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# PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability)

A revisit inspection of Bedfordshire Police



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## Introduction

This report sets out Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMIC's) findings following our inspection revisit to Bedfordshire Police on 19-20 April 2016. This revisit assessed progress made against the three causes of concern and four areas for improvement in *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability) – An inspection of Bedfordshire Police*, which was published on 15 December 2015. The report is available on HMIC's website: [www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/police-effectiveness-vulnerability-2015-bedfordshire.pdf](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/police-effectiveness-vulnerability-2015-bedfordshire.pdf)

### **PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability)**

In summer 2015, as part of our annual inspections into police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL), HMIC's effectiveness programme inspected how well forces keep people safe and reduce crime. This included an assessment of how effectively forces protect vulnerable people from harm, and support victims, based on findings against four questions:

- How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?
- How well does the force respond to vulnerable victims?
- How well does the subsequent police action and work with partners keep victims safe?
- How well does the force respond to and safeguard specific vulnerable groups (missing and absent children & victims of domestic abuse); and how well prepared is it to tackle child sexual exploitation?

### **What we found in Bedfordshire Police in 2015**

HMIC found that Bedfordshire Police needed to address urgently the serious weaknesses in its arrangements for protecting vulnerable people from harm and supporting victims.

There was still more work to do in relation to domestic abuse to ensure victims receive a reliable and effective response. We also had serious concerns about the way Bedfordshire Police responded to and protected missing children, particularly looked-after children.

There was a strong commitment within the force to improve the services to protect vulnerable people. The force had invested extra resource in its specialist services that support those who are facing the greatest risks. However, HMIC had serious concerns that there were significant weaknesses in the way the force assessed risks,

which meant that vulnerable people did not always get the response from the police that was needed to keep them safe.

There were also gaps in the training and awareness of frontline staff about how they should identify risk and vulnerability, and the steps they should take to protect and safeguard vulnerable people, particularly children. The force had made a good start in preparing to tackle child sexual exploitation and should build on this initial approach with partner organisations.

Bedfordshire Police had taken immediate action to address the concerns highlighted during the inspection including stopping the assessment of risk for domestic abuse victims over the phone.

However, Bedfordshire was one of four forces HMIC graded as inadequate at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm and supporting victims, and which we revisited to examine progress against the three causes of concern and four areas for improvement set out in our inspection report.

## Revisit findings: progress against the recommendations from the 2015 vulnerability inspection report

In this section we set out the causes of concern, areas for improvement and recommendations from our December 2015 vulnerability inspection and consider what progress the force has made in response to these recommendations.

### Causes of concern from December 2015 inspection report

#### Causes of concern

The force's response to missing and absent children was a cause for concern to HMIC. A high number of children in care who go missing were recorded as absent and categorised as 'no risk'. This meant that the force was taking limited action to understand the reasons behind the absence or to identify if these children were facing any risk while they were absent. Frontline staff lacked understanding and recognition of the risk and vulnerability factors, and who was responsible for conducting investigations. We considered the police response to be poor, not only because of a lack of safeguarding and tailored support for vulnerable children and young people, but also in the missed opportunity to obtain information or intelligence to identify potential risks in terms of child sexual exploitation.

#### Recommendation

- To address this cause of concern the force should review immediately its approach to reports of missing children and ensure measures are put in place to assess and safeguard them effectively.

#### Revisit findings

The force is improving its approach to reports of missing and absent children. It has worked closely with other forces to seek advice on how to improve its approach, invited a peer review, introduced scrutiny of missing cases at daily management meetings and completed an internal review resulting in the development of an improvement plan.

There is also greater chief officer oversight through a monthly missing and absent meeting to monitor activity to address the recommendations identified in the HMIC vulnerability report.

During our original vulnerability inspection we identified a high number of children recorded as 'absent', rather than 'missing'. The force together with its partners is undertaking a multi-agency audit of its missing and absent reports to look at the issue of over recording. Partners told us that the proportion of children classified as absent has decreased from an estimated 80-90 percent of children prior to our 2015 inspection to 40-50 percent now. Staff from local authority children's services considered that this may be due to the increased involvement of partners during the risk assessment process. Partners were encouraged by the joint work taking place with the force to establish a single multi-agency safeguarding hub<sup>1</sup> for Bedfordshire and the benefits this would bring.

