



# **HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland**

## **Improving Policing across Scotland**

**Monday, 22 June, 2015**

**PRESS RELEASE**

### **HMICS Publish Inspection of Missing People**

Strictly EMBARGOED until 1100 hrs, Monday, 22 June

Missing person inquiries across Scotland have benefitted from a more consistent approach and better access to specialist resources in the two years since the single police service came into effect.

This area of policing could be further improved if Police Scotland made better use of the information it holds and shared it with partners to develop ways to prevent, support and protect those who go missing, states a report published today (Monday, June 22, 2015).

The Local Policing+ Inspection of the Approach to Missing Person Investigations in Aberdeen City Division forms part of the review of local policing in Aberdeen City Division which was published last month by HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland.

It looked at how effectively missing person reports were handled by the division and also examined national oversight of missing people investigations in Police Scotland.

In association with Children in Scotland, Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Institute of Policing Research (SIPR), the inspection looked at all aspects of a missing person investigation – from initial report and assessment of risk through to investigations, harm reduction strategies and working with other agencies.

HM Inspector of Constabulary Derek Penman said: “The importance of dealing with missing person investigations effectively from the outset cannot be over-emphasised and experience has shown that in some instances the report of a missing person is the first indicator that a serious crime has occurred.

“There is usually a reason why a person goes missing, and understanding the circumstances and causes creates an opportunity for the police and other authorities to identify measures that can stop or minimise further disappearances.

“More importantly, it can draw attention to safeguarding issues for the young and most vulnerable in our communities and help in the identification and investigation of crimes which are linked to, or are the cause of, someone going missing.”

Thousands of people are reported as missing to the police every year with over 99% resulting in the person being found safe and well. While many are traced within 24 hours, these inquiries can be resource intensive and Police Scotland puts the annual cost to policing at between £30 million to £80 million.

With the creation of a single service, Police Scotland inherited a complex and divergent approach to missing person investigations with eight different systems for recording disappearances and eight different sets of policies and practices.

The force took an early decision to establish a National Missing Person Unit to standardise and improve the effectiveness of missing person investigation and management throughout the country. This led to significantly improved missing person investigations, better leadership and governance and more equal access to specialist support.

Mr Penman added: “HMICS is encouraged by the leadership around missing persons inquiries under Police Scotland and whilst more has still to be done, we endorse the approaches being taken by the service to drive improvement across Scotland.

“The key areas for improvement by Police Scotland relate to using information held within the organisation to work with partners to develop ways to prevent, support and protect those who go missing.

“In Aberdeen City Division we found strong leadership with an appetite to improve this key service to communities. The Division has produced a comprehensive assessment profiling missing incidents which we found to be ground-breaking in terms of the depth and quality of data analysis and we recommend it be adopted across the Force.”

To ensure this was a comprehensive inspection, the views were sought of people who have been reported missing – the service users. HMICS was assisted in this by Children in Scotland, Care Inspectorate and SIPR and their findings are reflected in a separate report which is also published today.

HMICS has made 11 recommendations – four for Aberdeen City Division and seven for Police Scotland. Police Scotland will be asked to create an action plan to take them forward and to ensure that good practice is shared across Scotland.

The recommendations relate to the sharing of good practice, data used for compiling management information, single points of contact for families, return home interviews, entries on the vulnerable person database, staffing of the National

Missing Person Unit, identifying emerging patterns, comprehensive local assessments and the development of consistent definitions which can be used by all agencies.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **Key Findings and Recommendations from the Report are listed below.**

The HMICS Local Policing+ Inspection of the Approach to Missing Person Investigations is available to download at the HMICS website <http://www.hmics.org/> from 11:00 hours, Monday, June 22, 2015.

To arrange an interview, please contact:

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## **REPORT KEY FINDINGS:**

- Police Scotland receives around 37,000 calls each year which start as missing persons. Around 32,000 of these initial calls become confirmed as missing person episodes. However, the current absence of a national ICT solution means that Police Scotland would require significant levels of manual data analysis to know how many people these 32,000 episodes relate to.
- In fiscal year 2013/14 Police Scotland recorded 36,473 missing incidents and 32,056 of these were confirmed as missing episodes. In fiscal year 2014/15 Police Scotland recorded 39,926 missing incidents and 35,271 of these were confirmed as missing episodes.
- Ten children from children's homes in Aberdeen accounted for 290 missing episodes and 25% of all missing episodes in Aberdeen City in 2014.
- Police Scotland estimates the cost of missing person investigations as £30m to £80m each year. However, there is a key knowledge gap in Scotland about the activity based costs to policing and the actual cost to policing and other agencies is unknown.
- Aberdeen City Division has developed a detailed missing person tactical assessment document which we endorse as effective practice.
- The appointment of a single executive lead for missing persons and a dedicated superintendent (SMPC) has strengthened national leadership and governance arrangements. The strategic direction of travel is good but there are still more improvements identified by Police Scotland to be fully implemented.
- There is strong leadership and governance and effective command over missing person investigations in Aberdeen City Division and reports of missing people are being properly investigated in Aberdeen.

