

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VERSION

HUMAN RIGHTS

**Review of Children
and Young People
and Policing**

DECEMBER 2024

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the Northern Ireland Policing Board (the Board) talked about how police treat children and young people. They were worried about things like police strip searching children and the number of children being stopped and searched. To understand these issues better, they asked their Human Rights Advisor to investigate.

The advisor looked closely at strip searches of children and young people and wrote a report that helped change how police treat children in custody. Now, the Board wants the advisor to study how police engage with all children and young people, hoping to find ways to improve.

The advisor has researched important topics, such as when police use force, stop and search, and how children can be victims of problems like exploitation and trafficking. The report also discusses how young people's privacy can be affected by police, especially with their phones and social media. Overall, this report addresses key issues affecting children and young people today.

The main goal of this research is to help the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) improve how they interact with young people and provide better support to them. By focusing on being more child-friendly, the PSNI hopes to build trust, so children will feel safer reporting problems.

The report emphasises the importance of neighbourhood police officers, who know the local area and understand the issues that affect young people. Unfortunately, there are fewer of these officers now, and the report highlights this concern.

The Human Rights Advisor talked directly with young people and agreed that good communication is really important. How officers talk to children can either make situations better or worse. The report suggests that police need to communicate in clearer, more approachable ways, especially when explaining what's happening.

The research also looked at how taking away children's mobile phones can affect their lives, as these devices are crucial for daily communication and services.

The Human Rights Advisor listened to children and groups that advocate for young people to understand their needs and concerns. The report includes sixteen recommendations to help improve how PSNI works with young people.

Although there were some big issues in Northern Ireland in the summer of 2024, these include protests and attacks on ethnic minorities, the report chose not to include those in its findings. The research was completed in the first half of 2024, using statistics from April 2023 to March 2024.

This report was prepared by the Policing Board's Human Rights Advisor with the assistance of the Board's Human Rights and Professional Standards team. The Policing Board, by consensus, has adopted and published this report but not every member of the Board endorses each and every part of this report.

Northern Ireland Policing Board

December 2024

This easy read version of the report has been produced for Children and Young People. It was developed with their help and some of the language may differ to the full report to make it easier to understand.

You can find a copy of the full report on the Board's website by clicking here.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Within six months of the publication of this report the PSNI should provide an interim report and within 12 months a full update report to the Board on the progress and outcomes in meeting all the following recommendations alongside progress in implementing its Children and Young Person's strategy.

Recommendation 1:

The PSNI should review all of its policies and practices in order to minimise the use of force, particularly the use of weapons, against children under the age of 14. In the meantime, the PSNI should amend its policy to ensure that, as far as possible, spit and bite guards are never used on any child younger than 14 years of age.

Recommendation 2:

The PSNI should review all of the PSNI's policies and practices in relation to the stops and searches of children between the ages of 10 and 14.

Recommendation 3:

The PSNI should publish more detailed statistics in relation to Justice and Security Act powers including the exact age of the children stopped and searched.

Recommendation 4:

The PSNI should publish annually the community background figures for arrest and custody of children and young people.

Recommendation 5:

The PSNI should report on the numbers, ages, and the offence for which they were arrested of all children and young people who have been detained in police custody for more than two hours and the length of time that they were

detained.

Recommendation 6

The PSNI should provide the Board annually with the numbers of children and young people who were not brought before the custody officer on arrival at the police station, their ages and the reasons why there was a delay.

Recommendation 7:

The PSNI should report to the Board what the barriers and obstacles are to increasing the diversion of children and young people away from the formal justice system.

Recommendation 8:

The Department of Justice should increase the minimum age of criminality responsibly in Northern Ireland to at least 14 years of age in order to comply with the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Recommendation 9:

The PSNI should report on how they intend to achieve their objectives in supporting children at risk of offending or becoming victims of crime when neighbourhood police and other officer numbers are falling.

Recommendation 10:

The PSNI should investigate on how better data could be collected on boys and girls involved in Child Criminal Exploitation and/or Child Sexual Exploitation in order to consider and review the current policies and approaches.

Recommendation 11:

In the absence of a statutory definition of Child Criminal Exploitation the PSNI should adopt the following definition:

“Child criminal exploitation is a form of child abuse which occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity. The exploitation (may be) through violence or the threat of violence (but may also appear to be transactional and in the context of perceived relationships and friendships). The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears to be consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact. It can also occur through the use of technology (and social media). The criminal exploitation of children (and young people) can include being exploited into storing drugs or weapons, drug dealing, theft, violence, intimidation, vandalism, forced labour and other forms of criminality through grooming by people that children and young people trust or look up to.”

Recommendation 12:

The PSNI should meet regularly with the Commissioner for Victims of Crime, Victim Support and Assist NI to ensure the best possible ways to protect children and young people are identified and that additional training is provided to officers to help them with the process of referral to Victim Support and Assist NI.

Recommendation 13:

Data outcomes of campaigns relating to Child Sexual Exploitation, Sextortion and Sexting should be included in the PSNI reports to the Board twice a year.

Recommendation 14:

The PSNI should not in any circumstances, use children and young people as Covert Human Intelligence Sources.

Recommendation 15:

The evidence from this report appears to indicate that some young people do not report sexual crimes that have involved their telephones and other devices. This may be partly due to the fear that they themselves may be prosecuted and to a fear that their devices will be retained for long periods. The PSNI, therefore, should address these issues by:

- Setting up a speedier triage system and change its system of priorities so that the importance of the device to the victim is taken into account in how long the device is retained.
- The investigating officers need additional training to ensure that only the necessary data is being sought and that the device is returned as quickly as possible.
- Through school/youth settings, community visits and other outlets the PSNI should revisit its messaging around the sending and receiving of photographs. This is to ensure if young people are a victim they should report this crime and need not be afraid of the consequences if the image and its original communication was consensual. The victim should be reassured the real perpetrator is the person circulating the photographs.
- The current procedure for dealing with devices provides that the PSNI investigating officer completes an online form with details of what information needs to be retrieved, the nature of the incident and details of the device owner. A copy should be provided to the child when it is sent to the Cybercrime department.

Recommendation 16:

The PSNI should report twice a year to the Board on the progress and on the outcome of referrals made to National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

These recommendations aim to keep children safe and help them better in difficult situations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northern Ireland Policing Board wants to make sure the police treat children and young people fairly and follow human rights laws.

