-Line Investigation Team. Where exploitation cases have significant force wide implications and risk, through the prescribed tasking arrangements there is the ability for cases to be escalated to either the Force Organised Crime Unit or the Regional Organised Crime Unit for ownership.

The dedicated local policing-based Exploitation Teams fall within the governance of the Safeguarding and Public Protection Department which has centralised policy control. Initially the teams had a single strategic Detective Inspector having responsibility for three geographically based investigation teams aligned to each Basic Command Unit, supported by a fourth strategic team having responsibility for policy, training and the identification of risk through the application of warning markers. The structure of the dedicated exploitation teams has evolved in the last 18 months following the realignment of the wider local policing Safeguarding functions under the central command, resulting in the Exploitation Investigation Teams and Missing People teams being amalgamated, due to the intrinsic links between missing and exploitation.

The new structure has a Detective Inspector based in each of the three Basic Command Units whose focus is on safeguarding and prevention planning with Partners, to work with those highest harm/repeat missing children and young people. This senior investigating officer will then progress the cases via exploitation teams to safeguard victims and disrupt suspected perpetrators for alternative offences in addition to prosecuting substantive exploitation cases through to court. The remit of the fourth strategic team will change in September 2024 as in addition to their existing remit, they will have responsibility for all National Referral Mechanisms (NRMs) received by the force with additional support from an intelligence officer. This whole system approach is likely to result in enhanced outcomes for children and young people subject to exploitation.

As resources are finite, one of the challenges in the assessment and subsequent prioritisation of those 'at risk' from exploitation is not having a pan-Wales exploitation risk assessment tool. In 2021/ 22 Dr Samantha Clutton was working on Child Exploitation Toolkit which was due to cover child criminal and sexual exploitation, which would be in line with the Welsh Safeguarding Procedures and be published on the Welsh Government website, but to date this has not come to fruition. Whilst there is plenty of material on the signs and symptoms of exploitation (criminal and sexual), there is no means/matrix to prioritise those at greatest risk or need.

In the lead up to the implementation of the dedicated exploitation teams, **South Wales Police** invested heavily in training them, taking lessons learnt from Operation Linden (investigations into how South Yorkshire responded to allegations of child sexual abuse) and the Independent

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Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) findings. A bespoke training programme was developed using expertise from Programme Hydrant, Tackling On-Line Exploitation (TOEX), St Giles Trust, National Youth Advocacy Service and other law enforcement colleagues in forces. In 2023 **South Wales Police** completed a large programme of training and CPD to all officers in contextual safeguarding and identification of risk in relation to missing people.

In 2023 **South Wales Police** launched Operation Amddiffyn, an animation led CPD input which focuses on six holistic themes which were identified through the findings of national learning events and reviews, which cover coercive and controlling behaviour, professional curiosity, victim blaming language, data quality, suspect focus and voice of the victim. To date Operation Amddiffyn has been delivered to more than 2400 officers and staff as well as externally to the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) National Conference on Vulnerability and Exploitation Investigations, to other Welsh forces, NYAS Cymru project workers and the NPCC VAWG Taskforce Practice Sharing Event.

At the end of the academic year 2023/24 officers commenced a series of awareness raising inputs to parents/carers of children in secondary education, to increase the awareness, signs and safeguarding options in relation to child exploitation (criminal and sexual, contact and on-line offending). Thirty-seven secondary schools across the Force have signed up to the engagement event, with delivery to resume at the beginning of the new academic year.

National initiative 'Operation Makesafe' is also utilised within the force area with community safety partnerships leading the way in delivering this training to partners. Several establishments within the major cities have been tested in their response to age/relationship inappropriate attempts to purchase hotel rooms. There have also been multi-agency days of action to target 'vape-shops' as they are seen as means of befriending and inducing young people to carry out drug related activity.

**South Wales Police** has had no additional funding opportunities in support of the reshaping of the model outlined above.