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Comisiynydd Heddlu a Throseddu Gwent | Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent:
Jeff Cuthbert B.Sc., MCIPD

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

7th May 2020

Dear Home Secretary

HMICFRS Inspection – The multi-agency response to child sexual abuse in the family environment.

As required by statute, I am writing to you to respond, from a Gwent perspective, to the findings contained within the multi-agency inspection report into the response to child sexual abuse (CSA) in the family.

It is right that in light of our increasing awareness of the prevalence and harm caused by CSA, we improve our response to it. Supporting victims and especially those experiencing significant harm is a priority of my Police and Crime Plan. My office is engaged with the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, and attends the Gwent Safeguarding Board and Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategic Board.

In Gwent, I am confident that we have reasonable arrangements in place to respond to CSA but that there is also room for improvement. We are heavily involved in the Sexual Abuse Referral Centre (SARC) Regionalisation Programme in Wales which is working to provide better support for children and adults who have experienced any form of sexual violence. As PCC, I am the major funder of the specialist service provision in this area and continually work with partners to improve the services provided. I am aware that there are waiting times for therapeutic services and limitations on service provision and that more resource is needed in this area. My office was recently successful in our application to the Ministry of Justice for additional Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) funding with half of the funding being used to create a new dedicated children's advocate role.

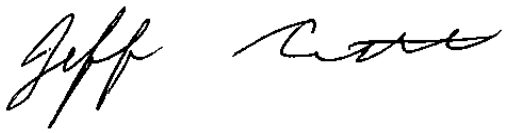
In Gwent, I am confident that through our improved safeguarding arrangements police are referring children to social services and to other services as appropriate. However, I do agree that more training and support for frontline professionals would be beneficial.

There is consistency with this inspection finding and report and the findings of Welsh Government work in this area which has resulted in the national action plan 'Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse'. The three key objectives of the action plan and underpinning actions relating to the prevention, protection and support of children at risk of CSA are consistent with many of the multi-agency inspection recommendations. Furthermore, the new guidance for the Wales Child Protection Procedures includes a specific document for children demonstrating harmful sexual behaviour which includes the requirement to consider their needs, potentially as victims, as a priority.

Unfortunately, I would agree that the practice is too police-led. It is also important to note that when children do not get medical treatment this is, in the majority of cases, because there are no forensic requirements. It is expected that social services would ensure that the health assessment is offered to children in these cases. Through the aforementioned SARC project there has been multi-agency training to increase the awareness and confidence of all relevant professionals to talk about and offer the health assessment and any medical treatment required.

I am confident that Gwent Police do take a child centered approach and are continually looking to improve the services it provides for children. I will continue to support the Chief Constable to ensure this important area remains a focus and that dealing with this area becomes a multi-agency approach.

Yours sincerely



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