SCOTTISH POLICE AUTHORITY
ÙGHDARRAS POILIS NA H-ALBA

Agenda Item 3.4.4

Meeting	SPA Policing Performance Committee
Date	12 March 2024
Location	Video Conference
Title of Paper	HMICS Assurance Review of Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation
Presented By	Assistant Chief Constable, Major Crime, Public Protection & Local Crime, Bex Smith
Recommendation to Members	**For Discussion**
Appendix Attached	Yes - Discharged HMICS Recommendations and Use of Technology

PURPOSE

To provide Members with assurance as to Police Scotland's continued efforts to tackle the threat, risk and harm posed by Online Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation. This includes our relentless focus on perpetrators, our commitment to protecting and safeguarding children, our aim to safely exploit technology as well as our outward looking preventative and partnership working across the UK, Europe and globally.

An overview is provided of progress made by Police Scotland in response to the Recommendations made by HMICS in its Strategic Review of Police Scotland's Response to Online Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation published in February 2020 and its subsequent progress review, HMICS' Review of Online Child Sexual Abuse, published in August 2021.

Members are invited to discuss the content of the report.

1. BACKGROUND

In February 2020 HMICS published its [Strategic Review of Police Scotland's Response to Online Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation](#) (OCSAE) and a subsequent Progress Review in August 2021. The Strategic Review made 10 recommendations with an 11th (Welfare recordation) added by the Progress Review.

Police Scotland has **discharged 9 recommendations** to the satisfaction of HMICS. These are summarised in **Appendix 1**.

2 recommendations remain outstanding. Police Scotland has continued its work towards discharging all remaining recommendations, ensuring an enduring focus on this high risk business area. This has been the catalyst for more wide ranging improvement work that continues as Police Scotland refuses to be complacent in the face of a persistent and enduring threat of significant harm to children in our communities.

The internet has enabled the production and consumption of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) on an industrial scale, creating new opportunities to sexually abuse and exploit children, with the growing volume of OCSAE offending testing Law Enforcement's capacity to respond.

Technological advances have served to aid both offending and detection, creating a huge surge in demand on criminal investigation and child protection services.

Police Scotland is committed to being at the forefront of international good practice and developments in the OCSAE arena. It is engaged with strategic partners across Scotland, the UK and beyond and is committed to robustly tackling perpetrators, partnership working and a preventative approach.

2. MAIN REPORT

2.1 Undischarged HMICS Recommendations

Recommendation 8 - *Police Scotland should work with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) to establish a pragmatic and realistic approach to digital forensic examination requests.*

A pilot between police Digital Forensics and COPFS and its Standard Forensic Instructions (SFI) was undertaken in the east of the country. This evidenced challenges with Police Scotland processes, but also the benefits of having a single COPFS SPOC. COPFS has committed to rolling

this out across the rest of the country. However, this has not yet taken place and Police Scotland is reliant upon COPFS to identify and train staff.

A case management system was introduced impacting positively with police Examination Request Forms (ERFs) backlogs. Digital Forensics has designed and implemented an automated management system for the Cyber Kiosk ERFs which has reduced the backlog.

Separately Police Scotland and COPFS have had discussions on evidential thresholds and whether an "Abbreviated Examination Policy" in terms of numbers of devices and images being examined could be decided by applying a *Serious Harm* threshold test.

Police Scotland (Digital Forensics and SCD Public Protection) and COPFS continue to explore whether an "Abbreviated Examination Policy" might be achievable. This will build in investigating officer safeguards and relate to the Risk of Serious Harm posed. This has been agreed as fundamental to ensuring Police Scotland fulfils its child protection obligations. If this can be finalised it will be presented to COPFS for its view. Further internal work is required.

HMICS has indicated a preference to await confirmation of outcome of internal police discussions before discharging this recommendation.

Further discussion with HMICS is required.

Recommendation 11 - *Police Scotland must ensure that sufficient welfare provision is available and provided to staff working within this area of policing.*

A policy National Online Child Abuse Prevention Investigations: Supporting the Wellbeing of staff involved in the viewing of Child Sexual Abuse Material has been agreed by Police Scotland's Tackling Online Child Sexual Abuse (TOCSA) Gold Group. In developing the policy consultation has been carried out with a number of interested parties including staff associations. Many of the measures outlined in the policy are already mainstreamed into daily business for officers and staff engaged in OCSAE focused investigations.

A NOCAP Wellbeing Group has been established and is currently drafting an action plan to support delivery of the Wellbeing policy. This includes front line staff from the business areas looking to develop the strategy into tangible day-to-day action to develop the aims and priorities of the strategy correlated to staff and business areas needs and suggestions to improve organisational welfare.

