



# CYSP Herefordshire

West Mercia Police Update –  
HMICFRS Inspections

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# Context

In the PEEL 2023-2025 Inspection (2024), West Mercia Police was issued an area for improvement (AFI) relating to protecting vulnerable people, specifically the force's ability to identify risk, assess safeguarding referrals, and make timely and proportionate referrals to statutory partners. HMICFRS identified that backlogs within the Vulnerability Hub (VHub), variability in referral quality, and inconsistent secondary risk assessment led to the force not being able to reassure itself that it was reducing the risk of harm to vulnerable people.

## Context continued.....


During 2025, HMICFRS determined that the force's response to safeguarding was inadequate and it hadn't improved how it managed safeguarding referrals since the previous inspection.

As a result, in September 2025, HMICFRS issued West Mercia Police with an accelerated cause for concern (ACoC), requiring immediate remedial action with close inspectorate oversight.

# Issue Identification

1. Referral backlog - risk not sufficiently understood or prioritised
2. Manual, fragmented police and partnership processes
3. Inconsistent quality of frontline risk assessments
4. Capacity misalignment
5. Limited real-time performance visibility

# Governance - Response

Child Protection Governance Board  Strategic Vulnerability Board

Urgent measures implemented, overseen by Chief Officers:

- Surge capacity introduced
- Analytical products produced to identify:
  - repeat children,
  - crime types carrying highest safeguarding risk,
  - and any hidden high-risk cases within backlogs.
  - missing Child Risk Assessments
- Performance dashboards and daily reporting introduced
- Partner agency engagement, including ACC-led briefings with Director's of Children Services
- AWARE Campaign (Voice of the Child)

# Process re-design

A dedicated process analyst was embedded within the VHub to map the end-to-end safeguarding journey, from initial police contact through to referral outcome. This work has underpinned a move towards a single pathway model, reducing variability across local authorities and strengthening consistency.

# Partnership Arrangements

West Mercia Police and the four Directors of Children's Services are currently progressing the Vulnerability Hub Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This document will clearly outline:

- processes
- timescales
- escalation routes
- shared accountability for safeguarding decisions.

The MOU aligns with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, reinforces lawful and proportionate information sharing, and formalises the VHub as a single, consistent policing interface for safeguarding.

# Workforce Capacity & Capability

- All VHub staff received refreshed MASH and safeguarding training.
- Workforce training on identification and recording of vulnerability.
- Single points of contact embedded within local policing areas and departments to review completion of child risk assessments.
- Monthly force audit modified to track quality of child risk assessment submissions
- Single and joint agency audits of Vhub referrals to promote continuous learning.
- Learning needs analysis and wellbeing offer established to support Vhub staff

# Digital Enablement and Automation

The force is moving away from manual processes by:

- Developing automated dashboards and Teams-based reporting to eliminate spreadsheet risk.
- Scoping robotic process automation (RPA) and AI-enabled solutions across referrals, information sharing requests (ISRs), Operation Encompass and MARAC workflows.
- Progressing a digital risk management, information-sharing platform, to efficiently process referrals, ISRs and Operation Encompass. This will improve quality, timeliness and the ability to audit cases.

# Current Position

West Mercia Police has moved from a position of dealing with the immediacy of the Vhub backlogs to proactive continuous improvement. Backlogs are now effectively managed, governance is embedded, and digital enablement will reduce risk and variability. The force continues to work openly and transparently with partners and HMICFRS, with a clear focus on sustained improvement and improved outcomes for children and vulnerable adults.

The journey is ongoing, but the force is now demonstrably learning, adapting and modernising in line with national expectations and best practice.