In 2011, the Board did their first review on how police interact with children, updating it in 2013. They looked at issues like anti-social behaviour and how to help children through the restorative justice process.

In June 2023, the police introduced a new Children and Young People Strategy. The Chief Constable said it's important to understand young people's needs and build trust with them. The strategy aims to give children a voice through local events where they can share their concerns and raise any issues they have.

The Assistant Chief Constable supports this review and believes it's crucial to help vulnerable young people. He emphasised that how police engage with children affects all areas of police work.

The report will also check how the police protect children who might be victims of crimes like sexual abuse or exploitation. Protecting children from harm is a key priority for the police. The strategy has five main themes:



1

Engagement



2

Safety and Protection



3

Suspected Offending



4

Victims and Witnesses



5

Stop and Search

For safety and protection, the police have special officers trained to help prevent harm to young people, in person or online. The strategy also promises to treat children with respect and make sure they get the support they need.

PSNI's strategy also connects with the Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, showing a commitment to protecting all young people. The police are working with community partners to improve their policies.

In January 2024, PSNI updated the Board about their progress with the Children and Young People Strategy. They started new engagement events to hear from the community and learn how they can improve. Some concerns raised were about training for officers and ensuring young people's voices are heard. To address this, the PSNI is creating a Young Person's Forum that includes representatives from various groups.

Young people mentioned that police messages aren't reaching them, so they suggested an app to share information about issues that concern children including rights and safety.

The police have special teams that investigate crimes against children and young people. These teams know a lot about issues like child abuse and exploitation. However, some groups believe that certain policies need to be updated to better support children today.

The police are also researching how to improve their response to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). They want to learn from past experiences to help children at risk.

A recent inspection found that the police understand the importance of protecting vulnerable people and have strong leadership in place.

While these new strategies are promising, real change will take time. The Board will keep an eye on the PSNI's progress and ensure they address any important issues. If children don't see improvements in how they are treated, the strategies won't be successful.

For these strategies to work, they need enough funding and support to make a real difference.



CHAPTER 1
**USE OF
FORCE**

CHAPTER 1

USE OF FORCE

Police officers have the important job of keeping people safe, but they can also use force to defend themselves or others, make arrests, and keep the peace. However, they must follow certain laws to make sure they do this fairly and safely.

Police have a range of powers they can use from de-escalation techniques through to more serious actions like using weapons. They must only use as much force as needed and always have a good reason for it. Reports have shown that most interactions with police don't require any force at all.

From April 2023 to March 2024, police used force on children under 18 in about 8% of cases. Most of these cases (94%) involved methods like physical restraint or handcuffs. There were only a few instances where more serious measures, like pointing a firearm, were used, and this was only when the young person was threatening police.

Reports have raised concerns about some methods used, like Spit and Bite Guards, which are designed to protect police from being harmed but can be upsetting for children. The Children's Law Centre worries that even if fewer children are involved in incidents, those who are might face more types of force than before.

It's important for police to treat all children fairly and with respect. They must always think carefully about how they use force and make sure it's absolutely necessary.

SPIT AND BITE GUARDS

Since 2015, the Board has had concerns about a device called a Spit and Bite Guard. This guard is meant to cover a person's mouth, face and head to stop them from spitting or biting. In 2020, police officers decided to use these guards more because of worries about spreading Covid 19.

Many people, including groups like Amnesty International and the Children's Law Centre, are worried about how these guards are used, especially on children. They say that using a Spit and Bite Guard can be harmful and unfair, especially for children who may already be feeling scared or confused.

Young people have shared their opinions too. They think that putting a guard on a vulnerable person, could make things worse. They also feel that using these guards can hurt the trust between young people and the police.

The Children's Commissioner has pointed out that children should be treated differently than adults because they are still growing and may not react the same way in difficult situations.

In 2022, the police decided to keep using these guards permanently, even on children. Between March 2020 and June 2022, about 6.4% of these guards were used on young people. Many groups continue to call for a complete ban on using Spit and Bite Guards on children.

The police say they will try to improve their training and make sure officers understand how to deal with young people better. However, many believe that the rules are still not strict enough, and children might be unfairly treated.

CONDUCTED ENERGY DEVICES

The Board has looked at how Tasers (also called Energy Devices, or CEDs) are used by police. PSNI have strict rules about who can use Tasers, allowing only special units, which helps make sure they're used less often.

Recently, the United Nations raised concerns about how often Tasers are used on children. They also pointed out that there are racial inequalities in how Tasers are used, affecting people of different backgrounds unfairly.

The Children's Commissioner has been worried about the use of tasers since 2008. They stress that police should only use Tasers if they really believe someone might get seriously hurt. However, there have been instances where Tasers were aimed at children, which is concerning.

The Children's Commissioner recommends that the police should never use Tasers on children and young people.

ATTENUATED ENERGY PROJECTILES (AEPS)

The Children's Law Centre has shared important concerns about the use of plastic bullets by the police in Northern Ireland. Despite many recommendations from important groups like the UN, the police still use plastic bullets, even when children are around.

On 13 July 2009, during riots in North Belfast, police fired 17 plastic bullets while children were present, causing injuries to some young people, including a 13-year-old.

A 16-year-old was seriously hurt in 2010 after being hit by plastic bullets during riots.

Other parts of the UK don't use plastic bullets for crowd control. During the 2011 riots in England, the police chose not to use them.

In 2023/2024, no plastic bullets were fired at people under 18, but there were two incidents involving young people during recent riots. In the past year, there were 75 times when police aimed plastic bullets, and 2% of those times involved children aged 13 to 17.

FIREARMS

In Northern Ireland, the Chief Constable has allowed all police officers to carry personal handguns, this is different from the rest of the UK, where only specially trained officers can carry guns.

The decision to let all officers carry handguns was made in light of security concerns, especially related to terrorism and organised crime.

The police review this decision regularly to make sure it's safe and necessary.

DE-ESCALATION

The Board recognises that using de-escalation techniques is very important. These techniques help reduce harm and prevent violence instead of using force. De-escalation techniques include the use of verbal and non-verbal cues, creating a safe distance between parties and distraction. This idea is also supported by the Independent Office for Police Conduct in England and Wales.

De-escalation techniques are especially important when dealing with people who might be struggling with disabilities, including mental health issues or substance use.