Relevant evidence has been submitted to HMICS for consideration of the recommendation being discharged.

2.2 Timescales & Interdependencies

As previously reported, the impact of the pandemic on timescales for progress was not insignificant. Many of the recommendations required collaboration across multiple Police Scotland business areas, as well as ICT work and HR processes where recruitment has been required. These complex and cross cutting interdependencies have at times pushed out timescales for certain recommendations, however there remains an enduring commitment to drive progress to discharge the outstanding recommendations.

2.3 Demand

All progress is set against the backdrop of sustained increases in OCSAE, by any measure.

Crimes
In 2022/23 1,928 online child sexual abuse crimes were recorded in Scotland, an **increase of 6.6% on the five year mean**. Further increases are expected for 2023/2024.

OCSAE Referrals
As with Law Enforcement across the UK, Police Scotland has endured **sustained increases as detailed below** with evidence of a recent reduction however National Crime Agency (NCA) reports further increases expected in 2024:

OCSAE referrals	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2015 - 2022 % change
Total referrals	509	817	1,581	1,346	1,961	2,422	3,111	3,054	2074	
% change from prev. yr.	n/a	+60%	+93%	-15%	+46%	+23%	+29%	-2%	-32%	**+307%**

Strategic Risk – Demand vs. Capacity
Operation PARROR, a dedicated specialised response to OCSAE, was implemented in 2020 as result of the sustained increases and this has now been embedded into business as usual activity through the establishment of dedicated online CSAE enforcement teams with dedicated Digital Forensic and Intelligence Support as per recommendation 5 which has been closed (see appendix).

Demand levels have continued to rise beyond that experienced throughout the period immediately prior to and during Operation PARROR,

and, consequently maintaining proportionate levels of enforcement has proven challenging. There has always been workflow with a number of NOCAP investigations awaiting enforcement - a consequence of demand exceeding resource capacity.

This presents a risk to the organisation and communities as it represents individuals who <u>may</u> have been involved in the online abuse of children.

Currently demand is being met by allocated resource and is deemed within risk threshold.

2.4 Key Successes

Victim Identification and Child Abuse Images Database (CAID)
Over the past two years Police Scotland has invested heavily in promoting and supporting its small but effective OCSAE Victim Identification (VID) team. Located within the NCAIU, these officers investigate to identify children depicted in images recovered during investigations but whose identity is unknown. It is vital to resolve these identities to ensure the welfare of the children, invoke child protection processes and ensure safeguarding. The number of investigations supported by the VID team has increased by over 300% in the past two years. Victim Referrals have also increased into the National Crime Agency (NCA) by 179% (77 in 21/22 and currently 215 in 23/24) in the past 2 years.

Police Scotland's Digital Forensics team has significantly improved its compliance in terms of uploads to CAID and Police Scotland now features in the top 10 performing forces in the UK.

NCA recently commented (February 2024) on Police Scotland now being the UK top performer in relation to Victim Identification business area.

Pro-Active Approach – Operation Overview
Operation Overview is Police Scotland's recently (November 2022) refreshed approach to the authorised use of the Undercover Online (UCOL) tactic. The authority enhances our ability to respond more efficiently and effectively to high harm OCSAE threats within Scotland, ultimately increasing our ability to protect children in Scotland.

Since the operation was launched, 58 males have been arrested and charged with various OCSAE offences, including grooming charges. 19 nominals have been identified in other jurisdictions, predominantly England and Wales, with evidential material provided to pertinent Home Office police forces, or other law enforcement, for progression.

2.5 Governance & Strategic Engagement

Governance
Police Scotland's internal governance remains improved and its wider strategic engagement is demonstrable. Police Scotland internally operates a TOCSA Gold (Strategic) and Silver (TOCSA Tactical) structure with various subgroups. (This led to the discharge of Recommendation 3 in August 2021).

Strategic Engagement - NCA
Police Scotland remains pro-actively engaged with the NCA and its UK structures including its Strategic Governance Group and Pursue and Prevent Boards.

2.6 Partnership & Prevention

Multi-Agency Preventing OCSAE (MAOCSAE) Group; the group meets quarterly with a focus on new innovation, public safety awareness, as well as recognition of streamlining and mutually supporting media activity and campaigns.

Police Scotland has strengthened relationships with Ofcom Scotland in anticipation of the new Online Safety Act and Ofcom Scotland's enhanced regulatory role in the Bill. A memorandum of understanding has been developed to ensure clarity of process to allow Police Scotland to effectively recover any Child Sexual Abuse Material received by Ofcom in Scotland.

Given the prevalence of female victims in OCSAE offending Police Scotland recognises the importance of ensuring our VAWG (Violence Against Women & Girls) work is informed by our OCSAE work and there is integration where possible. As such the emerging trends and threats discussed at MAOCSAE can help make informed assessments and decisions regarding VAWG.

Police Scotland's Partnerships, Prevention & Community Wellbeing (PPCW) Cybercrime Harm Prevention (CHP) Team has a multifaceted approach to educating young people about online abuse, grooming and exploitation. Where possible children and young people are addressed directly, however, work is also done with parents, schools, sports clubs service providers and various partners to reinforce messaging.

Police Scotland is part of the Horizon-EU funded "Prevent & Protect Through Support" (2PS) project.

This is a 22 strong international consortium of partners, funded for 3 years, to fight child sexual abuse, reduce the number of abused children and protect those at risk of exploitation. The consortium is made up of a number of EU law enforcement agencies, academia and other organisations.

Police Scotland is actively engaged with Childlight, with the Chief Constable speaking at its launch event at the University of Edinburgh in March 2023. Childlight aims to understand the prevalence, nature and scale of child sexual exploitation and abuse worldwide. Police Scotland is working to share data to inform Childlight's work.

Use of Technology

This is linked to action PPC 20221207-007 - Online Child Sexual Abuse – Police Scotland to provide a report to a future committee which details the potential introduction of technology that would be of benefit in this area.

Police Scotland has a Policing in a Digital World Programme to examine how to grow and shape capabilities to meet the increasing threat and harm from child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Police Scotland aims to make best use of available technologies to assist us, whilst recognising the need to ensure public confidence and appropriate safeguards in developing new technologies, to better enable us to fulfil our statutory obligations in keeping children safe.

Developing and introducing new technologies often also requires significant financial investment and additional resource to assist with the change and transformation process.

There are a number technical solutions which would bring greater efficiency in the world of OCSAE investigations. Although the vast majority of NOCAP offending relates to Indecent Imagery of Children there is a growing number of investigations which requires the identification, examination and analysis of chat logs. This can be in tandem to imagery or as a standalone aspect of investigation. There are a number of tools which can assist on these fronts, some of which are detailed in **Appendix 2**.

3.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are cost implications associated with some of the technological work relating to Digital Forensics which Police Scotland continues to

manage and develop. This also pertains to the matters described in Recommendation 6. However, it is assessed that there are no significant financial risks associated with the delivery of the recommendations.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

There are resourcing and wellbeing aspects to some of the recommendations, but there are no strategic personnel issues identified.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications in this report.

6. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

There are reputational implications, as detailed in the main body of this report, aligned with the ability to effectively meet demand and keep children safe.

7. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are social implications as detailed in the main body of this report, aligned with the ability to effectively meet demand and keep children safe.

8. COMMUNITY IMPACT

There are community implications, as detailed in the main body of this report, aligned with the ability to effectively meet demand and keep children safe.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are no equality implications in this report.

10. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to discuss the content of the report.

Discharged HMICS Recommendations

Recommendation 1- *Police Scotland should improve the means by which recorded data can accurately inform assessment of the scale and nature of online child sexual abuse.*

Discharged August 2021 – Context:

OCSAE markers now in place across force systems.

Recommendation 2- *Police Scotland should review the level of analytical support provided to the Public Protection business area and consider the appointment of a dedicated analytical resource.*

Discharged June 2022 – Context:

OCSAE now has dedicated analytical support. Examples of analytical product being a bespoke strategic threat assessment, management data on POWER BI, monthly snapshots circulated highlighting current demand, response and assessment of change/emerging threats.

Recommendation 3 - *Police Scotland should ensure a strategic governance framework is in place, which provides support, direction, scrutiny and quality assurance to the force's response to online child sexual abuse.*

Discharged August 2021 – Context:

Internally we operate a Tackling Online Child Sexual Abuse (TOCSA) Gold (Strategic) and Silver (TOCSA Tactical) structure. Various subgroups, such as the Online Child Abuse Activist Groups (OCAG) Practice & Policy Group, the Multi-Agency Preventing OCSAE Group Child Abuse Image Database (CAID) Working Group, National Child Exploitation Policy and Practice Group and OCSAE Tasking and Planning meeting (LPD\SCD forum to bid for specialist support to target CSAE) all report to TOCSA Tactical. There is a Local Policing Detective Superintendent\LPD representation at TOCSA Tactical and the various sub-groups.

Recommendation 4 - *Police Scotland should undertake an Online Child Sexual Abuse Strategic Threat Assessment to accurately identify the scale, nature and threat to children from online child sexual abuse.*

Discharged August 2022 – Context:

In 2022 we produced a Police Scotland/Scottish OCSAE Strategic Threat Assessment. A further assessment is now under review to ensure we seek to identify the scale and nature of the threat to children from OCSAE in 2023.

Recommendation 5 - *Police Scotland should review the current arrangements for allocation of specialist support in relation to online child sexual abuse to ensure the allocation is fair, equitable and meets the needs across the country.*

Discharged November 2022 – Context:

Police Scotland introduced a significant change to the management of investigations involving abuse of children and the images generated from this. This in essence resulted in a standalone specialist response now undertaking circa 92% of OCSAE investigations across Scotland which is complete allocation reversal from 2020 where Local Policing Divisions undertake circa 81% of these investigations. The work done by Police Scotland has identified the failings and taken steps to improve the response and generate better outcomes for communities and embed a new way of thinking and working.

Recommendation 6 - *Police Scotland should review the resources and structure of the Internet Investigation Unit and Communications Investigation Unit to ensure that the force is able to meet current and future demand in relation to initial risk assessment, triage and intelligence development.*

Discharged February 2024 – Context:

Following the HMICS inspection report in February 2020, ongoing consideration has been given to opportunities to enhance the resourcing and resilience within the IIU and CIU to support NOCAP processes. This has resulted in:

- A moderate uplift in resource within IIU
- Re-alignment of some intelligence assessor posts to IIU
- Re-alignment of some CIU posts from 'satellite' offices in Edinburgh and Aberdeen to the Scottish Crime Campus to help meet NOCAP demands on the CIU 24/7 function
- Embedding an accredited communications data Single Point of Contact (SPoC) within the IIU.

Further proposals to restructure and enhance the IIU and CIU were considered during 2022, as part of a wider Strategic Efficiency and

Reinvestment Review (SERR) across Intelligence, OCCTU and Specialist Crime Support functions, however significant resourcing and financial challenges over the last 12 months has made it unachievable to implement these proposals at this time.

The database and workflow management system utilised by the IIU to manage OCSAE referrals and develop intelligence 'packages' for action by operational teams is not fit for purpose and this was highlighted within the 2020 inspection report. Since 2021 Police Scotland's 'Data Drives Digital' and 'Policing in a Digital World' programmes have worked collectively with the IIU and commercial suppliers, to identify potential technology solutions and test proof of concept trials to support this. Due primarily to financial challenges this work has not been able to successfully deliver the technology solutions the IIU require. Despite this, opportunities to successfully deliver technology enhancements still continue to be explored and some positive work is currently underway, which is expected to deliver future benefits.

In December 2023 HMICS acknowledged the progress made and continuing work to support this recommendation and recognised the impact of financial and resourcing pressures on the ability to deliver on proposals identified from the SERR. In accepting these challenges, HMICS agreed to close this recommendation as partially complete – no further action in terms of regular reporting.

Recommendation 7 - *Police Scotland and National Crime Agency should work together to ensure that all capabilities are being exploited to their full potential and intelligence is shared effectively.*

Discharged August 2021- Context:

Police Scotland are now an active participant in the UK NCA-led structures including the Pursue and Prevent Boards and the NCA Strategic Governance Group, the UK Law Enforcement UCOL network and the UK CSE UCOL Co-ordination & De-confliction (CUCD) meeting. Our commitment to these meetings ensures we seek to identify and understand the scale and nature of the threat regarding CSAE.

Recommendation 9 - *Police Scotland should review its capacity and capability to conduct undercover online covert operations in support of its policing priorities and ensure that undercover online operatives are sufficiently equipped and supported to identify and equitably assess the risk to children as a result of online offending.*

Discharged August 2022 – Context:

SCD-PP-Operational Lead team in place (1 x DI, 1x DS and 4 x DCs) to enforce undercover online covert operations. Special Operations Unit in place (1 x DI, 1 x DS, 2 x Cover and 3 x UCOLS) to conduct undercover online covert operations. Overarching Authority in place meaning our ability is enhanced to respond more efficiently and effectively to high harm OCSAE threats within Scotland, ultimately increasing our ability to protect children in Scotland. Authority is SIO led via the Operational Lead team ensuring a Child Protection focus, with support structures in place via a Special Operations Unit regarding tactical and welfare advice for UCOL deployments.

