

# PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016

A vulnerability revisit inspection of Nottinghamshire  
Police



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## Introduction

This report sets out the findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)<sup>1</sup> following our revisit inspection of Nottinghamshire Police on 5 and 6 June 2017 and progress monitoring visits in December 2016 and February 2017. The revisit inspection assessed progress made against the one cause of concern and the four areas for improvement in our 2016 effectiveness report, which we published in March 2017.<sup>2</sup>

### PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016

In autumn 2016, as part of our annual inspections into police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL), HMICFRS' effectiveness programme inspected how well forces keep people safe and reduce crime. To reach a judgment on the extent of each force's effectiveness, our inspection answered the following overall question:

- How effective is the force at keeping people safe and reducing crime?

To answer this, HMICFRS explored the areas of policing that we consider to be of particular interest and concern to the public, including in relation to the following question:

- How effective is the force at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm, and supporting victims?

Five forces were graded as inadequate in how effective they were at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm, and supporting victims. HMICFRS revisited the following four forces between April and June 2017 to examine progress against the causes of concern set out in our 2016 effectiveness inspection reports: Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Humberside and Nottinghamshire. In respect of the fifth force rated as inadequate (the Metropolitan Police Service), the Home Secretary commissioned HMICFRS to publish quarterly updates on the force's response to our inspection findings.

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<sup>1</sup> This inspection was carried out before 19 July 2017, when HMIC also took on responsibility for fire & rescue service inspections and was renamed HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. The methodology underpinning our inspection findings is unaffected by this change. References to HMICFRS in this report may relate to an event that happened before 19 July 2017 when HMICFRS was HMIC. Citations of documents which HMIC published before 19 July 2017 will still cite HMIC as the publisher.

<sup>2</sup> *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016 – An inspection of Nottinghamshire Police*, HMIC, 2017. Available from: [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2016-nottinghamshire/](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2016-nottinghamshire/)

## **What we found in Nottinghamshire Police in 2016**

Nottinghamshire Police was failing to effectively support some victims and protect some vulnerable people from harm. The force had made insufficient progress to improve some of the weaknesses we had identified in our 2015 vulnerability inspection. The force continued to demonstrate an insufficient understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability, and its work with partner organisations was inconsistent.

There were weaknesses in the processes for identifying vulnerable and repeat victims at the first point of contact and there was an inconsistent approach to the assessment of victims' risks. We were concerned that, as a consequence, the force sometimes provided vulnerable people with a poor initial response, largely because of the inappropriate demands placed on the control room and response officers; this meant that there was often insufficient capacity to provide the level of service needed.

The force conducted the necessary immediate safeguarding actions at initial response but sometimes failed to share sufficient information about children with external organisations and agencies. Specialist investigations were supervised to identify risk and vulnerability, and to ensure that investigations and victim care plans were carried out. However, scrutiny of these plans was not always recorded. The force sometimes failed to ensure that appropriate ongoing specialist safeguarding arrangements were in place for vulnerable victims.

On a more positive note, we found that frontline officers and staff understood how to identify and protect those who were vulnerable, and worked positively in relation to vulnerable victims. Offences were investigated to a good standard by people with the right skills and with manageable workloads.

# Revisit findings: progress against the recommendations and areas for improvement from the 2016 effectiveness inspection

In this section, we set out the cause of concern, recommendations, and areas for improvement from our 2016 effectiveness inspection, and our findings from this revisit inspection in 2017.

## Cause of concern from 2016 effectiveness inspection report

### Cause of concern

Nottinghamshire Police was failing to respond appropriately to some people who were vulnerable and at risk at the initial point of contact. This meant that early opportunities to safeguard victims and secure evidence at the scene were being missed, and victims were being put at risk.

### Recommendations

The force should take immediate steps to ensure that:

- it improves its initial assessment and response to incidents involving all vulnerable people, by ensuring that staff working in call handling understand and complete assessments of threat, risk and harm to appropriate standards, consistently record them on force systems and are supervised effectively; and
- its response to incidents is determined by this initial assessment of risk in order to ensure victims are kept safe, and not by the availability of response officers.

## Areas for improvement

- The force should ensure that officers and staff understand how children can be affected by domestic abuse, and that there is a process to ensure they undertake safeguarding actions and make referrals to other organisations which have a role in safeguarding.
- The force should improve the way it works with partner organisations to share information and safeguard victims of domestic abuse and their children, specifically in relation to addressing the backlog of cases that require further assessment and referral to other organisations.
- The force should improve its approach to safeguarding victims of domestic abuse who are assessed as high risk. It should review the referral process to multi-agency risk assessment conferences to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are not being placed at risk as a result.
- The force should work with partner organisations to improve its understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability within its local area.

We identified three specific areas to follow up so that we could assess progress against the recommendations and areas for improvement:

1. How effectively does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?
2. How effectively does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?
3. How effectively does the force work with external partners to keep victims safe?

### **Revisit finding 1: How effectively does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?**

In our 2016 effectiveness report, we recommended that the force improve its initial assessment and response in the force control room to incidents involving all vulnerable people and that there is effective supervision. The force has since put in place effective governance and oversight and a plan to improve the identification of vulnerable victims at the first point of contact. This is led by an assistant chief constable who also ensures that, at a daily management meeting, domestic abuse incidents, and those where a vulnerable person is identified, are examined to ensure the force provides a more consistent response.

The force has now adopted the College of Policing definition of vulnerability:

"if as a result of their situation or circumstances, [victims] are unable to take care of or protect themselves, or others, from harm or exploitation".

Frontline officers and staff working in the control room receive training on this definition and on what it means in their day-to-day roles. Control room staff also receive refresher training and briefings on how to identify risk through the structured triage questioning process known as THRIVE.<sup>3</sup> Supervisors have regular meetings with call-handlers (who are known as customer service assistants), and each person is expected to use this process in every call they deal with and to record their findings on the incident log created from the call. Supervisors listen to calls, read incident logs, and provide feedback to their staff to ensure they perform this risk assessment process well. We reviewed a sample of incident logs and found that most contained a record of this assessment being completed, but the detail and quality of the log entries were inconsistent. We found that often there was limited recorded detail about the most appropriate type and style of investigation, whether the victim was vulnerable and how they preferred to be engaged with. The force is providing further training, but this is yet to be completed for all staff. This means the force is not consistent in the identification of threat, harm and risk, and investigation opportunities are sometimes being lost.

Positively, the force has introduced a new way of showing when an incident involves a vulnerable person, to enable a better-prioritised response. There is already a process to add tags on incident logs indicating a vulnerable person, and this new approach allows control room staff to revise an incident type from its original categorisation, for example from a 'sexual offences' incident to a 'vulnerable' incident. This revision would then help staff to recognise more easily the incident as involving a vulnerable person requiring a prioritised service. This procedure had been introduced six weeks prior to our revisit, and the force had only identified a very small number of incidents involving vulnerable people. The officers and staff we spoke to did not yet have a good level of understanding of this process. In some of the incidents we reviewed, we identified vulnerable people and brought this to the attention of the force for appropriate action.

Overall, this demonstrates a commitment by the force to improve its understanding of vulnerability. Once the risk assessment and vulnerability identification processes are more established, it should mean that the force provides a better response to those people who are vulnerable.

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<sup>3</sup> The threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement (THRIVE) model is used to assess the appropriate initial police response to a call for service. It allows a judgment to be made of the relative risk posed by the call and places the individual needs of the victim at the centre of that decision.