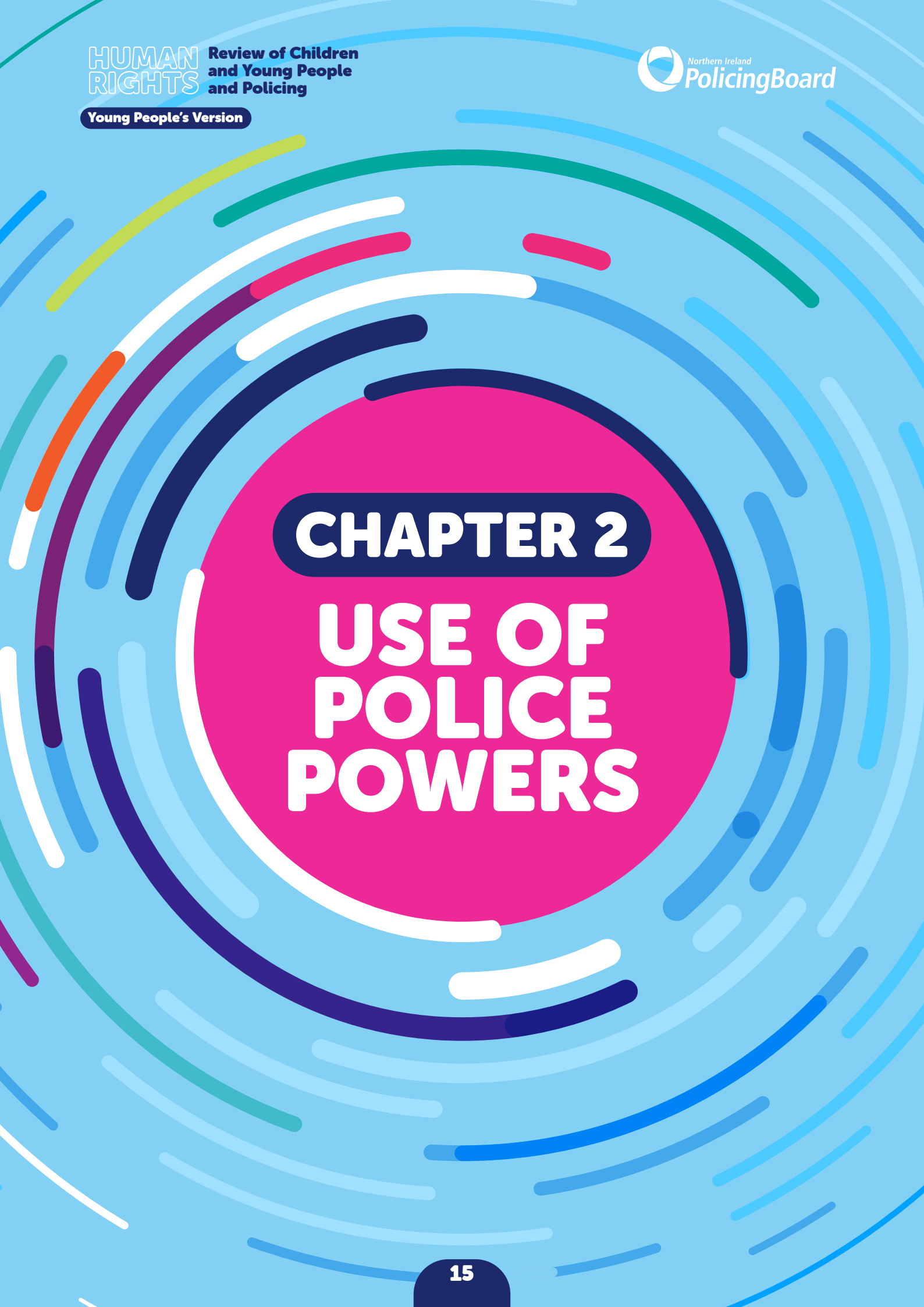
CONCLUSION

The Board has been looking closely at how police use force and has shared many concerns in their reports. They want to make sure that any force used by the PSNI is fair and necessary.

CEDs (Tasers) and Spit and Bite Guards have been big concerns for the Board over the last five years. Many suggestions have been made to improve when and how these are used, with help from the Police Ombudsman.

PSNI has made progress and now regularly updates the Board on how they use these tools. They have also improved their training on de-escalation techniques. This is important because it helps avoid conflicts, especially when dealing with people who may have mental health issues.

The Board recognises these improvements, especially since more people with vulnerabilities are coming into contact with the police.



CHAPTER 2

**USE OF
POLICE
POWERS**

CHAPTER 2**USE OF POLICE POWERS****STOP AND SEARCH**

Police statistics show that the outcomes when stopping and searching a young person are poor but the effect of the stop and search on the child can be damaging. Many young people feel scared or feel they have been treated unfairly.

What can police ask?

1. Your name
2. What you're doing
3. Where you're going

You don't have to answer or stop unless they have a good reason to suspect you of something wrong. In Northern Ireland, there are some special rules that let police stop and ask questions to find out who you are.

Many children think they are unfairly targeted because of their age, appearance, or where they live. They often say that police officers can be rude or aggressive. When asked about their experiences, a lot of children said they felt treated badly during these stops.

The police want to be friendly and help children, but they need to change how they talk to and treat young people. Many children think that police should explain why they are stopping them and treat them with respect.

What needs to change?

1. Police should clearly explain what's happening during a stop.
2. They should be polite and fair.
3. Young people should know their rights and how to complain if they feel treated unfairly.

The police are working on new plans to improve their relationship with young people. They want to listen to children's thoughts and experiences to make things better.

TAKING POSITIVE STEPS

The police in Northern Ireland use body-worn video (BWV) cameras to help improve how they do their job. Here are some ideas to help make things better for young people during police stops:

- 1. Check Footage:** A pilot exercise could assess if supervisors should watch the BWV footage of stops involving children to see how the officers and children react.
- 2. Guidelines for Supervisors:** Create a simple checklist or guidance for supervisors to use when looking at stop searches, to highlight focusing on important issues that need attention.
- 3. Turn On Cameras:** Make sure officers turn on their cameras before talking to young people, so everything can be reviewed later.
- 4. Share Young People's Views:** Update police training materials to include what young people think and feel about stop and searches.
- 5. Training for Officers:** Train police officers how to properly explain to young people why they are being stopped and what they are searching for.
- 6. Information Cards:** Create easy-to-read cards for children explaining their rights and what happens during a stop.
- 7. Spread the Word:** Use social media to share information about stop searches and rights to help children feel prepared.
- 8. Talk with Officers:** Organize discussions with police so they can understand young people's concerns and improve how they interact.
- 9. Share Plans:** Let the Northern Ireland Policing Board know about these new ideas and improvements.
- 10. Support for Young People:** Make sure these changes fit into the overall plans for helping children and young people.

