

Safeguarding and Public Protection Command (SPPC) to protect vulnerable individuals

The Safeguarding and Public Protection Command (SPCC) was created by centralising the strategic and operational safeguarding and public protection resources in South Wales Police to address shortcomings and enhance the force's ability to protect vulnerable individuals.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Public Protection, Safeguarding & Vulnerability Leadership, Workforce & Organisation
Organisation	South Wales Police
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Region	Wales
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	July 2023
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Workforce
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Aim

In July 2023, South Wales Police (SWP) created a Safeguarding and Public Protection Command (SPPC) with an overarching aim of providing safeguarding outcomes for vulnerable individuals in a challenging environment.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of centralising the SPCC are to:

- improve the response to safeguarding demands, providing flexibility in resource allocation and standardising processes across the force
- improve compliance risk assessments for missing children
- reduce the number of overdue visits for managing sex offenders
- improve the public protection notice (PPN) process and management of risk assessments
- improve the use of preventative tools such as domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) and stalking protection orders (SPOs)
- establish a Senior Management Team (SMT) to improve strategic oversight
- improve collaboration with partner agencies

Description

Historically, safeguarding in SWP was delivered through a basic command unit (BCU) based model, with Public Protection Units (PPU) in each area responsible for the operational delivery of all associated functions. In 2022, SWP received a grading of 'requires improvement' for vulnerability, following the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) PEEL inspection. Within force, there was a disconnect between strategic direction and local policing delivery, along with the lack of corporate approach across the three BCUs.

In response, South Wales Police launched the SPCC. A temporary detective chief superintendent (DCS) was appointed with overarching strategic and policy responsibility for the entirety of the

force's Safeguarding and Public Protection portfolio. The Public Protection portfolio included:

- the vulnerability change project
- operational responsibility for the Paedophile Online Investigation Team (POLIT) and PPN risk assessors
- the exploitation team
- mental health liaison officers
- two safeguarding superintendents
- detective chief inspector (DCI)

The DCS was also tasked with reviewing safeguarding governance in South Wales Police. The review considered further areas of safeguarding that may be suitable for centralised governance, and whether to include associated investigative function (rape investigation and child abuse investigation). This review involved discussions with commanders in relation to areas of safeguarding that may be suitable for transfer from BCU to centralised governance. The review and subsequent options paper submitted to SWP Chief Officers provided options for discussion in relation to safeguarding governance and not in relation to associated investigative governance.

In April 2023, the DCS submitted an options paper to the force's chief officers, ahead of force Gold Command. This outlined the benefits and risks for each option, along with the contextual basis upon which these options were being considered. The options were:

- Option one – retain governance as per the initial of the Safeguarding and Public Protection Command, with the BCU based PPU model utilised for most operational delivery.
- Option two – safeguarding and Public Protection Command take responsibility for the entirety of operational delivery for safeguarding functions across the force via centralised governance, with local delivery.
- Option three – safeguarding and Public Protection Command take responsibility for some additional operational safeguarding functions across the force via centralised governance, with local delivery. BCU retain the remaining operational responsibilities.

A decision was made by the chief officers to implement option two. This option resulted in the realignment of staffing structure previously aligned to the BCU Safeguarding DCI, to the SPPC. This included the three BCU based safeguarding DCIs and the transfer of all operational safeguarding functionality to SPPC.

The SPPC structure consists of:

- ten detective inspectors
- seven public protection manager
- one safeguarding manager
- one offender management manager
- one exploitation manager

As a result of the decision made at force Gold Command, SPPC commenced the significant organisational change program of centralisation, which was subsequently delivered on behalf of SWP by the end of July 2023.

Evaluation

The SPCC was evaluated by South Wales Police, looking at all aspects of the realignment. The evaluation considered the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of the realignment, to ensure the intended strategic objectives have been fully achieved.

The methodology utilised a mixed methods approach, consisting of quantitative data (statistical/numerical data in relation to public protection and safeguarding performance across numerous important business areas) and qualitative data (focus groups and surveys with relevant stakeholders and written feedback).

