NCA National Crime Agency

NCA Response to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Policing and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspections

The DG NCA must respond to reports published by His Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) relating to their organisation. This instruction is set out in Section 55 of the 1996 Police Act.

NCA Response

On the 8th December 2025 HMICFRS published a report on 'An inspection of the effectiveness of the police and law enforcement agencies' response to group based child sexual exploitation in England and Wales.'

This report focuses on how well six police forces in England & Wales, two ROCUs and the NCA tackle group-based child sexual exploitation (CSE).

The inspection reviewed the following areas:

- The nature and scale of offending.
- The police's attitude towards victims.
- The quality of investigations and wider outcomes

HMICFRS recognised the steps taken to improve the response to CSE over the years. The response to group-based CSE is primarily led by policing, who are best placed to deliver the immediate safeguarding response, however, the NCA will of course support policing in tackling such cases when it is best placed to do so. It will do so utilising where appropriate, national capabilities such as MCIS, providing a holistic threat picture through National Assessments Centre (NAC) and through national governance responding to all sub threats. We welcome the scrutiny and assessment of our performance within the report as it allows us to focus on areas of improvement. The NCA accepts the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 1: By 31 December 2024, the Home Office, the Department for Education, the Welsh Government, the National Crime Agency, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing should adopt the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's definition of an 'organised network' as a definition of group-based child sexual exploitation. Or they should devise and implement a suitable alternative.

- Recommendation 3: By 30 May 2025, the National Crime Agency should produce an assessment of group-based child sexual exploitation as part of its annual strategic assessment of serious and organised crime. The assessment should use the agreed definition of group-based child sexual exploitation from our recommendation 1.

NCA Director General Response:

In response NCA Director General, Graeme Biggar said:

"Group-based CSE has a devastating effect on children and their families. It shouldn't be underestimated how complex and challenging these crimes are to prevent and investigate, and the police can't tackle them alone. The police, law enforcement bodies, government departments, child protection agencies and the NCA need to work together to effectively protect children from harm and bring offenders to justice.

I welcome the findings contained in this report, including the acknowledgement of the progress made at the time of the inspection and the support the NCA can provide to individual forces to tackle this threat. We accept the recommendations made and have already taken action in respect of those directed towards the NCA.

Since this inspection took place we have continued to develop and improve our strategic assessment of group-based child sexual exploitation, developing a data set to be able to provide a full scale view of the offending to inform senior government officials and assist in the development of government priorities.

I look forward to continuing to engage closely with HMICFRS as we develop our collective response to group-based child sexual exploitation.