Recommendation 10 - *Police Scotland should ensure that arrangements for deploying undercover online specialist resources are directed by formal tasking arrangements aligned to risk, priority and demand.*

Discharged August 2021– Context:

Tactical tasking and co-ordinating processes submitting bids to either SCD Operational Delivery Board (SCD ODB) and Multi-agency Tasking and Delivery Board (MATDB). Furthermore a new regional layer of tasking has been introduced, Regional ODBs for North, East and West which encourages assessment of the required resource across divisions within each region. If the bid cannot be resourced at Regional ODB then this can escalated to SCD ODB. There is also a Dynamic Tasking Register held at SCD to collate specialist support provided by SCD to local divisions out with the monthly tasking cycle. This commenced in April 2021 and is welcome in terms of transparency and visibility.

There is also an OCSAE Tasking and planning meeting (LPD\SCD forum to bid for specialist support to target CSAE) held monthly, chaired by SCD and LPD invited into forum (as well as wider SCD) all seeking relevant undercover online specialist support.

Appendix 2

Use of Technology

CAID Facial Matching – Following endorsement by the SPA, Police Scotland has now endorsed the use of CAID Facial Matching. This went live in July 2023. The introduction of this tool has bolstered our current ability and will realise both investigative and Child Protection benefits. Use will be monitored on an ongoing basis.

Vigil AI- Home Office project which has just completed an assessment by a number of forces across the UK. The capability would point towards images which are contained on a device, are <u>not</u> on CAID and provide a probability as to the likelihood of these being indecent images of children. This could potentially speed up the obtaining of evidential material by pointing the DF analyst towards the images of 'interest' and greatest risk at the start of an examination.

Camera Forensics on CAID- This will be able to highlight to the analyst/ investigator when a camera has been used across multiple images, not just those images involving OCSAE. This brings subsequent investigative opportunities from the content of those other images that can help identify offenders and children. The VID Team is currently piloting this Camera ID product. Essentially images taken by a digital camera (whatever the device type) have a unique 'finger print' linked to whatever device they are taken from. Image/s from a suspect's device can be sent to Camera Forensics which will extract the photograph's 'fingerprint' and then search it across the internet to find other images taken with the same device. This brings the investigative opportunities. Unlike metadata, this fingerprint cannot be stripped out by software.

Text Analytics- This is being explored through the Critical Issues Project where the opportunity to analyse conversation and text would identify the likelihood of ongoing offending taking place and highlight this to an investigator at the earliest opportunity.

Cyacomb- This is a triage tool which will quickly identify images contained on a computer which are present on CAID potentially reducing the time taken for an analyst to triage a device a locus from hours to minutes, this should be moving to proof of concept via the Policing a Digital World forum.

Web Image Metadata Matching – NCAIU's Victim Identification Team is undertaking a pilot project with the Home Office in respect of Web Image Metadata Matching (WIMM).

Essentially CAID is linked to Camera Forensics and this will extract the Exif data from images and search them across the web for matches through the Camera Forensics platform which would produce additional investigative opportunities to identify and target offenders.

Uniform Database – The VID Team continues to use the Uniform Database as part of a pilot (the platform will be rolled out across the UK next year). A number of successes have been realised, where we have been able to identify and safeguard children uniform identification.

INSPECTR - This is an Online Investigation tool kit that extracts data from various profiles. It looks at the number of words, sentences, frequency of verbs, punctuation, and sentence context to identify the user and if they are using any other different profiles. The issue with this is that it requires a minimum of 500 words and it has not been tested on different platforms.

LOCARD – Is a reporting tool kit that standardise the process of preparing and generating Digital Forensic Reports to present to the courts. The process has not been tried out by an UK or European Court.

AVIATOR – A tool that priorities NCMEC referral reports using an automation and intelligence tool. This reduces the labour required to process the reports.

AIRA - T3KA1 - The company states that its system can quickly identify a number of crimes including CSAM using hash value comparison.

Dark Web Monitor - This is a company that monitors the Dark Web 24 hours 7 days a week to detect crime and uncover evidence. It looks at dark web domains and establishes who the host of a domain is. With this information the specific host can then be examined to establish what other domains are held by the host. This can assist in identifying the legal and illegal sites set up by the host. Part of the work is the detection of CSAM and identification of subjects involved in this.

Developing Resistance Against Grooming Online – Spot & Shield (Dragon S) – Academics at Swansea University have developed a spotter tool which integrates Linguistics and AI to detect online grooming content, pinpointing the manipulative language tactics that groomers use: from making children feel emotionally isolated to communicating sexual intent implicitly and explicitly to them. This Spotter tool will aid law enforcement's online grooming detection work and could have a significant impact on our ability to keep children safe from online grooming.