These steps can help build trust between young people and the police.

EQUALITY ISSUES WITH STOP AND SEARCH POWERS

There are some concerns about how police in Northern Ireland are using special powers from the Justice and Security Act (JSA). These powers let officers stop and search people without needing strong reasons.

Here's what's important to know:

- 1. Racial Differences:** Some groups, like Irish Travellers, and people of black ethnicities, often face unfair treatment. Reports show that they are stopped more often by police compared to others. The United Nations has pointed out that there are still many issues of unfair treatment based on race, even with some efforts to improve things. They are worried that some people are treated unfairly in the criminal justice system.
- 2. Community Data:** For a long time, there hasn't been enough information about who gets stopped and searched by police. Starting in April 2024, a new plan will begin to collect this important information. This will help us to understand if certain groups are being treated unfairly.
- 3. Fairness Matters:** If it turns out that a lot of young people from a specific background are being treated differently, the police need to look into why this is happening. They must show that it's fair and justified, or else it could be seen as wrong.

By keeping an eye on these issues, we can help ensure everyone is treated fairly by the police.

ARREST AND CUSTODY

When the police arrest someone, they are responsible for keeping that person safe and respecting their rights. There are important rules in place to protect people who are detained, which include:

- 1. Rights to Liberty:** Everyone has the right to feel safe and not be held against their will without good reason.

- 2. Fair Treatment:** Police must treat everyone with respect and dignity, following strict rules to ensure no one is mistreated.
- 3. Health and Safety:** If someone needs medical help while in custody, the police must make sure they get help as soon as possible.

In the year 2023/2024, there were 988 arrests of children and young people in Northern Ireland under PACE. Most of these arrests were of boys, and many were from different backgrounds.

There are concerns about how the police sometimes use special powers to arrest young people for terrorism-related activities instead of using regular procedures.

The police in Northern Ireland are regularly inspected to ensure they are treating detainees fairly. Several recommendations have been made to improve how detained young people are treated:

- **Alternatives to Detention:** There's a push to find other options instead of putting children in police custody.
- **Report on Progress:** The police have promised to give regular reports to show how they are improving and to keep everyone informed.

There have been serious concerns about how children are treated in police custody. For instance:

- Some children are held in custody after arrest because there aren't any safe places for them to go.
- Reports show that children have faced delays in processing if the custody suite is busy and sometimes have to wait in uncomfortable conditions
- There's a strong belief that police custody should never be used for children. They need a safer, more supportive environment instead.

The goal is to create a system where young people can be treated fairly and humanely and where their rights are respected. This includes finding better places for them when they need help instead of keeping them in police stations or vans.

COMMUNITY BACKGROUND AND RELIGION

In recent years, there have been statistics that make us think about how fairly the police are treating different communities in Northern Ireland, especially between those who identify as Catholic and those who identify as Protestant.

- 1. Arrests Over the Years:** Information obtained in December 2021 showed that, over the past five years, twice as many people who identified as Catholic were arrested compared to those who identified as Protestant.
- 2. Charges After Arrest:** but twice as many Catholics were also charged with a crime after they were arrested.

These statistics raise important questions about whether everyone is being treated equally by the police. It's important for everyone in a community to feel safe and treated fairly, regardless of their background.

STRIP SEARCHING IN POLICE CUSTODY

In June 2021, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child urged the UK to stop strip searches of children completely. This issue has raised significant concerns, especially in Northern Ireland, where discussions about the treatment of young people in police custody have taken place. The Policing Board completed a report into Strip Searching of Children in police custody and recommendations were made to improve the process. As a result of the report fewer children are now being strip searched and it is unlikely for an Appropriate Adult to not be present. Despite all the positive work some issues still remain.

1. Strip Searches:

- There have been reports about how often children are strip searched in police custody, raising worries about their dignity and rights.
- It was found that many searches happened without an "Appropriate Adult" present, which is a supporter for the child during the process.

2. Questions Raised by Include Youth:

- Why is a strip search conducted? What reasons are recorded?
- How do police assess if a young person is vulnerable or may be triggered by such a search?
- What steps are taken to ensure proper governance and decision-making during these searches?

3. Statistics from April 2023 to March 2024:

- A total of 19 children were strip searched.
- Most searches (13) involved boys, and only a few had positive results.
- The majority of those searched identified as Catholic, 5 refused to disclose, 7 answered none.

4. Legal Changes:

- Recent legal clarifications mean that even the partial removal of clothes might now count as a strip search, requiring more protections for juveniles.

5. Ongoing Efforts:

- PSNI is working on developing new policies to better protect the rights of children and vulnerable adults during searches. They plan to involve stakeholders, including those responsible for the Appropriate Adult scheme.

While there have been improvements, concerns remain about the fairness and treatment of children in custody, particularly regarding strip searches. Ongoing discussions aim to ensure that children's rights are fully respected and protected.

DIVERSION

What is Diversion?

Diversion is a way to help children and young people stay out of trouble and avoid the court system. This is done through teamwork between the police (PSNI), the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), and the Youth Justice Agency (YJA).

Why is it Important?

- **Support:** The goal is to support young people and their families so they can make good choices.
- **Less Waiting:** This approach helps reduce the waiting time for cases, allowing families to get answers faster.

In 2022/2023, there were 3,747 cases (not crimes) referred for Youth Engagement. Out of these, 1,291 cases were suitable for youth engagement, while 2,270 were not. Most young people involved were aged 10 to 17, and most were boys. The most common result of this help is a Youth Conference, where everyone can talk things out. If a case doesn't get resolved, it may go back to the PPS for further decisions. Families can go to special clinics where they can talk to police and youth workers about what happens next and what it means for their child.

COMMUNITY RESOLUTION NOTICE REFERRAL SCHEME

A Community Resolution Notice (CRN) is a way for police to handle less serious crimes without going to court. It helps with issues like:

- Low-level public disorder.
- Criminal damage.
- Minor drug-related offenses.

