



**26/03/2026**

Dear Ms Stanley, Professor Fowler, Ms Skeer and Mr Jones

***Re: Response to HMICFRS – Joint Child Protection Inspection: Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment, Leicestershire (February 2026)***

As Leicestershire Police and Crime Commissioner I am writing in response to the joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse within the family environment, conducted December 2025 and published February 2026. I welcome the comprehensive inspection findings and the clarity they provide in identifying both strengths and areas requiring improvement in our local safeguarding arrangements. The HMICFRS letter rightly acknowledges that Leicestershire Police already play a central role in these arrangements, with senior officers providing strategic leadership through their participation in safeguarding boards, public protection forums and multi-agency governance structures. This ensures that police oversight of child sexual abuse and exploitation remains consistent and visible at the highest levels.

The report recognises that the partnership in Leicestershire has prioritised strengthening its understanding and strategic response to child sexual abuse in the family environment. Inspectors noted the development of a draft strategy informed by local practice reviews, thematic audits, surveys and partnership engagement with national bodies such as the NSPCC and the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse. This demonstrates ambition and a commitment to evidence informed planning. I acknowledge this work and support continued strategic focus, including ensuring that strategies translate into consistently improved frontline practice. The HMICFRS report reflects the contribution of Leicestershire Police to this strategic development, particularly through their role in shaping and delivering the Child Exploitation Framework 2024–26 and embedding updated CSE procedures across operational teams.

The inspection highlighted clear examples of positive practice where child centred work is already embedded, and partners are engaging effectively to support children at risk. Leicestershire's specialist units, including the Child Abuse Investigation Unit (CAIU) and the Child Exploitation Team, were recognised for delivering child focused investigations and for their close collaboration with children's social care and the SARC to ensure victims are supported

sensitively. This demonstrates that the force is capable of high-quality work in the CSE arena. However, the inspection also makes clear that this level of practice is not yet consistent, and that systemic weaknesses continue to undermine the quality of multiagency responses. Therefore, strategic intent must translate into reliable operational practice if children are to be protected effectively, and it is the specialist units that provide an important foundation on which that consistency can be built.

A significant concern raised by inspectors was the inconsistency of information sharing at referral and early assessment stages, which hindered timely multiagency risk assessment and protection planning. In several cases, new information about risk was not escalated quickly enough, and strategy discussions were delayed because agencies did not share information effectively. These delays have a direct impact on children's safety and require urgent attention. Strengthening information sharing protocols and ensuring compliance across policing, children's social care and health partners will be essential, and I will work with senior leaders to secure this. The findings also highlight the importance of existing tools used by Leicestershire Police, such as the Police National Database (PND) and statutory MAPPAs processes, which support early identification of risk and ensure information about known or suspected sexual offenders is shared promptly with partners.

The inspection further found multiagency planning and decision-making forums were not consistently attended by all relevant professionals, including health and probation practitioners. This absence of key partners limited the collective understanding of risk and reduced opportunities for professional challenge and shared decision making. Effective child protection requires input from all disciplines including health professionals who can provide critical insight into physical and emotional wellbeing. I want to address this finding further, by discussing with the safeguarding partnership, to ensure mandatory attendance and an uncompromising multidisciplinary approach in all strategy and planning meetings. I am glad to hear that the HMICFRS Report notes that police attendance at strategy discussions, Child Exploitation meetings and MAPPA panels is already routine. I trust the Force will continue to prioritise consistent representation so that police intelligence and risk assessments inform key decision making, and I will also ensure this remains a clear expectation going forward.

Inspectors found that responses to suspected abuse remain too heavily police led, with insufficient focus on the welfare of the child beyond investigative thresholds. The report observed that the focus of the criminal investigation often overshadowed considerations surrounding immediate protection and ongoing care, particularly where forensic evidence was not immediately available. Embedding consistently child centred planning across all agencies is therefore essential to ensure safeguarding and welfare considerations remain central, irrespective of evidential factors. Leicestershire Police's public facing CSE guidance already reflects this expectation by setting out how safeguarding and child welfare sit alongside investigative responsibilities, and by explaining how children will be supported throughout the

process. This provides a strong platform for embedding the more consistent child centred practice highlighted in the HMICFRS letter.

The inspection's findings on criminal investigation delays and procedural weaknesses were also concerning. Inspectors noted delays in interviewing suspects, prolonged forensic examinations, inappropriate reliance on voluntary attendance, and insufficient consideration of potential victims and the wider family or community. These failings increase risk and prolong trauma for children and families. I expect the Force to address these issues directly, ensuring skilled officers manage such investigations, and establish rigorous performance oversight to eliminate avoidable delays and procedural failings. The HMICFRS report reinforces the urgency for this improvement, highlighting the need for investigators to demonstrate more robust safeguarding decision making and clearer coordination with partner agencies throughout the investigative process. While the LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships provide a multiagency training programme that includes professional curiosity and core safeguarding responsibilities, the inspection makes clear that the existence of this training has evidently not yet translated sufficiently into consistently effective practice. Strengthening the relevance, quality and impact of this training, particularly for specialist detectives in CAIU and Public Protection, will therefore be essential to achieving the improvements HMICFRS requires.

The report highlights that children and nonoffending family members are not consistently receiving timely therapeutic support. Inspectors noted confusion about the availability of support during criminal investigations, delays in service provision, and a lack of clarity about pathways for long term support once initial services end. High quality therapeutic support is critical to recovery and resilience, but the inspectorate found that many areas services are inaccessible or unclear. I will look to work with commissioning bodies and partners going forward to strengthen pathways, remove barriers to access, and ensure families understand and can navigate the available support. The HMICFRS letter highlights the strength of the Children's Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (CHISVA) service which the OPCC commissions and the SARC, both of which Leicestershire Police routinely signpost victims to as part of their safeguarding responsibilities.

The inspection also drew attention to challenges in responding to children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour. Inspectors found cases where underlying causes of harmful behaviour were not fully explored, and where multiagency coordination did not adequately consider risks to other children. This reinforces the need for improved assessment frameworks, specialist training and coordinated multiagency management for these complex cases. Strengthening expertise and ensuring practice reflects the latest evidence and guidance will be essential to improving outcomes in this area. Leicestershire Police contribute to multiagency responses to harmful sexual behaviour through risk assessments, intelligence sharing and participation in LLR training and procedures, aligning with the improvements identified in the HMICFRS letter.

It is also important to recognise that while Leicestershire's broader children's services were recently rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted, highlighting strong social work practice and positive relationships with families, the inspection makes clear that the specific area of CSAFE multiagency response requires continued improvement to reach the same standard across all cases. Police continue to participate in multiagency audits, learning reviews and improvement activity through the LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships, supporting the systemwide learning and development highlighted in the HMICFRS findings.

I acknowledge the substantial work already underway in Leicestershire to improve responses to child sexual abuse in the family environment, notably Leicestershire Police's ongoing work. This is through CAIU, MOSOVO, MAPPA, the Child Exploitation Team and multiagency training, all of which provides a strong and necessary foundation for delivering the improvements identified in the HMICFRS inspection letter. The inspection report provides clear direction on where we must focus our efforts: consistent information sharing, full multiagency engagement in key decisions, timely and child centred protection planning, effective investigations and clear therapeutic pathways. I will ensure these areas are prioritised through the local safeguarding partnership and will hold partners to account for measurable progress. The safety, dignity and wellbeing of every child in Leicestershire is paramount.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rupert Matthews', with a long, sweeping underline.

**Rupert Matthews**

**Police and Crime Commissioner for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland**