

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Devon and Cornwall Police



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

Calls for assistance per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2015

Devon and Cornwall
Police

149

England and Wales

350

Domestic abuse calls for assistance per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2015

Devon and Cornwall
Police

12.7

England and Wales

15.8



Crime

Crimes recorded per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2015

Devon and Cornwall
Police

47.0

England and Wales

61.6

Change in recorded crimes (excluding fraud) 12 months to 31 March 2015 against 12 months to 31 March 2014

Devon and Cornwall
Police

-5.8%

England and Wales

+2.2%

Percentage of total crimes recorded (excluding fraud) as having a vulnerable victim 12 months to 31 March 2015

Devon and Cornwall
Police

18.8%

England and Wales

10.7%

Percentage of total crimes recorded as domestic abuse 12 months to 31 March 2015

Devon and Cornwall
Police

12.6%

England and Wales

10.0%

Change in domestic abuse recorded crime 12 months to 31 March 2015 against 12 months to 31 March 2014

Devon and Cornwall
Police

+1.6%

England and Wales

+20.8%



Domestic abuse arrest rate

Number of domestic abuse arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015

Devon and Cornwall Police

52

England and Wales

66



Charge rate

Charge rate as a percentage of all crimes recorded (excluding fraud) 12 months to 31 March 2015

Devon and Cornwall Police

15.2%

England and Wales

16.6%

Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015

Devon and Cornwall Police

23.1%

England and Wales

27.3%



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015

Devon and Cornwall Police

82.3%

England and Wales

83.8%

Data: for full details on the data used in this graphic see annex A in the vulnerability national report.

Introduction

The public expects their local police force to support victims of crime by responding to calls for help, putting in place the right support and keeping them informed. It is particularly important that vulnerable people, whether or not they have been a victim of crime, are identified early and receive the support they need.

As part of its annual inspections into police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL), HMIC's effectiveness programme assessed how well forces keep people safe and reduce crime. Within this programme, HMIC's vulnerability inspection examined the overall question, 'How effective are forces at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims?' We have considered in depth how forces respond to and support missing and absent children and victims of domestic abuse, and assessed how well prepared forces are to respond to and safeguard children at risk of sexual exploitation.

We have looked at four areas:

- How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?
- How well does the force respond to vulnerable victims?
- How well does the subsequent police action and work with partners keep victims safe?
- How well does the force respond to and safeguard specific vulnerable groups (missing and absent children & victims of domestic abuse); and how well prepared is it to tackle child sexual exploitation?

At the heart of this inspection is the protection of people who are vulnerable. A force may therefore be judged as requiring improvement by HMIC where it exhibits shortcomings in one of these areas, even if its performance in other areas is strong, and even if there are many elements of its service that HMIC considers to be good.

This inspection follows up our 2014 domestic abuse inspection and reviews forces' progress on implementation of their action plans following that inspection. A national domestic abuse report summarising the findings across 43 forces is being published at the same time as this report.

During our inspection we collected data and plans from forces, conducted a review of case files and observed multi-agency meetings. We heard from victims of domestic abuse through a number of focus groups across England and Wales and conducted an online survey with practitioners, including Independent Domestic Violence Advocates, outreach and refuge workers, to gauge views on what has changed since the 2014 inspection and inform local practitioner focus groups.

During the in-force inspection, we interviewed chief officers in each force and held focus groups with officers, staff and partners, and made unannounced visits to police stations, force control rooms and specialist teams.

We also worked with the force missing person coordinator (or equivalent) to review cases of missing and absent children, including children considered to be 'repeat absent' and 'repeat missing' and children shown to be at risk of child sexual exploitation.

All forces are subject to significant cost reductions and these issues have been reflected in our efficiency reports published in October 2015. The judgments we are making in this vulnerability report are made understanding the financial challenges forces are facing.

This report sets out the findings from this wide-ranging inspection of Devon and Cornwall Police.