These offer;

- **Quick Solutions:** Victims get a fast way to resolve their issues.
- **Support for Offenders:** It helps those who made a mistake get support to avoid repeating offending and fix the harm they caused.
- **No Criminal Record:** Offenders don't get a criminal record for these minor offenses.

The YJA Program

Since March 2018, the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) has been running a pilot program where children and their parents attend drug and alcohol awareness sessions as part of the CRN. This helps prevent future problems. Feedback has been very positive from everyone involved.

Due to its success, the program was expanded to include more types of offenses across Northern Ireland starting in November 2019.

Sexting Referral Scheme:

The **Sexting Referral Scheme** helps children who might get into trouble for “sexting.” This program is a partnership between the police and the Youth Justice Agency (YJA). Instead of going to court, children are taught about the risks of sexting.

- **How It Works:** If the police think a child could benefit from learning rather than punishment, they can refer them to the YJA. Within 30 days, YJA staff hold sessions for the child and their parents about the dangers of sexting.
- **Understanding Choices:** It’s important for children to understand what accepting help means. They should have legal advice to know the consequences, like not being able to get certain jobs or travel to some countries.
- **Legal Help:** Even though legal help is offered, many families choose not to accept it. The Children’s Law Centre has pointed out that children should not agree to anything without understanding its impact.
- **Changing the Rules:** Some people believe the age for being considered a criminal should be higher. Currently, children as young as 10 can be treated like adults in the justice system. Many organisations would like this age raised to 14.

In 2022, the Department of Justice asked the public what they thought about raising this age. A public consultation was held and the majority of people support changing it to 14.

CHAPTER 3

**CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE
– VICTIMS
OF CRIME**

CHAPTER 3**CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE –
VICTIMS OF CRIME****PARAMILITARISM**

In some communities, there are groups that try to control young people and influence them to commit crime. These groups can make children feel scared and think the police can't help them. A report showed that many children who have been hurt by these groups don't tell the police because they feel the police won't do anything, or they are afraid of getting in trouble themselves.

Here are some reasons why young people don't report to the police:

- They think the police can't help.
- They believe the police already know about the bad people but do nothing.
- They are scared of revenge or being seen as a tout.
- They don't trust the police because of past experiences.
- Some children even think they deserve what happens to them because of their actions.

Research shows that many young people feel they have three choices:

- 1. Stay away from damaging groups and focus on school and work.**
- 2. Get forced into these groups because of threats.**
- 3. Choose to be part of these groups.**

It's important to help children early on, especially in primary school, to build their confidence and make better choices.

The report also says that young people need better relationships with the police. Right now, many feel that police only want information, which makes them worried about being labelled as touts. In some areas, the absence of police has allowed paramilitary groups to step in and act as if they are helping the community.

The report suggests that youth workers and police need to work together better. They should have clear roles and plans to help keep children safe and support them in their communities.

CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

Child Criminal Exploitation, or CCE, is a serious problem in Northern Ireland. It happens when children are forced or tricked into doing illegal things, often because someone is threatening or controlling them. This can involve drugs, stealing, or other crimes, and it can affect any child or young person.

What is CCE?

- CCE means that someone uses their power to make a child do something illegal.
- It can happen in person or online, especially through social media.
- Even if a child is aware they are doing something wrong they can still be a victim.

Many children feel scared to tell the police about their experiences because they think the police won't help or might even make things worse. Some children believe that if they report something, they might be seen as touts, which could lead to trouble from others in their community. There are many children in Northern Ireland who have had bad experiences with paramilitary groups, and they feel the police cannot help them this can make them distrust the police even more.

Experts are working to create a clear definition of CCE so that everyone can understand it better. The police are trying to learn more about CCE and how to help children who are affected. Programs are being set up to help vulnerable children through sports and other activities, which can build trust between police and children.

Many children believe that police officers are not there to help them, which can make them feel alone. It's crucial for police to show that they care and are there to protect all children. Everyone—parents, teachers, police, and community leaders—needs to work together to keep children safe and help them understand that they are victims, not criminals. Teaching children about CCE and how to get help can make a big difference.

By understanding CCE, we can all help protect children and make our communities safer.

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a serious form of abuse. It happens when someone uses their power to trick or force a child or young person (under 18) into sexual activities. This can happen even if the child seems to agree. Sometimes, the exploitation happens online or through technology, not just in person.

How CSE and Criminal Exploitation are linked

CSE often goes hand-in-hand with Criminal Exploitation (CCE). For example, girls might be pressured into doing things for gangs and then face sexual threats or violence. This can lead to situations where they feel trapped and unable to escape.

Concerns About CSE

The United Nations has pointed out some important issues about CSE, including:

- More children are being abused online.
- Children's voices aren't always heard when it comes to stopping abuse.
- The prosecution rate is low which means few people get punished for their crimes.

Recently, reports have shown that police in Northern Ireland are improving how they handle CSE. They have special teams that help find children at risk and those who might exploit them. These teams work with other services to keep children safe.

Although CSE can affect any young person it is most often associated with girls. A young person can get caught up in low-level crimes and, over time, find themselves in dangerous situations where they are exploited. They may be asked to do things like deliver payments for drugs, and if they get caught, they face trouble with the law. Many young people don't realise that what's happening to them is abuse because it feels normal to them.

It's important for everyone to understand these issues so we can help protect children from exploitation.

PSNI INITIATIVES

In June 2023, a report highlighted the programmes the PSNI is undertaking to stop violence against women and girls. They have started several important programs, like:

- **Ask for Angela:** A way for people in restaurants and bars to ask for help if they're feeling unsafe.
- **Training:** Police are learning more about things like domestic abuse and stalking to better support people in need.
- **Operation Encompass:** This helps police work with schools to support children affected by domestic violence.

The police are also working on raising awareness about Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in places where people gather at night. They have a campaign called "**Trust Your Gut**" to help people recognize signs of CSE and encourage them to report it.

To help victims of violence, the police refer them to organisations that can provide support, like Victim Support Northern Ireland. However, there are some problems with these referrals. For example, many victims of sexual offenses and violence are not being referred for help. This means some children and young people might not get the support they need quickly.

The police want to improve this process so that everyone gets the help they deserve when they need it.

REPEAT VICTIMS

The police in Northern Ireland are working hard to help children who are victims. They are looking at children who have been victims of Domestic Abuse, Child Sexual Abuse, and Hate Crime.