Feedback gathered from surveys and focus groups underscores the perceived success of the centralisation process. Among internal stakeholders, 90% rated the transition as average or better, with 40% describing it as good. Additionally, 15% of respondents reported improved relationships with external partners, reflecting strengthened collaboration in areas such as child exploitation and multi-agency risk assessments.

The focus groups identified several benefits, including improved performance monitoring, strategic resource management, and enhanced governance. The centralised structure has enabled faster implementation of initiatives, such as child exploitation teams and the use of a centralised data dashboard to allocate resources effectively. Positive feedback also highlighted the SMT's role in fostering accountability, promoting team cohesion, and standardising practices across BCU areas.

The evaluation found operational, strategic, and cultural advancements whilst also identifying areas for continued focus. The centralisation of the SPPC has delivered improvements across several

safeguarding functions, aligning operational practices with national standards and enhancing governance. Centralisation has demonstrably strengthened the force's safeguarding operations and key performance metrics reflect these significant improvements.

Overall impact

The centralisation of the Safeguarding and Public Protection Command represents a transformative step in the force's commitment to protecting vulnerable communities. The programme of change has delivered substantial improvements in operational efficiency, strategic oversight, and inter-agency collaboration, with performance metrics affirming these advancements. However, challenges remain in fostering local engagement, addressing resource gaps, and streamlining processes.

Performance highlights

Domestic violence and child safeguarding:

- domestic violence disclosure scheme (DVDS) requests rose by nearly 28% year-on-year, with disclosures within required timescales improving by 15%.
- Risk assessments for missing children improved from 33% completion in 2022 to over 90% completion in 2024.

Management of sexual offenders:

- Overdue visits decreased by 84% and overdue risk management plans reduced by 72%.
- The backlog of active risk management system (ARMS) assessments fell by 81%.

Missing persons:

- Reports for missing children declined, supported by problem-solving initiatives and strategic policy changes.
- Risk assessment completion rates for missing adults improved from 28% to 87%.

Preventative measures:

- Issuance of domestic violence protection notices (DVPNs) and DVPOs increased by 42% and 26%.

- SPOs have improved from just one in 2022 and one in 2023, to nine year-to-date in 2024, with a continuing positive trajectory.

These achievements reflect the SPPC's ability to adapt to shifting demands, promote innovative practices, and provide enhanced safeguarding services to vulnerable communities across the force.

Learning

What went well

- Improved resource allocation – it is important to address capacity strains in high-demand areas such as exploitation investigations by increasing staff and providing appropriate training for frontline officers to support these functions effectively.
- Strengthen cross department collaboration – it is essential to continue to integrate SPPC attendance at BCU tasking and force tasking meetings more consistently to ensure operational alignment, particularly around case impacts on local communities. Cross-departmental communication could be enhanced to prevent duplication and increase strategic cohesion.
- Enhanced resource management – to address capacity strain, a more centralised approach to deploying SPPC resources based on demand, especially in high-need areas, would support consistent coverage. Additionally, rotating staff between SPPC and BCUs would foster relationships and enhance vulnerability training, providing a pathway for promotion within a safeguarding background, or enhancing the safeguarding awareness of those promoted into BCU roles.
- Streamlining processes for efficiency – simplifying overlapping roles and eliminating duplication, particularly in statutory reviews, public protection notices, and safeguarding governance, to ensure resources are focused effectively.

Challenges

- Relationships between BCUs and safeguarding command – mixed attitudes from BCUs toward the safeguarding command changes has strained terms of engagement and increased resource demands, creating competition for talented staff. This competitive atmosphere can affect team morale and staff cohesion.
- Capacity and resource strain – certain roles are under-resourced, particularly within the operational exploitation investigation teams, impacting performance and response capabilities.

- Governance and operation disconnect – Structural gaps in the BCUs can affect collaborative performance. This is further compounded by a single-point-of-failure risk due to reliance on individual positions for certain responsibilities.

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