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

Summary



Requires improvement

Devon and Cornwall Police generally provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and responds well to their calls. However, there are several areas where the force needs to improve to ensure that its service is consistent and that vulnerable people are kept safe. Given the scale of the challenge in this area and the risk that is posed to some of the most vulnerable people, overall HMIC judges that the force requires improvement.

HMIC acknowledges that the force has committed significant effort and resource to improve its service to the public in relation to vulnerability issues and supporting victims.

The force effectively identifies vulnerable victims, and its sexual offences and domestic abuse investigation teams provide a specialist response to crimes committed against vulnerable victims. These specialist teams are under continual review and resourced according to demand.

Missing and absent children are a priority for the force. There are clearly understood and well-supervised processes for finding missing or absent children. Professionals in the multi-agency safeguarding hubs assess victims' vulnerability to child sexual exploitation and they take early action to reduce the risks to victims.

The force is improving its response to cases of child sexual exploitation, although force computer systems cannot readily identify victims or perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. However, this inspection only considered how well prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation. HMIC also inspected the force's child protection services. The more detailed findings from that inspection¹ should be read in conjunction with this inspection report.

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the force. Officers and staff understand this priority and their initial response to domestic abuse and risk is thorough with officers assessing risk and taking effective action to keep victims safe. During crime inspection in 2014, we identified that the force needed to improve the quality of the

¹ *National Child Protection Inspections - Devon and Cornwall Police*, HMIC, September 2015. Available from www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/devon-and-cornwall-national-child-protection-inspection.pdf

service and contact it had with the victim. The force has improved this by introducing a victim care unit and specific victim's needs assessments. However, this is a relatively new process and the use of victim's needs assessments is inconsistent. Staff do not always recognise those victims who are entitled to additional measures and support.

How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?

Devon and Cornwall Police is committed to protecting vulnerable people. Officers and staff clearly understand and support this commitment. The force has effective methods in place to identify vulnerable victims when they first contact the police and ensures that the police response is appropriate, based on an assessment of threat, harm and risk and meets the particular needs of vulnerable individuals.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

Devon and Cornwall Police is good at identifying repeat and vulnerable victims when they first contact the police.

Forces define vulnerability in different ways. The majority of forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime² or that referred to in ACPO guidance.³ Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

Devon and Cornwall uses the definition from VCOP and defines vulnerability as:

"You are eligible for enhanced entitlements under this Code as a vulnerable victim if:

- a) You are under 18 years of age at the time of the offence, or
- b) The quality of your evidence is likely to be affected because:
 - 1) You suffer from mental disorder within the meaning of the Mental Health Act 1983;