Over the past 20 years, more children have been victims of serious crimes, and the number of reported cases, like sexual grooming and other sexual offences, has been increasing. In 2023/2024, 932 children were repeat victims.

To help with this, the police are making a new plan to understand and stop child exploitation. They are also working with other police forces across the UK to learn and improve.

In 2021/2022, a lot of sexual crimes were recorded with many of those crimes being against children. Online grooming is a big problem, and the police have seen more cases of this lately. The “Trust Your Gut” campaign has helped hotel staff know what to look out for, report when they think a child might be in danger.

The police want to keep track of how well they are doing and see if their efforts are making a difference in protecting children.

Sexting

Over the years, the number of children under 16 who are hurt by sexual crimes has more than doubled. Many young people share pictures online, which is often called “sexting.” Girls, especially, receive messages from older men, even if their social media accounts are private.

Some children feel embarrassed or scared to tell the police if someone shares their private pictures without permission. They worry they might get in trouble too, which stops them from reporting these incidents.

The police are working hard to protect children online. They have a special team that focuses on child safety and helps catch people who try to hurt children online. They also try to educate young people about the risks of sharing images and how to stay safe.

If a child does get in trouble for sending a picture, the police can help them learn from the situation instead of just punishing them. This approach puts the child's needs first and aims to help them make better choices in the future.

The police know that many children don't report crimes because they trust their friends or community workers more than they trust officers. They are trying to create a safer space for children to talk about what's happening to them.

Training is provided for police officers to help them understand the feelings of children who have experienced trauma. This way, officers can better support young victims. However, there are still challenges, like some children feeling uncomfortable talking to male officers.

The police are determined to make things better for children and ensure they have the right support if something bad happens. They are learning to listen to young people's concerns and respect their wishes about reporting.

Sextortion

Sextortion is a type of online crime where someone threatens to share embarrassing pictures or videos of a person unless they do what the criminal wants, usually giving them money.

How does it happen?

- 1. Tricking Victims:** The criminal often pretends to be someone else online and tricks or pressures people into sharing private pictures.
- 2. Threatening:** After getting the pictures, they threaten to post them online if their demands aren't met.

Many young people under 18, are affected by sextortion. More boys are becoming victims, and it's happening all over Northern Ireland. Children often do not report it, which makes it hard to understand how big the problem is. Victims often feel scared to tell the police because they think they might get in trouble for sharing the pictures in the first place.

The police focus on teaching people about the dangers of sextortion through campaigns and school visits. They also work with social media companies to make things safer. If someone reports sextortion, a partner group will help the victim and gather information to help the police.

Important points to remember:

- If someone shares your pictures without your permission, it's not your fault. You should report it to the police.
- The police want to help and ensure children understand how to talk about these issues without feeling scared.
- There are laws in place to protect young people who are forced to do things because they are being exploited.

If you or someone you know is facing sextortion, remember:

- Talk to a trusted adult.
- Don't be afraid to report it.
- It's important to stay safe online and think carefully before sharing pictures.

OPERATION ENCOMPASS

What is Operation Encompass?


Operation Encompass is a program that helps children who see or experience domestic abuse at home. It involves the police, schools, and child protection agencies working together.

If police respond to a domestic abuse call and find children there, they will confidentially let the child's school know. This helps teachers check on the children when they arrive at school, so they can give them support if they need it. The program began as a trial in September 2021 and was fully launched in May 2023. It currently works with over 1,162 schools in Northern Ireland.

Operation Encompass ensures that children who witness violence at home can get help and feel safe at school. But, some schools say they don't always get the information quickly. The police think emailing schools would be faster, but right now, they have to call because schools don't have secure email.

The program mainly helps during domestic abuse situations, but it could be expanded also support children during other serious incidents, like arrests, to make sure all children get the help they need.

Overall, Operation Encompass is working to support children and help them feel safe at school.



CHAPTER 4

**PRIVACY AND
SURVEILLANCE**

CHAPTER 4**PRIVACY AND
SURVEILLANCE****PRIVACY**

Children and young people have shared their thoughts about privacy, especially when it comes to social media, the internet, and phones. They are worried about how much of their private lives are being watched and tracked by the police. The Board's latest report on Privacy and Policing says that in Northern Ireland, the right to privacy is one of our weakest rights.

When people go online, it's easy for others to see what they're doing. The police can collect lots of information about people, and there are concerns that this isn't done in a clear way. There's a rule called Article 8 that helps protect people's privacy, but many children feel they are being watched more than they should be, especially in public places with cameras.

The report also talks about how police use cameras and other technology to keep track of people. However, many of these cameras aren't run by the police but by other groups, like local councils.

Recently, there was a plan for the police to use facial recognition technology to compare faces from CCTV with pictures on passport databases. This made some people very worried, as they feel it could be unfair and an invasion of privacy.

Many people, especially young ones, don't always know what information the police have about them. Also, everyone has smartphones that can track where they go, which adds to privacy concerns.

Overall, children want to feel safe and protected, but they also want their private lives to be respected.

Biometric Databases and Artificial Intelligence

The police use special technology called biometrics to identify people. This includes fingerprints, DNA, and even faces. PSNI has stored biometric information about many people since 2008, but some of this data is not being kept properly according to the law.

live facial recognition, which uses AI (artificial intelligence) to recognise faces has been used in the UK but not routinely by the PSNI. However, this technology can be unfair because it might work better on white people's faces than on others. AI can be very complicated, and many people don't understand how it works, so it shouldn't be the only thing that decides important issues.

Open surveillance

In Belfast City Centre, there are 120 CCTV cameras that watch over the area all the time. The police use these cameras to quickly respond to problems and keep people safe. Most of the CCTV cameras in Northern Ireland are actually run by private companies and local councils, not the police.

There are also 234 sites using Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR), which can read a lot of car number plates—about 100 million by 2023/2024. Many people have CCTV cameras at home too.

CCTV can be really helpful, like when it helped investigate an attack on a police officer and also looked into mistreatment at Muckamore Abbey Hospital, where it helped identify suspects.

Technology is changing really fast. Tools like CCTV cameras and facial recognition are getting better and better. These technologies can help the police catch criminals and keep people safe, but they also affect our privacy.

