



Norfolk's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) response to inspections published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Section 55 of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 37 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017) requires local policing bodies to respond and publish comments on all inspection reports pertaining to your force within 56 days of report publication.

Inspection Title:

Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse in Norfolk.

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Child Protection and Joint Inspection

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[Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse in Norfolk - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

Section 55 Response Deadline:

24 April 2025

Key Findings

Between 9 to 13 December 2024, Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and HM Inspectorate of Probation carried out a joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse in Norfolk.

This inspection focused on the multi-agency response to unborn children and children aged 0 to 7 years who are victims of domestic abuse. The evaluation of strategic arrangements in Norfolk took a broader look and considered the multi-agency response to children of all ages.

Strong strategic leadership and collaborative partnership arrangements in Norfolk are helping to ensure that most unborn children and children aged 0 to 7, who are victims of domestic abuse, receive an effective response that safeguards them and meets their needs.

Domestic abuse is seen as a 'priority for everyone' in Norfolk. Overseen by the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership (NCSP), the Domestic Abuse and Serious Violence Group (DASVG) leads on the delivery of the Norfolk domestic abuse strategy, which focuses on tackling the causes of domestic abuse and supporting all victims of domestic abuse. There is an evident synergy between partners and coherent governance arrangements that provide and oversee the multi-agency response to domestic abuse at all levels. This is helping to ensure that preventing, responding to and supporting children who are victims of domestic abuse are suitably prioritised by all partner agencies.

Relationships between agencies and strategic leaders are mature and allow for constructive mutual challenge and problem-solving. There is good crossover between connected boards, including the NSCP, the Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board and the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board (DALB), to ensure that a whole-systems approach to tackling domestic abuse is provided.

The needs of unborn children and children aged 0 to 7 at risk from domestic abuse are generally identified early and mostly responded to well. Support is well coordinated and sensitively delivered at the right level.

There remains, however, more work to do. The partnership itself has recognised the need for greater emphasis on evaluating service impact and measuring the effectiveness of domestic abuse training across the partnership to ensure that learning is leading to improved practice. There are some weaknesses in multi-agency information-sharing, and not all practitioners are sufficiently focused on obtaining the voice of the child or understanding children as victims in their own right. Multi Agency Risk Assessment Co-ordination (MARAC) processes are not always well utilised or understood.

The partnership's strong strategic intent and commitment to supporting Norfolk children to 'flourish' as a strategic ambition is helping to safeguard children, including unborn children, who are victims of domestic abuse. Leaders have created a strong ethos and culture of openness and shared learning across the partnership.

The work of the DALB, which holds accountability for the delivery of safe accommodation, is diligent and robust. There is a clear multi-agency approach to the provision of accommodation and to the support needs of victims of domestic abuse, including children. This work is informed by robust performance management information and a range of comprehensive needs assessments. It has led to a good range of quality-assured, suitable accommodation being in place to meet need, including sanctuary support to help parents and their children to live safely in their own homes.

The NSCP is well established and supported by a range of effective subgroups. Education services are well engaged and there are clear plans to further strengthen representation across the partnership board and subgroups. Domestic abuse is not named as a priority for the partnership as it is clearly integrated throughout all the work being undertaken.

Independent scrutiny of the work of the NSCP is well established and provides critical challenge and insight, which supports service improvement.

Leaders acknowledge the need for enhanced workforce development, improved information-sharing and to achieve better consistency of practice with children as victims of domestic abuse. This learning is being responded to in a timely way within a comprehensive action plan, which is being tracked and reviewed by both the NSCP and NCSP strategic boards.

Co-design and co-production with children are a strength for the partnership. Children are involved in strategic planning and are helped to produce strategic plans that are specifically written by children, for children to understand. Children have been instrumental in designing specific services to support them as victims of domestic abuse, and leaders regularly hear from children to learn from their experiences to help improve domestic abuse support and services even further.

The intelligent use of partnership data, combined with audit and the voices of children and families, provides an in-depth understanding of the needs of children and families at risk from domestic abuse in Norfolk and the impact of services to support them. The partnership has correctly recognised the need to put even more emphasis on measuring the impact and outcomes of its interventions linked to domestic abuse.

A specialist commissioned service, as a response to domestic abuse, is highly valued across the partnership, both strategically and operationally. Its impact is tangible and far-reaching in providing domestic abuse services and in bringing the voices and experiences of victims and survivors to help shape these.

Effective partnership working has also led to a wide range of commissioned, community, voluntary and social enterprise domestic abuse services being in place to support children, adult victims and perpetrators. These services are available across the continuum of need, ranging from universal to specialist programmes.

While commissioned services are well integrated into the governance arrangements across the partnership, some smaller voluntary services feel less integrated and involved.

Services in Norfolk work well together to identify children who may be at risk from domestic abuse. The investment in creating domestic abuse champions within education and most health services is making a positive difference in raising awareness of domestic abuse, which supports the early identification of risk for children and adult victims.

When there are immediate safeguarding concerns for unborn children and children aged 0 to 7, referrals are swiftly passed to the MASH for an interagency response. Partner agencies, including probation and the commissioned domestic abuse service, are well represented and engaged in the MASH. Referrals are effectively triaged and responded to by multi-agency practitioners. Next steps are proportionate and based on the careful consideration of strengths and risks. When immediate action is required to keep children safe, this takes place without delay. Referrals about domestic abuse incidents from the police vary in quality and do not consistently include important information about the child and family, for example information about their ethnicity, religion and beliefs. Practitioners

understanding of the child's needs, experiences and the risks to them is missing this important information, at the earliest point in time, so that workers can provide a suitably informed response.

