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Watchdog Report Exposes Ongoing Failures in Greater Manchester Police Handling of Child Sexual Exploitation Cases

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A recent inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services has found that Greater Manchester Police (GMP) is still failing to adequately protect victims of child sexual exploitation, leading to a significant breakdown in public trust. The report, which follows a reinspection of the force's handling of grooming gang cases,

highlights that despite some progress over the years, critical systemic flaws persist, leaving vulnerable children exposed and survivors without the support they need.

The watchdog's findings pointed to deep-rooted issues within the force, particularly in how it identifies and manages cases involving sexual exploitation. While some operational reforms have been made, inspectors concluded that they have not been consistently or effectively implemented. Risk assessments remain inconsistent, case supervision is often weak, and coordination with social services continues to fall short. As a result, many victims remain unsupported, and opportunities to intervene early are missed.

The report emphasized that these failures are not new. It referenced past scandals where GMP and partner agencies were heavily criticized for ignoring or mishandling reports of abuse, some of which date back more than a decade. In those cases, children were not only left in dangerous situations but were also wrongly treated as offenders rather than victims. Despite public outrage and earlier reviews, many of the same shortcomings still exist.

A major concern raised by inspectors was the lack of adequate training among officers handling complex child exploitation cases. Without the necessary expertise, many frontline officers cannot properly assess risk or engage with vulnerable victims. Additionally, the report criticized the ongoing failure to share intelligence between the police and safeguarding partners, an essential component in preventing organized exploitation and repeat offending.

In response, GMP leadership acknowledged the force's historic failures and reaffirmed its commitment to change. Chief Constable Stephen Watson stated that while new safeguarding measures and specialist units are being rolled out, the force recognizes that meaningful change takes time and continued effort.

The report has reignited national debate over the need for a wider inquiry into how police forces across the UK respond to grooming gang cases. Campaigners argue that Greater Manchester is not alone, and that more coordinated oversight and resources are urgently needed to address what appears to be a wider institutional failure to protect some of the most vulnerable members of society.