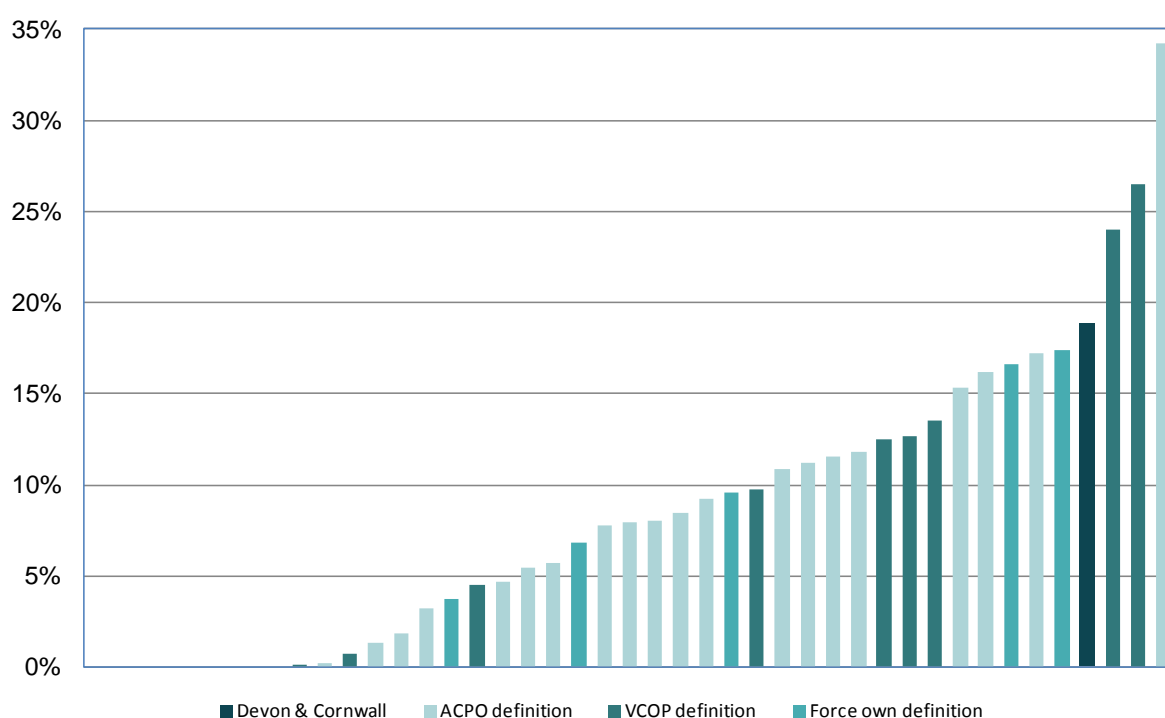
² *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*, Ministry of Justice, 2013. Available from www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf

³ The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is now the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). *ACPO Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults*, NPIA, 2012. Available from www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/

- 2) You otherwise have a significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning; or
- 3) You have a physical disability or are suffering from a physical disorder.”

The proportion of crime recorded which involves a vulnerable victim varies considerably between forces, from 0.03 percent to 34.3 percent. For the 12 months to 31 March 2015, 18.8 percent of all recorded crimes in Devon and Cornwall Police were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. Eight forces were unable to provide this data at the time of data collection. There is no standard way in which forces are required to record on crime recording systems whether a victim is vulnerable and forces do this differently.

Figure 1: The proportion of police recorded crime with a vulnerable victim identified, by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015.



Source: HMIC data return

HMIC found that staff who answer 999 calls have a clear understanding of the procedures to identify vulnerable victims at the initial point of contact. Upon receipt of a call, staff working in the force control room use a prepared set of questions to identify vulnerable victims and allocate an appropriate resource to respond to the case, based on the level of threat, risk and harm. HMIC listened to and reviewed 14 calls made to the force in relation to vulnerable victims. We identified some good examples of staff assessing vulnerability at the first point of contact. However, there was some inconsistency in the way that call centre staff questioned callers regarding the immediacy of the risk, and the advice that was given to reduce that risk.

Assessing levels of risk and need

Devon and Cornwall Police ensures that its response to the victim is based on their needs rather than the type of crime. It does this by making an assessment of threat, risk and harm for each victim and determining the most appropriate response.

The force has also put in place measures to check that the assessment of risk for victims is completed effectively. A dedicated risk management supervisor works in the police control room and reviews all calls where the victim is assessed as vulnerable, including those related to domestic abuse, missing and absent persons and calls where there are concerns for the welfare of an individual. Supervisors of staff who answer 999 calls also carry out checks on two calls per member of staff per month and assess the quality of information obtained and how well vulnerability of a victim has been assessed. In addition, the control room supervisors use a process of side-by-side coaching when they will listen to live-time calls and provide immediate feedback to the member of staff taking the call.

The force also has mental health professionals in the force control room, working alongside police officers in order to advise and inform risk assessments and provide an improved service for victims. Local leadership teams also review all incidents involving vulnerable victims at daily management meetings and force daily tasking meetings, to ensure that risk is being assessed effectively and the right investigative and safeguarding⁴ action is taking place. As a result, HMIC found that generally the right people are sent to deal with the incidents involving vulnerable victims.