- Service users gave largely positive feedback about their experiences of local policing delivery around missing person investigations in Aberdeen.
- Service users felt that local protocols with the police work well in Aberdeen City Division. They feel that it is important that there is sufficient flexibility for local solutions to be negotiated and agreed within broad national parameters.
- Service users had overwhelmingly positive experiences of operational policing delivery in Aberdeen, but some spoke about police culture and felt that some staff and officers on occasion saw regular missing people as a problem rather than as vulnerable people at risk.
- Reports of missing people are being properly recorded on the initial incident recording system in Aberdeen City Division. In a small number of cases, some of this data is not subsequently replicated onto the local missing person management database.
- Police Scotland has created more equal access to specialist support and has enhanced national capacity around missing person search and investigation. In high risk cases, this includes expert advice on investigative options around social media, the internet and other forms of digital communication.
- The proposed national Police Scotland i6 technology solution has a missing person element which should provide better national visibility and access to all missing person records with significantly enhanced management information and analysis opportunities.
- The new National Child Abuse and Investigation Unit (NCAIU) has been established in line with Scotland's National Action Plan to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and is strengthening child protection measures including those for children who go missing.
- Police Scotland has not issued policy guidance to officers on when a vulnerable person concern form should be submitted in respect of missing people. This has led to confusion amongst officers and has resulted in different divisional approaches across Scotland.
- The level of concern referrals to partners made by the police following missing people episodes in Aberdeen was entirely appropriate to and consistent with the levels of threat, risk and harm in individual missing person records that we examined in Aberdeen.
- Whilst there is strong information-sharing between agencies in Aberdeen about individual missing episodes on a case-by-case basis, the consolidated information from these various partnership records is not routinely collated and analysed for patterns of behaviour or emerging intelligence across different groups or communities. There is therefore a need for improved sharing of information and intelligence between local agencies about children and vulnerable adults who go missing.
- There is no common partnership definition in Scotland for what constitutes a missing person and the lack of a single multi-agency definition makes the subject matter difficult to define and measure.

## **REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **Recommendation 1**

Aberdeen City Division should share the findings from its recently developed missing person tactical assessment with community planning partners in Aberdeen and in particular child and adult protection committees.

### **Recommendation 2**

Police Scotland should work with the Scottish Government Missing Person Steering Group to develop common partnership definitions for missing people that can be agreed and adopted by multi-agency partners across Scotland.

### **Recommendation 3**

Police Scotland should ensure greater consistency between internal and external management information reports on missing people by drawing source data from final incident closing codes on command and control systems.

### **Recommendation 4**

Aberdeen City Division should work with Contact, Command and Control Division to introduce processes to ensure that data and information about missing persons is properly recorded on both STORM and the CrimeFile missing person system to achieve greater accuracy and reconciliation of data between both systems.

### **Recommendation 5**

Police Scotland should provide clearer guidance to officers on the establishment of a single point of contact for the relatives or guardians of missing people.

### **Recommendation 6**

Aberdeen City Division should put local arrangements in place to ensure that return home interviews (in addition to safe and well checks) are conducted by investigating officers for all missing people including adults in accordance with the provisions set out in the Police Scotland Standard Operating Procedure.

### **Recommendation 7**

Aberdeen City Division should conduct a review of the Return Home Welfare Interview (RHWI) function in light of the Police Scotland Standard Operating Procedure and new Missing Person Operational Co-ordinator post to ensure that an equitable service is available when the dedicated RHWI officer is not available due to rest days or annual leave.

### **Recommendation 8**

Police Scotland should issue policy guidance to staff on the circumstances under which a reported missing person should result in a vulnerable person database entry.

### **Recommendation 9**

Police Scotland should conduct a review of staffing within the National Missing Person Unit to ensure that it has sufficient capacity to administer the national long-term missing person database, conduct national investigative reviews and support the ongoing improvement agenda around missing person investigations.

### **Recommendation 10**

Police Scotland should ensure that all divisions develop missing person tactical assessments at local authority level to share with local community planning partners including child and adult protection committees.

### **Recommendation 11**

Police Scotland should work with local authorities and local child and adult protection committees in developing more routine analysis and sharing of data about missing people to inform shared partnership tactical assessments.

### **REPORT EFFECTIVE PRACTICE:**

HMICS endorses the missing person tactical assessment produced by Aberdeen City Division as effective practice. We would encourage the sharing of this product with membership of the Police Scotland strategic and tactical missing person forums so that this effective practice can be disseminated throughout Police Scotland.

**END**