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Comisynydd Heddlu a Throseddu Gwent | Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent: Jane Mudd

The Right Honourable Shabana Mahmood
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

11th December 2025

Dear Home Secretary,

Group-based child sexual exploitation in England and Wales

As required by statute, I am writing to you to respond to the inspection report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) entitled, 'An inspection of the effectiveness of the police and law enforcement bodies' response to group-based child sexual exploitation in England and Wales'.

I welcome and support the findings in the report as an opportunity to establish how well the police and law enforcement bodies understand and respond to group-based child sexual exploitation, and ultimately to improve how the police respond to and tackle group-based child sexual exploitation. This is reflected by the Chief Constable in his comments:

"I welcome this inspection report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services which examines the progress made by police and other law enforcement bodies against recommendations issued in the Inspectorate's report published in 2023 regarding group-based child sexual exploitation.

The report highlights the progress made in some areas, such cultural change to eliminate the use of victim-blaming language, and the support provided to policing by the Hydrant Programme, to improve the response to victims of group-based child sexual exploitation.

However, as the report emphasises, there are significant challenges remaining relating to data collection, flagging and the quality of criminal investigations. The recommendations made in the report for Chief Constables have been shared with our Head of Public Protection to implement."

Please find an update below detailing the current work being undertaken in Gwent and progress towards meeting the recommendations detailed in the report.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg, a phan ddaw i law, byddwn yn ateb yn y Gymraeg – ni fydd hyn yn gohirio ein hymateb. Os hoffech dderbyn gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg o hyn ymlaen, neu os ydych wedi cael eich gwahoddi gyfweiliad neu gyfarfod ac yr hoffech ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg, anfonwch e-bost at: Commissioner@gwent.police.uk. Darperir gwasanaethau cyfieithu.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and where received, we will reply in Welsh - this will not delay our response. If you wish to receive correspondence in Welsh hereafter or if you have been invited to an interview or meeting and you wish to use Welsh, send email to: Commissioner@gwent.police.uk. Translation services will be provided.

Recommendation 1: By 31 March 2026, the Home Office, Department for Education and all police forces and law enforcement bodies that are yet to do so should adopt the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's definition of an 'organised network' as a definition of group-based child sexual exploitation. And they should make sure they use this definition in all relevant policies, training products, procedures and guidance.

Gwent Police has adopted the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's definition of group-based child sexual exploitation.

Recommendation 2: By 31 March 2026, all police forces should fully adopt and use the Hydrant Programme's child sexual exploitation problem profile template as a minimum when preparing their 2025/26 child sexual exploitation problem profiles.

The force will make enquiries with the Hydrant Programme regarding their child sexual exploitation problem profile template. The Analysis and Research department will seek to utilise this when preparing the 2025/26 child sexual exploitation problem profile.

Recommendation 4: By 31 July 2026, all chief constables should use the Hydrant Programme's guidance so forces can efficiently and accurately identify child sexual exploitation and group-based child sexual exploitation in their police record management systems.

The force welcomes Recommendation 3 of the report for the Hydrant Programme which states 'By 31 March 2026, the Hydrant Programme should develop quality assurance guidance for all police forces so they can accurately and efficiently identify child sexual exploitation and group-based child sexual exploitation in their child protection and abuse investigation data returns and police record management systems'. On receipt, the force will seek to implement the guidance to improve the identification of child sexual exploitation and group-based child sexual exploitation.

Recommendation 6: By 31 July 2026, all police forces should devise a strategy to implement Operation Makesafe consistently and include this in their child sexual exploitation data returns to the Hydrant Programme. This strategy should include the adoption and use of the rebranded Operation Makesafe police and partnership marketing materials.

Led by our Neighbourhood Pillar, the force approach to Operation Makesafe has been reinvigorated. Neighbourhood Pillar are closely linking with the Exploitation Team and wider Public Protection Unit regarding the approach. The force has liaised with local authorities and has made some progress in embedding this in some areas but are working toward a pan-Gwent consistent approach. This is being monitored via the Vulnerability Meeting (a monthly strategic meeting at which the Head of the Public Protection Unit provides a report, and trends relevant to crimes affecting vulnerable people are monitored).

Through my Accountability and Assurance Board, I will ensure progress on improving the force response to group-based child sexual exploitation is being made. I also have other means to monitor progress against these requirements. For example, one of my team attends the above-mentioned Vulnerability Meeting to monitor trends, gaps and progress, and through this we are cognizant of both the progress and the challenges to date of improving the police response in Gwent to group-based child sexual exploitation. One of my team also sits on the Force Improvement Board, which monitors the implementation of all HMICFRS recommendations.

Finally, I am in the process of developing the terms of reference for a deep dive into different aspects of vulnerability, as a result of different inspections and performance information I see. Gwent Police's approach to group-based child exploitation and progress against these recommendations will be considered within these terms of reference.

In addition to the work being undertaken by Gwent Police, my office also commissions and funds services in Gwent whose target beneficiaries include children and young people at risk of group-based child sexual exploitation, as part of wider cohorts at risk of child sexual and/or criminal exploitation. These services are as follows:

- The Crimestoppers Fearless programme is a service to increase children's awareness and understanding about difficult issues they may face, including child sexual exploitation.
- Positive Futures provides trained role models such as sports coaches, and provides sport and physical activity opportunities, to engage young people and encourage them to take part, providing a diversion from peer pressure, anti-social behaviour, and serious organised crime.
- St Giles Trust is a charity providing one-to-one support for children and families involved/at risk of becoming involved in serious organised crime and serious violence. Staff mentors have lived experience of many of the challenging circumstances faced by the charity's beneficiaries and so can provide empathy and understanding. Child sexual exploitation is one criterion for support.
- Senghenydd Youth Drop-In Centre provides a range of services to children and young people and the youth workers raise awareness with CYP on issues such as grooming, trafficking, modern slavery and risk-taking behaviour.
- New Pathways, our ISVA Service provider, employs a specific CYP sexual violence worker, with funding provided through us from the Ministry of Justice.

Staff engaged to deliver these programmes are aware of the risks, watchful for indicators, and equipped to support young people around group-based sexual exploitation should the need emerge. Through this preventative work we seek to reduce and prevent harms to young people in Gwent.

As noted by the Chief Constable, I acknowledge the challenges, as well as the progress to date, made in this area. Ultimately, work remains to be done to achieve the intended outcomes and the force will continue to implement these changes, which my team and I will monitor closely.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Mudd', written in a cursive style.

Jane Mudd
Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent