

Child Exploitation (POLICY ONLY)

OFFICIAL

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Policy

Statement

Nationally, the Police service is committed to improving the service it provides to children experiencing exploitation.

Vulnerability is a top priority for policing services, and both police officers and staff play a critical part in safeguarding children who live in and visit our communities.

Merseyside Police is fully committed to develop its own local plans and integrated working practices with partner agencies in a way that effectively tackles the problem of child exploitation.

We must ensure that our officers and staff are equipped to safeguard and protect vulnerable victims of crime through early identification of risk and a robust response to identified criminality.

Investigations relating to such individuals can be linked to some of the most serious crimes that the police deal with including trafficking, sexual offences, and exploitation.

Aims

This policy aims to support a common framework that helps all responsible partner agencies to work together for the protection of children and young people. The main aim of the policy is to safeguard and protect the lives of children and young people by reducing the risk of exploitation, identifying risk at the earliest opportunity and by disrupting offender activity. When exploitation has occurred, to ensure that reported incidents are responded to and investigated through the Criminal Justice system from initial reporting through to the disposal stage. In so doing, the policy aims to ensure that crimes against children and young people are successfully investigated and prosecuted and that offenders are held accountable for their actions and that victims receive the best possible service and support.

This policy is underpinned by procedures designed to give clear, definitive, and unambiguous direction for all those involved in its implementation.

Objectives

The main objectives are to:

- a) Identify children and young people at risk of exploitation at the earliest opportunity.
- b) Protect the lives and preserve the safety of all children and young people who may be at risk of harm.
- c) Develop joint working protocols with our partners for more effective partnership working to protect victims and their families.
- d) Improve information sharing across all agencies and have a partnership approach to risk reduction.
- e) Investigate all safeguarding concerns regarding children and young people who are/may be at risk of harm.

- f) Facilitate effective action against offenders so that they can be held accountable through the criminal justice system.
- g) Work proactively with voluntary and statutory partner agencies, providing a multi-agency approach to preventing offences against children and young people.
- h) Deploy disruption tactics in relation to perpetrators and ensure proactive action is taken against those intent on exploiting children and young people.
- i) Ensure all incidents are recorded as reported and in accordance with National Crime Recording Standards and National Standards for Incident Recording.

Application and Scope

All Police officers and Police staff, including the extended Police family and those working voluntarily or under contract to Merseyside Police must be aware of and are required to comply with all relevant policy and associated procedures.

This policy document sets out principles to help guide decision making and is in some parts quite prescriptive. However, it is vital that officers and staff have the freedom to innovate, exercise discretion and take risk-based decisions centred on the needs of the victim and the merits of each case.

Non-statutory policies, including College of Policing APP, provide guidance. They are 'living documents' and it is recognised that there may be a better way of doing this. Accordingly, if staff depart from a policy but can give a good rationale for their actions, and have acted with honesty, integrity, and professionalism, to make the best decision for the community we serve, they will be trusted and supported.

Safeguarding children is the responsibility of all public agencies, including those that are statutory, non-statutory or from the voluntary services sector. There is a key acknowledgement that services engaged in the safeguarding of children and adults need to work together in a structured way to keep those people safe.

The chief officer lead for this policy is the Assistant Chief Constable responsible for investigation and intelligence.

This policy does not singularly address child exploitation. The policy should always be followed in conjunction with current safeguarding procedures, and it is meant to reinforce safeguarding and thus more comprehensively reduce the opportunity for further exploitation of children.

Outcome Evaluation

Progress against specific objectives should be measured on a routine basis. The Head of Investigations Protecting Vulnerable People (PVP) will determine responsibilities and activities, cross strand, via the approved governance structures and report to the chief officer lead.

The head of crime is responsible for monitoring success via bespoke governance arrangements that span partner agencies.

Data Protection Act (2018)

This policy and procedure has been assessed for compliance with the Data Protection Act by the Data Protection, Corporate Support and Development Unit. Any victim data obtained and/or shared will be subject to Data Protection Principles.

Freedom of Information Act (2000)

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 grants a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities. Any requests made for this policy should be forwarded to Freedom.Of.Information@merseyside.police.uk