Understanding the risk to victims and ensuring they are protected and supported

HMIC assessed the extent to which the force provided services that best meet the victim's needs. We found that in Devon and Cornwall the requirements of some vulnerable groups are better understood than others. For example, we found that domestic abuse is a clear priority for the force. Staff understand this and their initial response to domestic abuse and identification of risk is generally thorough, with partner agencies and the voluntary sector appropriately involved. Understanding of, and initial response to, missing and absent people is well established, but there is a lack of longer term planning in relation to children who go missing repeatedly. The force is still developing its approach to tackling child sexual exploitation, and is actively working with partner agencies to improve its joint understanding and response.

⁴ The term safeguarding means providing protection and support to ensure the safety of vulnerable people and prevent further harm.

To provide the most appropriate support to vulnerable victims, the force has invested more resource in the parts of its organisation which works to keep them safe. This has led to the positive step of the force creating several new teams and structures and improvements to existing structures, including:

- increased numbers and training of investigators in the sexual offences and domestic abuse investigation teams (SODAIT) who carry out specialist investigations into crimes against vulnerable victims;
- development of a victim care unit (VCU);
- introduction of victim needs assessments (VNAs);
- introduction of multi-agency child sexual exploitation meetings (MACSEs), where police, social services, mental health, local authority housing, children and adult services and non-statutory partners work together to safeguard victims;
- the Devon MASH⁵ to gain a better understanding of missing and absent occurrences and the links to child sexual exploitation, using an analytical tool called social network analysis (SNA); and
- development of an improved way of assessing risk and vulnerability of victims through the use of a vulnerability screening tool (ViST) which was piloted in the Torbay area and is being rolled out across the force.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁶

Devon and Cornwall Police responds well to vulnerable victims. It has clear and well understood systems in place to ensure that the police response to vulnerable victims is appropriate and reflects their needs. These include having mental health staff working alongside people answering 999 calls to help recognise particular issues and respond accordingly, and having arrangements in place to identify repeat incidents of anti-social behaviour at the first point of contact which helps to identify and support vulnerable victims of anti-social behaviour.

⁵ A multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) brings together into a single location principal safeguarding agencies to identify risks to children better (and in some areas, vulnerable adults), and improve decision-making, interventions, and outcomes. The MASH enables the multi-agency team to share all appropriate information in a secure environment and ensures that the most appropriate response is provided to effectively safeguard and protect the individual.

⁶ The question within the PEEL inspection methodology asks "How well does the subsequent police action and work with partners keep victims safe?" HMIC has amended the heading in this report to make it clear to the reader that this section focuses on the investigation of offences involving vulnerable victims, rather than the police's initial response to vulnerable victims.

Response officers

HMIC found that the police officers who respond to vulnerable people have a good knowledge of how to assess risk and keep victims safe. Officers make good use of the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH)⁷ risk assessment and management model for domestic abuse incidents. The force has piloted a new way of assessing risk and vulnerability of victims of other crimes, through the use of a vulnerability screening tool (ViST) which was first used in the Torbay area of the force and is now being implemented force-wide. The ViST assessment directs frontline staff on actions that need to be taken to minimise risk and it allows for information to be shared quickly with social services and other partner agencies.

Frontline staff are aware of the immediate safeguarding options that they can use to help victims. Response and neighbourhood officers conduct immediate safeguarding actions, such as parking marked police vehicles outside victims' houses, removing the victim from the location and arranging for alarms to be fitted. Officers also contact social services and mental health teams directly to ensure that the victim receives appropriate support and specialist advice.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

Supervisors play an active role in checking and approving the risk assessment process. However, HMIC found that there can be delays in the supervision process, with some domestic abuse risk assessments waiting for supervisors on the following shifts to check them, prior to submission. Potentially this could lead to delays in vulnerable victims receiving the level of service that they require.