In Northern Ireland, it's important to talk about how to control and check these technologies. We need to discuss how things like CCTV, facial recognition, and other surveillance tools should be used safely and fairly.

In England and Wales, there is a special person called a Commissioner who looks at these issues. Northern Ireland tried to create a Biometrics Commissioner back in 2013, but it hasn't happened yet. Changes in technology and policing often come from big decisions made by the government, so it's important for everyone to be part of these conversations.

COVERT SURVEILLANCE

Surveillance means watching or listening to people to keep people safe or to investigate crimes. In Northern Ireland, there are laws that help police do this, including using cameras and listening devices.

Types of Surveillance:

- **Listening to Calls:** The police can only listen to someone's phone calls if they have permission from a high-ranking official. This is very serious and protected by law.
- **Monitoring Movements:** Police need permission to watch a specific person closely or track their movements.
- **Using Technology:** Police can look at information from phones and computers to gather evidence about crimes.

CCTV and Public Cameras:

- There are many cameras in public places, like in Belfast, to help keep people safe. Most of these cameras are not run by the police but by businesses or local councils.

Social Media Surveillance:

- The police can look at what people share online because it is public. But if they want to watch someone's social media closely, they might need permission.

Important Rules:

- There are strict rules to protect people's privacy. Police must have permission to do things like listening to calls or watching someone closely.
- Some types of surveillance, like using a camera in someone's home, need special approval because they are more private.

Why it matters:

Surveillance helps catch criminals and keep everyone safe, but it's important to make sure people's private lives are respected, too.

Children as Informants:

Sometimes, police ask young people to help them by providing information. This practice is called using “Covert Human Intelligence Sources” (CHIS). However, it’s important to know that it’s not okay for children to be used in this way. The Children’s Commissioner has made it clear that children should not be used as informants.

There are strict rules (Code of Conduct) about when and how children can be asked to help the police. If a child is under 16, they can’t be asked to give information about their parents. Only certain police officers can make these requests, and there must be good reasons for using a child.

The police in Northern Ireland have rules about using children, but there’s a need for more awareness and guidelines. Reports show that only a few children have been used in this way, and it’s considered very carefully.

Young people have shared their feelings about the police. They often feel misunderstood and sometimes think the police see them as troublemakers rather than victims. It’s important for police to understand the backgrounds and challenges these young people face.

Organisations that work with young people have suggested:

- Training for police on how to handle young people who have had tough experiences.
- Working closely with community groups to better support young people.
- Getting young people more involved in decisions that affect them.

PSNI has a new strategy to improve how they work with young people. It’s important that this plan is checked regularly to make sure it helps children and follows their rights. Everyone wants to ensure that the police treat young people fairly and listen to their voices.

DATA COLLECTION

Many organisations responding to this Review suggested PSNI needs to review and improve its data collection.

EXTRACTION OF DATA FROM MOBILE PHONES/DEVICES

Problems with Seized Devices

Many young people have problems when the police take their phones and other devices. They feel frustrated because it can take a long time to get their devices back. Sometimes, it seems like a victim has to wait longer than someone who did something wrong. If a young person can't get their device back quickly, they might not be able to stay in touch with family and friends or use important services.

How the Police Handle Devices

PSNI has a special Cybercrime department that retrieves data from devices. When a device is taken, the police fill out a form to explain what information they need. They should give a copy of this form to the young person when sending it to the Cybercrime department.

The Process of Getting Information

Police officers must be careful when deciding what information to collect. They need to think about privacy and whether they really need to take the device. Sometimes, they can get the needed information without taking the victim's phone, like asking for passwords instead.

How Long Does It Take?

When devices arrive at the Cybercrime department, they check them based on how serious the case is. There isn't a set time for getting devices back. If it's urgent, police can ask to speed up the process, but this is only for very serious situations.

Challenges Faced by the PSNI

A recent report said that many phones are still not processed, and there is a backlog. This means that devices taken a long time ago are still waiting to be looked at. The police say this is because of budget cuts and too many requests for help.

Recommendations for Improvement

To fix these problems, the report suggests that the police should find ways to process devices faster. They should think about getting more help and training for officers.

Staying Safe Online

To help young people, some officers from the Cybercrime department visit schools and youth groups to talk about staying safe online. The police also promise to keep young people informed about their devices, but right now, it seems they aren't always doing this.

CHAPTER 5

**HUMAN
TRAFFICKING
AND MODERN
SLAVERY**

CHAPTER 5**HUMAN TRAFFICKING
AND MODERN SLAVERY****Guidance for Police and Health Workers**

PSNI and the Department of Health made rules to help when they think a child might be a victim of human trafficking or modern slavery. They must always act in the child's best interest and follow laws to protect children.

What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking means forcing someone to work or do things they don't want to, like slavery or forced labour. Children can be tricked or forced into these situations, and it's often done for money.

Finding and Helping Children

When children arrive in Northern Ireland or if they are found in unsafe homes, they can be taken care of by special services. The police work with social workers to ensure the child's needs are met during these situations.

Recent Increase in Unaccompanied Children

Many children who come alone to Northern Ireland need help. Last year, a record number of these children were taken care of by social services. This might be because more children are coming without adults.

Building Trust with Young People

Some young people are scared to talk to the police because they had bad experiences before. It's important for police to be understanding, especially with children who have gone through tough times.

Concerns About Identity and Language

Sometimes, police may not know a child's correct name or age, which can cause problems. Language differences can also make it hard for children to explain what happened to them. There aren't enough interpreters to help everyone, especially in rural areas.

Children's Experiences

Some children feel that when they talk to the police, they are not treated like children. They want police officers to be kind and to listen to them. Trust is very important—if children don't trust the police, they won't ask for help.

Need for Better Training

Many young people said police need more training to communicate better with children. PSNI is working on improving their interpreter services to help children understand their rights and the support available to them.

TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN: NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM (NRM)

What is the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)?

The NRM is a special process to help identify and support children who might be victims of human trafficking or modern slavery. It ensures that these children get the help they need and are not treated like regular criminals.

Changes in the Law

A new law changed the way children are referred to the NRM. Now, it's harder to prove that a child is a victim, which means fewer children might get help. Some people are worried that this could lead to more children being denied support.

Lack of Awareness in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, many people don't know enough about the NRM. Some groups believe that the NRM isn't used as much as it should be, and that children in dangerous situations, like those involved with paramilitary groups, aren't getting the protection they need.

