

NSPCC

Response to

**Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry
into Police Reform**

NSPCC
Weston House
42 Curtain Road
London
EC2A 3NH
Tel: 020 7825 2500
Fax: 020 7825 2525
www.nspcc.org.uk

October 2010



About the NSPCC

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children. The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children in the UK over future generations. In pursuit of our vision we will:

- Create and deliver services for children which are innovative, distinctive and demonstrate how to enhance child protection most effectively;
- Provide advice and support to ensure that every child is listened to and protected;
- Provide advice and support to adults and professionals concerned about a child and if necessary take action to protect the child;
- Work with organisations which work with children to ensure they effectively protect children and challenge those who do not;
- Campaign for changes to legislation, policy and practice to ensure they best protect children;
- Persuade everyone to take personal responsibility for preventing cruelty to children;
- Inform and educate the public to change attitudes and behaviours towards children;
- Use our statutory powers as necessary to protect children.

Introduction

The proposal to abolish police authorities and replace them with locally elected commissioners represents a significant change to policing. Protective police services form an essential part of the protection that society offers to children. The police play a vital and integral role in preventing cruelty to children and as such the NSPCC is concerned that this proposal may have adverse and unintended consequences. As this is such a new way of working there has been limited opportunity to thoroughly test the practical implications and measure the impact of these proposals. **We would recommend that this proposed model is piloted and evaluated by the Home Office to ensure that lessons can be learnt.**

Protecting children from child abuse and interpersonal violence is a complex task. To be successful requires a combination of the highly visible elements of policing with the less visible elements such as engagement in multi-agency work and investigative work. We fully support the importance of local police priorities reflecting the needs of the communities they serve. However, it is essential that there are safeguards in place to ensure that the police have the sufficient operational independence, as well as the necessary time and resources to offer protection to the communities they serve; including the most vulnerable members of our society. These decisions may not necessarily reflect issues the prioritised by the majority of their communities.

Protecting Children and Young People

A democratic process for electing Police Commissioners will not guarantee that the protection needs of the most vulnerable in society are considered. The principle that the electorate will hold the police commissioners to account does not offer opportunities for those who are unable to vote. Many of those people, including all children, who rely on the police for protection will not be afforded the right to vote for the Police Commissioner. We would like to see serious consideration given as to how children and young people will be able to hold the commissioner to account.

The specific needs of children should not be overlooked when identifying policing priorities. Under the Children Act 2004 the Police have a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children when exercising their functions¹

Children should be offered protection both within the home and their community. Challenges faced by the police in delivering effective child protection were identified in Lord Laming's Review of Child Protection in England² which received cross party support. This included concerns about the adequate resourcing of child protection teams within a large number of police forces, particularly since some other issues have a greater national priority. Forces also identified that child protection work can be afforded a low status and that there have been considerable reduction in posts in recent years. In 2009 Lord Laming recommended that the Home Office should take national action to ensure that police child protection teams are well resourced and have specialist training to support them in their important responsibilities³. The consequences for vulnerable children of under resourcing child protection teams are grave. In the challenging financial climate, and when pushed to respond to popular pressures, the NSPCC are concerned that Local Police Commissioners may not properly resource their child protection teams.

Addressing 'Hidden' or Rare Crimes

We welcome the Government's commitment to reducing violence against women. The police are key partners in protecting women and children from the effects of interpersonal violence and abuse. Crimes such as domestic abuse, rape, child abuse investigation, honour based violence, monitoring travelling sex offenders, female genital mutilation and forced marriage are unlikely to be identified as local policing priorities by the general population. This is because they are not highly visible crimes and they disproportionately affect marginalised groups in our society.

¹ Her Majesty's Government, (2007) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children, statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under section 11 of the Children Act 2004*. (London: Department for Education and Skills), p.10.

² Lord Laming, (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*. London: The Stationary Office. p.6.

³ Lord Laming, (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*. London: The Stationary Office. p.60.

Certain crimes including honour based violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation may even be endorsed by some sections of communities.

“I can’t tell people about what is happening at home. I’ve a large extended family and if anyone finds out they will tell Dad. I always feel trapped like there is no way out for me”. - Young person calling NSPCC Helpline⁴

The specific needs of women, children and young people identified that domestic abuse is not always addressed by community and religious leaders, who are predominantly male. This has an impact on how domestic abuse is perceived within a community.

We consider that these protective services are critical to preventing cruelty to children and as such there should be national performance indicators to ensure they are prioritised. NSPCC has demonstrated that the police response to domestic abuse had improved following Home Office directives⁵.

Conclusion

Policing child protection involves complex and sensitive issues that cut across local policing.

We recommend that to ensure these issues are prioritised there should be national performance indicators for child protection. We welcome the acknowledgment in the Police & Social Responsibility Bill consultation document that some cross-cutting issues that are of sufficient risk or national importance that there need to be checks and balances in place to ensure they are given sufficient attention. **We recommend that child protection is identified as one of these issues.** Child protection must be identified as a policing priority nationally and locally to ensure it is addressed in a concerted and co-ordinated way.

For more information please contact:

David Chaplin
Parliamentary Advisor, NSPCC
0207 825 1352
david.chaplin@nspcc.org.uk

⁴ NSPCC: ‘Children experiencing domestic violence in South Asian communities’ 2009
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/policyandpublicaffairs/policysummaries/DomesticViolence5_wdf63300.pdf

⁵ NSPCC: ‘Children and families experiencing domestic violence: Police and children’s social services’ responses’ 2010
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/children_experiencing_domestic_violence_wda68549.html