## **Revisit finding 2: How effectively does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?**

In our 2016 effectiveness report, we recommended that the force take the necessary steps to ensure that its response to incidents is determined by an initial assessment of risk, and not by the availability of response officers. The force has put in place several positive steps to ensure that it responds appropriately to those incidents that involve the most vulnerable. For example, where domestic abuse is suspected, the force aims to respond either immediately or within an hour of the incident happening. Sometimes it is not always appropriate to respond in this way. On these occasions a decision is made to re-grade the force's response. A variety of factors are considered and incidents are only re-graded once a supervisor in the force control room has made an assessment and confirmed this can occur. We saw some good examples of this decision-making process but, equally, found some incident logs in which the assessment and re-grading had not been authorised or recorded. This means that investigation opportunities may have been lost, including a chance to engage face to face with the victim at an earlier stage.

The number and type of incidents yet to be allocated which involve a person who is vulnerable have been reduced. The force has improved how it manages these unallocated incidents and has allocated more resources to improve resilience in the team that manages these incidents; for example, each incident is reviewed by a supervisor, and the action that is required is then recorded on the incident log. However, sometimes these reviews do not take place for several hours, and do not include a re-assessment of the original risk, which is a missed opportunity. Generally, reviews take place on handover to the next shift, but we found several instances of action having been requested by a supervisor but then limited, or no, activity being conducted until the next supervisor review. This is disappointing.

The force recognises that there are sometimes significant delays in its response to incidents involving a person who is vulnerable. It is conducting research with other forces to see how it can manage its call volume better. We found several examples of incidents not being attended for several days, and very few entries on some logs regarding contacting or keeping the victim updated. This can mean victims do not receive safeguarding advice, and no one is responsible for securing evidence or for investigating the incident. On a more positive note, the force has invested in a crime audit team, whose task is to ensure that where an incident contains enough information to indicate that a crime may have been committed, then it is recorded. Although this improves compliance with crime-recording standards, it does not necessarily lead to an improved response. The force still cannot always respond to the demand it faces in a timely way and then provide the service to which it aspires. This is a fundamental problem.



### **Revisit finding 3: How effectively does the force work with external partners to keep victims safe?**

In our 2016 effectiveness report, we identified four areas for improvement. The force has made good progress in most of these areas. The force has taken steps to ensure that officers and staff understand how children can be affected by domestic abuse. It has a process to ensure that officers and staff undertake safeguarding actions and make referrals to other organisations that have a role in safeguarding. We spoke to officers and staff who all displayed understanding towards dealing with vulnerability, particularly in response to domestic abuse. The force has invested considerably in training and briefing frontline officers, led by the head of public protection and his team. The force uses several innovative ways to explain vulnerability, domestic abuse (including coercive and controlling behaviour) and the effect on children. For example, handy business cards explain a new process to make referrals to partner organisations, and there are several 'bite-size' videos to help officers and staff identify those people who are vulnerable, especially children affected by domestic abuse. We found an improved understanding in most areas among officers and staff. We assessed how well this knowledge had become established in our 2017 effectiveness inspection. Daily Encompass meetings,<sup>4</sup> which involve a range of adult and children services partner organisations, where information is shared among partners, have increased the effectiveness of interventions. These meetings will be enhanced further as the force is developing a way of combining two forms, which should make referrals more streamlined. At the time of the revisit inspection the force envisaged that this would be in place by September 2017.

The force has moved some public protection teams together to provide more resilience, and the process to carry out secondary risk assessment on domestic abuse referrals is much improved. During our 2016 inspection, we identified a backlog of cases that required further assessment and referral to other agencies. There is now no backlog, and partners receive information in a more timely way. An improved approach to safeguarding victims of domestic abuse who are assessed as high-risk is now in place. The force has reviewed the referral process to multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)<sup>5</sup> to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are not being placed at risk as a result. All high-risk cases are referred to county-based MARACs, and the force anticipates that the city MARAC will also shortly include all high-risk domestic abuse cases. This is very positive, and means that information-sharing opportunities will be enhanced so that all high-risk domestic abuse victims are appropriately safeguarded.