Current Statistics

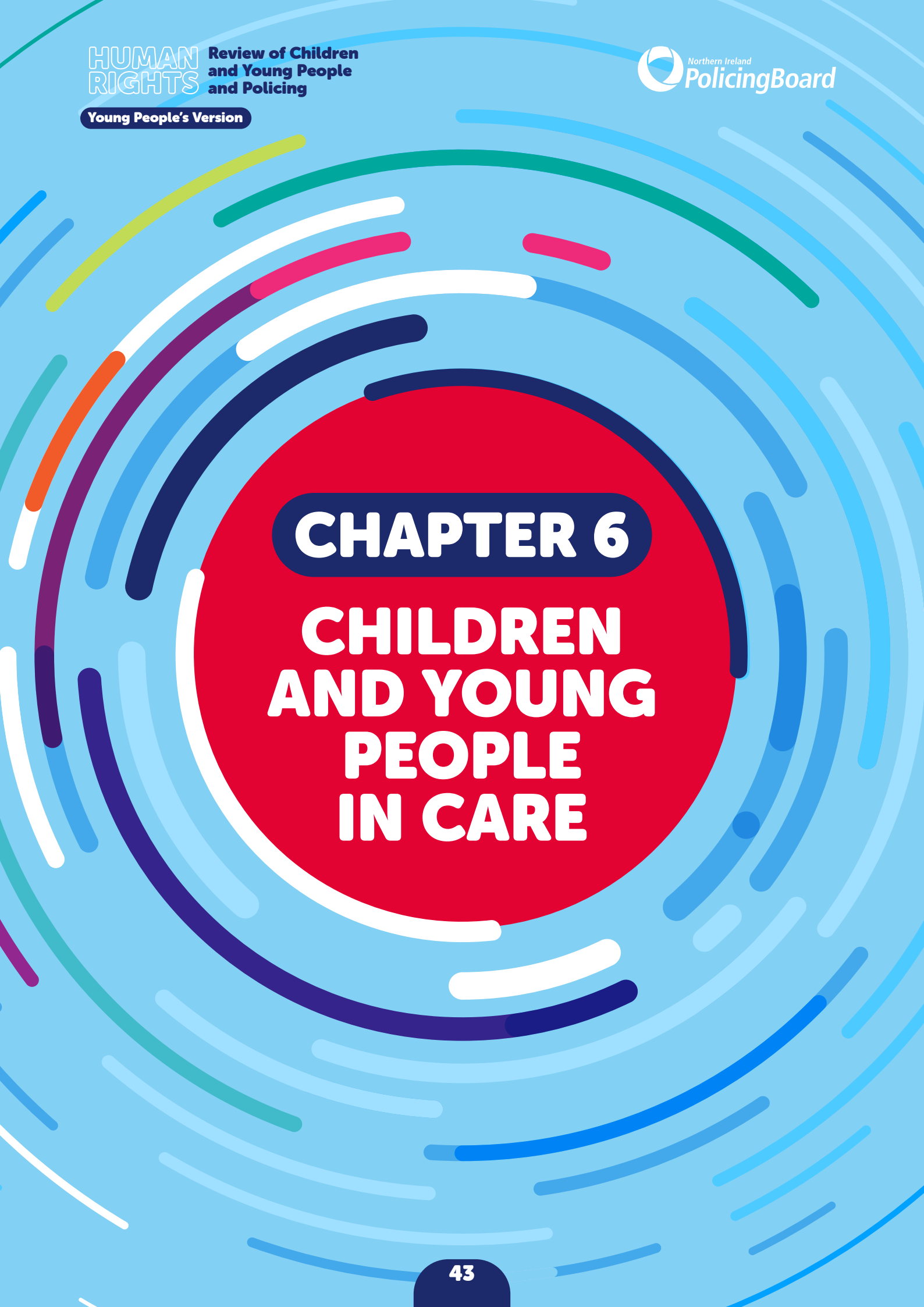
In 2023, there were 7,432 reports about children in the UK who might be victims, but only 110 of those were from Northern Ireland. Most victims of modern slavery in Northern Ireland are girls, and very few boys have ever been referred to the NRM.

Importance of Reporting

It's really important to report these cases to help keep children safe and gather information about those who might be hurting them. The NRM helps in understanding and addressing these issues, but more people need to use it.

Rising Numbers in Other Parts of the UK

In England and Wales, more and more children are being reported as potential victims of trafficking, especially boys. This is a big concern because trafficked and separated children are at a high risk of going missing.



CHAPTER 6

**CHILDREN
AND YOUNG
PEOPLE
IN CARE**

CHAPTER 6**CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE IN CARE**

NICCY (the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People) worries about how many children in care end up in trouble with the police. Research shows that children in care are more vulnerable to problems like exploitation.

Children in care might be treated differently by the police compared to other children in their community. They may not get help from lawyers quickly because of how social services and police work together.

The rules meant to help children who are in trouble with the police aren't working well. There are budget cuts that make it harder for different groups to cooperate and help children when they need it. Many children feel that the police see them as troublemakers. One young person said, "The police expect us to be bad and always look at us suspiciously." This makes it hard for children to trust the police.

As of March 2023, there were 3,801 children in care in Northern Ireland. This is the highest number ever. Many children in care are at greater risk of getting into trouble with the law.

Missing Children

In one year, the police received over 5,000 reports of children going missing from care. This can be dangerous because those children are at risk of exploitation.

When children run away from care, it's important to understand why they're doing it. They might be in danger or being exploited. The police should look into the reasons instead of just seeing them as troublemakers.

PSNI knows that when children go missing, they are very vulnerable and might be at risk of danger. To help these children, PSNI works with the Health and Social Care Trust to follow special rules when a child goes missing from home or a care place.

Important Protocols

- 1. Missing Persons Investigations Service Instruction:** This guide helps police know what to do when a child is missing.
- 2. Philomena Protocol:** This helps keep important information about a child when they move into a care home. It also records what actions were taken to find the child. Once completed, this information is shared with the police to help them in their search.
- 3. Immediate Safe and Well Check:** When the child is found, the police check to make sure they are safe and not hurt.

PSNI and Health and Social Care Trust have an agreement called the Interface Protocol. This sets out how they should work together when a child is reported missing. The goal is to keep the child safe and make sure their rights are protected.

Together, these protocols help ensure that missing children are found quickly and safely.

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