Following domestic abuse incidents, police use Operation Encompass effectively, to quickly share information with schools. Regular dip sampling of notifications provides assurance that appropriate information is being shared and acted on. Nearly all children receive additional support in school following information received via Operation Encompass. This information-sharing also helpfully extends to services supporting children not in education and children being home educated.

The voice of the child is not consistently being sought or well recorded by health, probation and police practitioners. While there are some strong examples of practitioners speaking to children and taking the time to listen to and understand their experiences, this is not the case for all children.

The Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) model has been adapted in Norfolk into a process known as Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Co-ordination. This aims to bring agencies together more quickly to coordinate planning for victims. However, these arrangements are not consistently understood by practitioners across the partnership. Some practitioners are not confident that they understand how to make a referral into MARAC or what value MARAC brings. Outcomes of the MARAC are not consistently being shared with relevant practitioners. Leaders accepted the findings of the inspection and planned to undertake prompt action to review the current delivery of the MARAC.

There is a clear process for the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law), and partners are working well together. All applications are considered by a weekly multi-agency panel using information from all agencies. The police receive referrals from most partner agencies. There is an online portal on the police website (single online home) for victims to raise the 'Right to ask' request. This is helping parents to proactively protect their children and make choices that will help to keep them safe.

Recommendations

There were no recommendations made within the report.

Areas For Improvement

There were no areas for improvement as conventionally defined by HMICFRS, however the report does list five items under the heading 'What needs to improve?' which are as follows:

- Partners' understanding and engagement in MARAC and the Partnership's oversight of its operation.
- The consistent consideration of the cumulative harm to children aged 0 to 7 from repeated experience of domestic violence.
- How well the voices and experiences of individual children who are victims of domestic abuse are listened to, understood and captured by practitioners, across the partnership, and are used to inform children's plans.

- The timeliness and consistency of information-sharing, in a small number of practice areas, related to risk management. This includes digital information sharing of health records.
- The accessibility of domestic abuse training to practitioners, its take-up by those practitioners, and how well they apply learning to practice.

Chief Constable response to report and any Recommendations/Areas For Improvement

I welcome the outcomes of the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse in Norfolk which took place in December 2024.

As detailed within the letter of findings which was published on 27th February 2025, the joint inspectorate praised the strengths of the partnership arrangements that we have in Norfolk for safeguarding children. They observed strong collaborative governance and effective partnerships which ensure that children who are victims of domestic abuse receive a well-coordinated and suitably prioritised response, and effective support from a wide range of services. The inspectorate considered that these services meet children's needs and seek to prevent them from suffering future harm.

I was very encouraged that the inspectors recognised that domestic abuse is seen as a 'priority for everyone' in Norfolk and that they also recognised the strong commitment that we have to continuous improvement across our local partnership, with our effective working arrangements leading to a wide range of commissioned, community, voluntary and social enterprise domestic abuse services being in place to support children, adult victims, and perpetrators.

I was also really pleased that they highlighted the strength of frontline practice in supporting both adults and children affected by domestic abuse.

There is of course always more that we can do, and we accept the areas that have been identified by the inspectorate as needing further improvement, both for the Constabulary and for the wider safeguarding partnership. These issues have been clearly set out in the letter of findings. It is encouraging to see that the inspectorate found that as a partnership we had already recognised many of these shortcomings ourselves, and that activity was already taking place to deliver improvements.

We are required to provide a written multi-agency response to the inspection findings by 11th June 2025. Our response is being prepared and will detail the actions that the partnership and individual agencies, including Norfolk Constabulary, are already taking and will be taking to make further improvements.

This activity will be delivered through a joint action plan which will be closely monitored by the safeguarding partnership through our local multi-agency arrangements.

PCC response to report and any Recommendations/Areas For Improvement

I welcome the findings of the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse in Norfolk. In particular, I am encouraged by the acknowledgement that there is “strong strategic leadership and collaborative partnership arrangements”. Alongside the “evident synergy between partners and coherent governance arrangements” this means that most unborn and children up to the age of 7 years receive an effective safeguarding response as victims of domestic abuse.

That said, as the voice of the public into policing, I am concerned by the JTAI findings that “not all practitioners are sufficiently focused on obtaining the voice of the child or understanding children as victims in their own right.” The report’s further observation that there is a lack of full understanding of the cumulative risks on a small number of children who are at risk of repeated incidents of domestic abuse is concerning. While I anticipate the Constabulary’s response to these recommendations will set out areas of work to be undertaken, I am mindful that other agencies are also included in these recommendations e.g. probation and health. I will therefore be asking for relevant working groups within the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) to consider these recommendations within these groups to ascertain what, if any, additional work can be done by the LCJB to expedite these areas of improvements.

With local government review underway there is a prospect of up to three local authorities providing Children’s Services within the county rather than the single authority which currently provides it. This therefore leads to the potential for mature partnerships such as the multi-agency approach to children’s safeguarding in Norfolk to be undermined.

In discussions with the Leaders of the County and District councils I have stressed the importance of ensuring not only service continuity over this period, but also the need to enhance provision going forward by learning from lessons and recommendations made in this Inspection and others e.g. HMICFRS. As Norfolk progresses towards the new authority set up, my office will continue to work with partner organisations to ensure, as far as practicable, that these arrangements are safeguarded and strengthened during this period.

For Office Use Only:

- Response forwarded to the Chief Constable.
- Response forwarded to the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.
- Response submitted to the HMICFRS monitoring portal.
- Response published on the OPCN website.