

<b>Case 3   Bulletin 31 – General</b>	<b>LEARNING THE LESSONS</b>
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## Safeguarding a vulnerable young person

*Interaction with a young person who had been drinking, raising issues about:*

- *Training for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).*
- *Taking action to safeguard children and young people.*

This case is relevant if you work in:

Neighbourhood policing



Public protection



### Overview of incident

While on patrol, PCSO B and PCSO C met a group of young people in a park. The group quickly dispersed into a nearby wooded area when they saw the officers walking towards them, and left behind Miss A, aged 13, who was sitting on the ground.

PCSO B recognised Miss A who he had visited at home in connection with his duties. He suspected that she might be under the influence of alcohol. He asked her to get up off the ground and to sit on a bench so that he could make a better assessment of her condition. The bench was on the main footpath. It was lit and in range of local authority CCTV.

Miss A and several others described Miss A as being extremely drunk and barely able to stand. Both officers describe her as being able to get up and walk without help to the bench and sit down.

While sitting on the bench, Miss A admitted to the officers that she had been drinking alcohol. She pleaded with them not to take her home because she would get into trouble with her parents for drinking.

Although the officers knew that Miss A had drunk alcohol, they noted that she had been able to stand up and walk to the bench without help and had answered their questions coherently. They decided she was not drunk enough to justify taking her home. The officers could hear her friends laughing and shouting from the nearby woodland and thought that it was likely they would return when the officers left.

Before leaving, PCSO C told the girl that they would check back in an hour and, if she was still there, they would take her home. It is unclear why he said this because the officers appear to have finished their patrol and gone home shortly afterwards.

A short time later Mr D, aged 16, who Miss A knew, arrived with his girlfriend, Ms E, who Miss A did not know. The couple noticed that Miss A was quite drunk. Ms E left Mr D and Miss A to go and buy water to help sober her up. Miss A alleges that Mr D then took advantage of her vulnerable condition and sexually assaulted her.

Miss A's mother made a formal complaint that the officers failed in their duty to safeguard her daughter.

## Type of investigation

Supervised investigation.

## Findings and recommendations

### Finding 1

1. PCSOs in the force did not, at the time, receive the same level of training as other officers who complete a mandatory two-day training course. This covers a range of safeguarding topics that include:
  - preventing radicalisation
  - child protection and multi-agency safeguarding
  - child sexual exploitation
  - human trafficking

### Local recommendation 1

2. Forces should provide the same training on safeguarding and protecting children to PCSOs as for officers.

## Force response

### Local recommendation 1

1. The force has gone through a considerable training programme to equip its officers and staff with the necessary skills to be better able to safeguard children and vulnerable adults.

## Outcomes for officers and staff

There were no misconduct or criminal outcomes for any of the individuals involved in the handling of this incident.

## Questions to consider

### Questions for policy makers and managers

1. How does your force ensure that PCSOs, officers and staff are properly prepared to identify and deal with vulnerable people who they may encounter during the course of their work, including children and young people who may be at risk of harm?

**Questions for police officers and police staff**

2. How could using the national decision model (NDM) have helped you in the same situation?
3. Do you know where to find your force's policy on safeguarding children and young people?
4. Do you know who to ask for advice if you have concerns about a child or young person's welfare?
5. Thinking about this case, what action would you have advised PCSOs in your force to take if dealing with similar circumstances to those in this case?

***For more information about this case, please email [learning@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:learning@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk)***