To improve the initial risk assessment of missing and absent children, a new question set with risk factors has been introduced within the force control room to assist staff in determining whether a child should be categorised as missing or absent. All reports categorised as missing will receive an immediate police response, whilst absent cases will be overseen by supervisors within the control room. The force duty officer (police inspector) oversees all missing adults and children, except those defined as 'high risk' which a detective chief inspector oversees. A missing persons coordinator reviews all absent and missing cases every 24 hours and all missing and absent children feature on the force daily management report.

This has been supported by training, which has been provided to all staff since January 2016. However, we found that while the force has protocols in place in its control room that aim to ensure all absent and missing reports are subject to an initial THRIVE assessment,<sup>2</sup> procedures are not being consistently followed with occasions where THRIVE and additional questions sets are not being completed. HMIC reviews of five cases found that staff did not always identify the cumulative risk to children and often focussed on the current incident in isolation.

The force has taken steps to ensure that those children known to be at risk of sexual exploitation are quickly identified at the first point of contact with the police and treated as a missing person. A child sexual exploitation (CSE) marker placed on the intelligence system will alert the operator. We found good examples of this during our inspection including the identification of a 15-year-old boy with a CSE marker,

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<sup>1</sup> A MASH (multi-agency safeguarding hub) co-locates principal safeguarding agencies to better identify risks to children (and in some areas, vulnerable adults), and improve decision-making, interventions, and outcomes. A MASH enables the multi-agency team to share all appropriate information in a secure environment, and ensures that the most appropriate response is provided to effectively safeguard and protect the individual.

<sup>2</sup> THRIVE is a risk assessment Bedfordshire Police applies to all new incidents reported to it. THRIVE stands for Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability and Engagement. The assessment determines if the police need to attend and how quickly. It also identifies which resources need to be despatched, for example an emergency response by uniform police officers, or an appointment by community officers.

indicating a raised risk of vulnerability and the force decision to treat the boy as a missing person, rather than absent. This resulted in action being immediately taken to locate the boy and to ensure appropriate safeguarding was put in place. However, during our reality testing not everyone we spoke to would classify every child with a CSE marker as missing rather than absent, which is unacceptable.

More positively, we found the force is raising awareness of CSE in a number of ways, including through:

- its 'Safeguarding is Everyone's responsibility' presentation to all staff in 2015. This describes officers, staff and partners' responsibilities and what they should look for when attending all incidents. It also raises awareness of vulnerability and what to look for as well as how to refer children and adults to statutory partners for specialist support;
- giving CSE presentations in crime command seminars;
- including awareness training in its student officer training;
- providing specific CSE training for its investigation officers;
- giving presentations and training to local safeguarding children board partners;
- 'One chance', a hard-hitting domestic abuse publication highlighting the importance of taking action to prevent escalation taken from Norfolk; and
- visiting Thames Valley Police to look at its accredited vulnerability training.

The force has added frequently absent and missing children to its localised 'Know your community' publications in order to increase the knowledge of community officers to these individuals. However, it needs to ensure that its officers and staff understand what is expected of them when they are in contact with an absent or missing child.

The force has completed an internal audit of forty 'missing' cases from 2015 recorded on its missing persons system (COMPACT). The force reported that it is reassured to find all had been subject to a THRIVE risk assessment, and had a 24-hour supervisory review conducted, though some risk assessments had not been signed-off by a supervisor. However, while the audit may have provided the force with some reassurance regarding process issues, it did not address the fundamental question of how well the force identified, assessed and responds to risk. This is an omission that the force needs to correct so that its own quality assurance and audit processes enable it to determine whether the safeguarding of missing and absent children is effective.