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<sup>4</sup> Operation Encompass involves reporting to schools before 9.00am on a school day when a child or young person has been involved or exposed to a domestic abuse incident the previous evening.

<sup>5</sup> Multi-agency risk assessment conferences are local meetings where information about high-risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies.

In our 2016 effectiveness report, we noted that the force should work with partner organisations to improve its understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability within its local area. The force is making good progress in establishing the nature and scale of domestic abuse, supplementing its knowledge with partnership data from the MARACs. However, there are still gaps in the force's understanding of missing and absent children and child sexual exploitation. Although the child sexual exploitation assessment has been updated with information from an assessment conducted at a regional level, it is not based on sufficiently detailed analysis. The missing and absent assessment has not been updated since our last inspection. Together, these assessments describe the situation well but lack meaningful analysis and are limited in their use of partnership data. This means the force is limited in how it can successfully direct its resources to the highest need.

## Conclusions and next steps

### Conclusions

Nottinghamshire Police is making good progress in protecting and safeguarding victims of domestic abuse. It is making some progress on how it assesses calls and responds to incidents involving all vulnerable people, but the force's understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability is still only partially effective.

The force has developed a clear plan to improve how it identifies vulnerable victims at the first point of contact. It takes a more consistent approach to the assessment of risks for victims, and is improving the accuracy with which it records its rationale, although the quality of these assessments still varies widely. The way that the force identifies vulnerable people and their level of risk in the force control room is improving, but the force needs to firmly establish this approach.

Nottinghamshire Police has changed how it responds to victims of domestic abuse. It now aims to respond to all these types of incidents within one hour of receiving the initial call. However, we still found some significant delays in attending these calls, as well as other calls involving vulnerable victims. We found some improvements to supervision, and most incidents where there is evidence of a crime being committed are now recorded as a crime. However, victims are sometimes not seen by an officer for days. This means they do not receive safeguarding advice. Moreover, no one is responsible for securing evidence or for investigating the incident.

Once an officer has attended and spoken to the victim, the force conducts all the necessary immediate safeguarding actions, and now provides sufficient information about vulnerable people and children to external organisations and agencies. We found good progress in ensuring that the views and concerns of the child are being effectively heard. The force has improved its understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability in relation to domestic abuse, with improved engagement from partner organisations. However, the force's understanding of child sexual exploitation and missing children is still insufficient. We found progress with partner organisations in ensuring that victims of domestic abuse victims are not put at risk. The force anticipated that, during the months immediately following the revisit inspection, information-sharing opportunities at multi-agency risk assessment conferences would be enhanced.

Nottinghamshire Police now needs to fully establish and manage a complex set of linked changes to its processes for dealing with vulnerability. The force understands these challenges and the risk associated with the changes. HMICFRS will want to test the impact of these changes in future inspections.

## Next steps

HMICFRS will continue to monitor Nottinghamshire Police's progress against the cause of concern and areas for improvement set out both in this report and previously in our autumn 2016 effectiveness report,<sup>6</sup> published in March 2017. We have also assessed progress during our autumn 2017 effectiveness report, published in March 2018.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016 – An inspection of Nottinghamshire Police*, HMIC, 2017. Available from: [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2016-nottinghamshire/](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2016-nottinghamshire/)

<sup>7</sup> *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2017 – An inspection of Nottinghamshire Police*, HMICFRS, 2018. Available from: [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2017-nottinghamshire/](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2017-nottinghamshire/)

## Annex A – Methodology

The revisit inspection methodology included:

- a presentation by the force on progress since the original inspection;
- a review of supporting documentation provided by the force;
- reality testing in the control room, to review the assessment of vulnerability and the management of incidents involving domestic abuse, missing people and calls reporting concern for welfare;
- reality testing in police stations, to review the quality of investigations into crimes resulting from domestic abuse incidents;
- discussions with public protection investigation teams; and
- additional monitoring and progress visits before the revisit inspection.