In our review of five missing and absent cases we found the force has significantly more to do to ensure children are correctly risk assessed and the appropriate safeguarding put in place. While the force has systems in place to enable it to investigate cases of absence on the incident data base (STORM), we found occasions where the force does not develop available intelligence which could assist it in locating children expeditiously and therefore reduce their potential exposure to risk. HMIC reviewed a case relating to a 15-year-old girl reported absent who was seen in the early hours of the morning by CCTV staff entering a block of flats with two other teenage girls. While a police unit was dispatched, the attending officers failed to gain entry to the building. No checks of police databases were carried out about the address, which would have identified a risk relating to drug dealing in the communal areas and information about how police could access the building.

The force is reviewing its systems to ensure that they include all records of absent children on its missing system (COMPACT), so it can link incidents better and improve its case management.

HMIC is still concerned that the force does not properly recognise the risky behaviour of children who are missing or absent from care homes. Drug dealing and criminal activity is regarded by some staff as 'not out of character' or normal for some children. We found an example where an absent boy had called his care home saying he was "off to buy drugs". This clearly represented a risk to the boy, but it did not trigger a review of his absence status. In addition, the force does not give enough consideration to the vulnerability of members of the public from absent and missing children who commit violent crime. We found the force misses opportunities to prevent offences being committed, such as enforcement of breaches of curfew.



## Causes of concern from December 2015 inspection report

### Causes of concern

The way the force assessed the level of risk and needs of vulnerable victims was a cause of concern to HMIC. We found too few staff understood the process to assess risk and vulnerability (known as THRIVE) and had not been trained in using it. This meant that the force risk assessed poorly vulnerability and therefore did not always send the right people to deal with the right incidents, or indeed, send them at all.

### Recommendation

- To address this cause for concern the force should immediately ensure that all its frontline staff understand THRIVE and puts in place processes to ensure they apply it reliably and effectively.

### Revisit findings

It remains of concern that staff within the control room had received limited additional training on THRIVE since the last HMIC inspection. The force had provided a range of initial training courses for new staff. A number of experienced staff had left which enabled the force to introduce THRIVE more rapidly with staff knowing no other approach. The initial courses involved domestic abuse investigation and safeguarding (DAISU) staff and other specialists providing inputs and detailed training on THRIVE. Some control room staff attended the training for new staff to further develop their understanding. Positively, the force has an audit process in place where supervisors review incidents to identify how well the THRIVE assessment has been applied. This is an ongoing process to improve the understanding of staff within the control room and it is overseen by the senior management team.

Since October 2015, existing staff have been receiving 1.5 hours training on THRIVE and vulnerability, which included CSE. We were told that the existing shift pattern made training staff difficult. One team had recently come into work on a rest day to receive additional training. During our revisit, we identified an inconsistency in the understanding and application of the THRIVE risk assessment process. The force needs to prioritise more quality training and development of staff to achieve the standard of assessment that will consistently safeguard vulnerable children and adults.

The force recognises that to improve the quality of its risk assessments, it needs to be able to review available information and intelligence more effectively. However, its various intelligence systems are not linked and this hampers its ability to undertake

effective risk assessments. The force believes that the implementation of the new information system (Athena) currently scheduled for November 2016 will significantly improve this situation. However, the force needs to put in place effective interim measures to address this concern.

## Causes of concern from December 2015 inspection report

### Causes of concern

The force's response to victims of domestic abuse was a cause of concern to HMIC. Risk assessments were on occasions being completed over the telephone without an officer seeing the victim in person. While there may be subsequent police attendance at an incident, this was not always the case. This may result in a failure to effectively recognise and assess the risk and a victim of domestic abuse (and other family members) not being appropriately safeguarded with tailored support. In addition, we found inconsistencies in the quality of investigation and handover of domestic abuse cases.

### Recommendation

- To address this cause of concern the force should review immediately its approach to risk assessing victims of domestic abuse without the attendance of an officer and take steps to ensure any changes deemed necessary to protect victims are implemented.

### Revisit findings

The force has made a number of improvements in its response to victims of domestic abuse. It no longer conducts domestic abuse risk assessments (DASH) by telephone and now completes the initial THRIVE assessment with an additional ten questions relating to domestic abuse. Officers now visit all domestic abuse victims. The force's domestic abuse investigation and safeguarding unit (DAISU) has introduced a feedback process to officers to improve the quality of its investigations and handovers, and DAISU detective sergeants complete an investigation plan for all high and medium-risk detainees. The force has also set up a domestic abuse scrutiny panel to review cases, with support from the charity Safe Lives, and seeks to understand why its relatively low charge rate remains low despite improving the timeliness of its arrests.

While we found some positive progress, we also found the risk assessment process within the force control room for victims of domestic abuse is being undermined by inconsistent completion of the THRIVE assessment and the domestic abuse question set. This is not helped by occasional delays in supervision of initial calls. The force's high use of scheduled appointments for incidents of domestic abuse

(18-21 percent of all domestic abuse incidents) may lead to lost investigative opportunities and it does not send a positive message to victims about the seriousness with which the force treats domestic abuse. Appointments are averaging 38 hours after initial contact with the victim. The force is committed to improve this position and aims to attend on average within 24 hours. The head of crime now reviews daily the force's response to domestic abuse incidents to challenge the culture and behaviour of officers and leadership in response to domestic abuse.

The force recognised that it needed to improve staff awareness of vulnerability issues. It plans an improved vulnerability training package that encourages 'professional curiosity'. The head of the public protection department responsible for the vulnerability portfolio has secured funding to train all frontline officers using the 'Domestic Abuse Matters' training package provided by an external agency. This training has been implemented in other forces with positive results. Disappointingly this is not planned until 2017 (due to the priority systems training required prior to the implementation of Athena in November 2016).

It remains of concern that HMIC found examples of call handlers failing to investigate fully the circumstances of allegations of domestic abuse made to the police. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether a crime had been committed, the condition and safety of the victim and whether a 'fixed' or 'fast' response should be made. These omissions usually occurred where operators had failed to use the additional domestic abuse questions put in place to support the THRIVE model.

HMIC found positive examples of intelligence relating to domestic abuse perpetrators being developed and acted upon in terms of the assessment of risk. However, we also found examples where this is not happening. One example related to the threat of a domestic abuse perpetrator being assessed as a lower risk than it should have been owing to a supervisory review failing to take account of the suspect's previous offences for violence and threats to kill.

## **Areas for improvement from December 2015 inspection report**

### **Areas for improvement**

- The force should improve its response to cases of children who are at risk of sexual exploitation by ensuring that the staff from the specialist team who have the appropriate professional skills and expertise have the capacity to investigate such cases.

## Revisit findings

The force is reviewing its public protection department. In September 2016 it plans to increase the resources in the CSE and missing persons unit with an additional detective inspector and detective sergeant. The CSE team will also be represented as part of the new MASH structure based in Luton.

This will provide faster information-sharing between the police and partner agencies to identify risk to vulnerable children and provide safeguarding support.

The dedicated CSE team currently consists of one detective sergeant and three detective constables supported with the recent addition of a specialist intelligence officer and part-time researcher. The investment in the intelligence and research function should help the force to improve its proactive capability which is positive. The unit has had several successes, including:

- an increase from 4 to 140 CSE-related intelligence submissions a month following the appointment of the specialist intelligence officer;
- some 38 disruptions of potential CSE offenders in last 6 months;
- some 80 productions of CSE awareness film Chelsea's Choice attended, resulting in direct disclosures from students; and
- several high-profile cases with successful convictions.

## Areas for improvement from December 2015 inspection report

### Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its initial response and investigation of cases involving vulnerable victims, including reports of rape or sexual offences, by ensuring staff with the appropriate skills are available to respond and support victims.

## Revisit findings

The force has only made limited improvement in its initial response to and investigation of cases involving victims. However, we are encouraged that the force plans to increase its number of trained initial contact officers from 27 to 40 by the end of 2016. This will provide additional support for vulnerable victims when they first come into contact with the police, with the provision of specially trained officers who are skilled at dealing with trauma. We were also pleased to find 54 staff trained in the Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview technique, including 11 in the rape investigation unit.

However, Bedfordshire Police recognises that with the newly collaborated<sup>3</sup> learning and development post, it must ensure that its force priorities are recognised and a training plan developed that will support making vulnerability a priority. The force has since provided some training for frontline staff covering female genital mutilation, domestic abuse-related controlling behaviour, forced marriage and honour-based violence.

We found frontline officers and staff to have a good understanding of vulnerability. Local management promotes a positive attitude towards vulnerability and safeguarding and this appears to have been shared with the rest of the team. A sergeant described how their job is 'to protect everyone', even those who cannot or will not protect themselves.

However, we found the training provision to be inconsistent with a supervisor conducting her own gap analysis to identify areas for future training. Officers and staff we spoke to expressed a desire for more face-to-face training and briefing, expressing dissatisfaction with what they described as an over-reliance on computer-based options. Officers referred to a computer package on domestic abuse and controlling behaviour, stating that more was required to develop a better awareness of this area especially with the new legislation. Among those we spoke to, there was a shared view that face-to-face training is required for complex issues like vulnerability and domestic abuse. HMIC agrees that computer-based training is no substitute for face-to-face training. The force should consider immediately how it might ensure more effective training for officers and staff.

Since the set up of the community investigation team, disappointingly none of the officers we spoke to had received any additional training on investigation. In the last 12 months, the community officers we spoke to said they had not attended any face-to-face training on risk or vulnerability, apart from some attending a recent two-hour presentation on hate crime, which they described as interesting and relevant.

We observed a supervisor's daily management meeting and noted that prisoners are assigned to the most suitable unit with decisions made based on risk and complexity and not just crime type. During reality testing, we heard that DAISU representation at the morning supervisors meeting is inconsistent and high-risk domestic abuse investigations with prisoners in custody may not always be dealt with by DAISU. Therefore, investigations into high-risk cases may not be conducted by the most appropriate and skilled people.

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<sup>3</sup> Bedfordshire Police shares a number of its policing functions with Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire constabularies. This includes a recent collaboration of human resources and learning and development, covering the three forces.

The force needs to do considerably more to ensure that officers and staff who initially respond and investigate crime are appropriately skilled to deal effectively with vulnerable victims.

## Areas for improvement from December 2015 inspection report

### Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its compliance with the *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime* specifically in relation to victim personal statements.

### Revisit findings

The force has made some progress to improve its compliance with the duties of the *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*,<sup>4</sup> specifically in relation to victim personal statements (VPS). The force has updated its crime management policy to require the taking of VPS in all cases where an evidential statement is obtained.

As there is not a system-based solution to check if a VPS had been taken, the force is developing a process using a system called MG Wizard to check the number taken by officers and staff. While this is being developed, the force has communicated with officers and staff to remind them of their duty to comply with the code of practice. The force has designed a new leaflet and circulated it to staff to enable an informed discussion with victims about VPS and how it is used in criminal proceedings.

On 22 January 2016, the criminal justice unit (CJU) took responsibility for overseeing compliance with VPS and there is a regular review of this at the joint Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and police performance meetings.

The force recognised that this area needed to be developed further to ensure that victims are offered the opportunity to share with the criminal justice system their experience of the impact of a crime upon their quality of life.

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<sup>4</sup> Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, Ministry of Justice, 2015. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/476900/code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime.PDF](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/476900/code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime.PDF)

## Areas for improvement from December 2015 inspection report

### Areas for improvement

- The force should improve the way it works with partners to share information and safeguard vulnerable people, specifically in relation to making referrals to other organisations of children at risk.

### Revisit findings

Since our last vulnerability inspection the force has been working closely with partners to improve knowledge and awareness of missing and absent children. The force was represented at a local safeguarding children board event in January 2016 which focused on absent and truanting children.

The force recognised that management of missing and absent children, especially of those who abscond frequently, would benefit from a multi-agency co-located team. The force and its partners are keen to develop a county-wide multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) that will include the management of missing and absent children. While this has not yet been achieved, we are encouraged that the force and partners have a shared aim to improve safeguarding for children.

HMIC is pleased to find that the force had taken steps to improve the number of referrals to other organisations of children at risk. This included children who were missing and absent and those identified as a family member of a domestic abuse victim. The domestic abuse investigation support unit (DAISU) referred all crime reports and accompanying DASH risk assessments to social care.

Partners spoke positively about the force's commitment to joint working and the high number of safeguarding referrals to social care and schools highlighting children who were at risk, raising awareness and ensuring that support is tailored to individual needs. Partners welcomed the referrals, but felt that the force could do more to assess the actual risk to the child concerned.

Between 1 September 2015 and 29 February 2016, Bedfordshire recorded 759 reports of crime that took place with a child present. This represents 33.6 percent of the 2,259 domestic abuse offences recorded in the same period. The force was unable to provide this data previously, so we cannot yet assess if its performance is improving; however, we are pleased to note that the force has improved its understanding of the number of referrals.

The force is committed to identify and respond to repeat victims and suspects across all areas of crime where vulnerability may feature. It has recently set up a working

group of senior managers to look at how different groups of victims and suspects are responded to, and whether it can streamline safeguarding activities and rehabilitation pathways with partner agencies. This is a positive step, which we will revisit during our autumn effectiveness inspection.



## Conclusions and next steps

### Conclusions

Bedfordshire Police has made some progress to improve its approach to missing and absent children, but there is still much more to do and the force recognises this. The force must continue to improve its risk assessments and ensure that it considers available intelligence and information when determining if a child is missing or absent. The force's current approach remains inconsistent and ineffective; this means that it is not consistently providing children with the appropriate safeguarding when they need it. This remains a cause of concern.

The force is committed to continue to train its officers and staff in the THRIVE risk assessment process, but needs to ensure that it is prioritising training in the context of many other demands. With a thorough knowledge and understanding of how officers and staff should apply THRIVE, victims of crime should receive an improved service. During our revisit we found an inconsistent approach due to lack of knowledge and understanding.

We are encouraged to find that the force has stopped assessing risk for domestic abuse victims over the telephone. It has also introduced a feedback process for frontline officers where specialist staff review initial investigations and handovers, commenting on positive action taken and areas for improvement. Frontline officers have received this well, and it should improve the quality of initial investigations and handovers of domestic abuse cases.

The force continues to review staffing within its public protection department, although has decided to increase supervision with its CSE team by September 2016. The force also plans to integrate its CSE team into the Luton MASH, which should increase the capacity to investigate this type of crime. The addition of a specialist CSE intelligence officer and part-time analyst is positive and should allow the force to become more proactive in its approach to CSE.

Bedfordshire Police has considerably more to do to ensure that it equips its officers and staff with the right skills to support vulnerable victims. While the force has taken steps to increase the number of specially trained frontline staff, it needs to assure itself that this progress is sufficient to meet the current and future demand. The force should ensure that its training plan reflects its priorities for improving its response to vulnerability and should ensure that effective face-to-face training is provided wherever possible.

The force is committed to complying with the Victims Code of Practice. However, it needs to ensure that it has effective systems in place to provide management oversight and that officers and staff obtain victim personal statements as a matter of course.

We are encouraged to find partnership working and sharing of information has improved, with a keen desire to implement one MASH across Bedfordshire.

During our revisit we found that staff and frontline officers' opinions of the changes being made as a result of the previous HMIC vulnerability inspection varies. Some officers reported seeing no significant change in the force following the vulnerability inspection. Although we found clear control strategy priorities including domestic violence and CSE, some officers were unaware of any prioritisation from the force or from chief officers in relation to vulnerability. We also found that some frontline staff understand clearly the priorities that have been communicated via the force intranet. They also reported greater supervision and scrutiny of priorities by senior officers. The force needs to ensure that it communicates clearly and consistently its priorities across the force area for all officers and staff.

## **Next steps**

HMIC will continue to monitor Bedfordshire Police's progress against the three causes of concern and four areas for improvement set out previously in this report and in our *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability) – An inspection of Bedfordshire Police* published on 15 December 2015. We look forward to seeing further progress during our effectiveness inspection in autumn 2016, and under our National Child Protection Inspection programme.