⁷ Most forces use the domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence risk identification, assessment and management model (DASH):

www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/risk-and-vulnerability/#approaches-to-risk-assessment

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁸

The force has invested resources to improve the investigation of crimes committed against vulnerable people; while this process is not yet complete, significant progress has been made. During a previous inspection (HMIC's crime inspection in 2014), HMIC identified that the force needed to improve the way in which it investigates domestic abuse. It is clear the force is seeking to address the issues raised, particularly in relation to having specialist trained investigators. HMIC recognises the positive progress the force is making with the introduction of the sexual offences and domestic abuse investigation teams (SODAITs) who provide a specialist accredited response to crimes committed against vulnerable victims.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

HMIC reviewed a number of investigations⁹ which were identified as involving a vulnerable person. We found that generally where vulnerability was identified there was effective safeguarding activity undertaken to protect vulnerable victims. However, the way in which investigations were conducted was inconsistent; the quality of initial action, statements and following investigative opportunities was not always good and investigative activity and supervisory action was not always recorded.

Overall, the force effectively identifies vulnerability at an early stage of an investigation and there was clear evidence that staff followed up safeguarding enquiries in a timely fashion. The force demonstrates a good level of safeguarding and victim care where it identifies vulnerability, although this is not recorded on the crime file consistently.

SODAITs investigate cases of sexual offences and domestic abuse. If SODAITs do not have capacity, investigations are then transferred to other investigation teams. HMIC did not find any incidents when this transfer affected adversely the quality of investigations. The force is still in the process of resourcing the SODAIT teams and has recently recruited staff with the required skills. In some areas, not all staff are fully trained yet. HMIC's file review found evidence that the force uses specialist

⁸ The question within the PEEL inspection methodology asks "How well does the subsequent police action and work with partners keep victims safe?" HMIC has amended the heading in this report to make it clear to the reader that this section focuses on the investigation of offences involving vulnerable victims, rather than the police's initial response to vulnerable victims.

⁹ HMIC reviewed a sample of rape, burglary, offences of serious violence and actual bodily harm cases. In most forces the review consisted of 10 cases from each crime category but in some larger forces the sample was increased to 15. The file review was designed to provide a broad overview of the identification vulnerability and the effectiveness of the investigation.

officers with appropriate skills and training to conduct complex investigations. However, it was of concern that other cases reviewed which involved serious crime (i.e. rape and grievous bodily harm) did not contain clear records of investigation plans, or evidence of effective supervision or of supervisory involvement in the decision making.

Compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime

All police forces have a statutory duty to comply with the code of practice for victims of crime, which sets out the service that victims of crime can expect from all parts of the criminal justice system. The code states that all victims of crime should be able to make a personal statement, which they can use to explain how the crime has affected them.

Victims should also be kept updated about the progress of their case. During HMIC's crime inspection in 2014, we identified that the force needed to improve the quality of victim service and contact. The force and the police and crime commissioner (PCC) have a clear priority to protect people who are at risk or are deemed to be vulnerable and have taken steps to improve the quality of service to victims of crime, in particular those assessed as vulnerable. The victim care unit (VCU) has been introduced to improve the service provided to vulnerable victims. The VCU reviews all reported crime to ensure that vulnerable victims are identified and review victim's needs assessments, that are completed by frontline staff to identify specific victim's needs. The VCU shares this information with external agencies so that joint activity can be undertaken to safeguard victims.

HMIC found clear evidence that police supervisors had been trained in relation to the work of the VCU and that they had then passed on this training to their staff. HMIC found that staff had a good awareness of the VCU and the need to conduct a victim needs assessment (VNA) and had been provided with a helpful checklist detailing the VNA process. In addition, staff we spoke to had completed recent internet-based training in relation to the code of practice for victims of crime. However, this is a relatively new process and the force may wish to evaluate the ongoing quality of the assessments and any resulting care plans, as our inspection and case file review found some inconsistencies in the use of victim's need assessment which in some cases lacked recorded victim care plans within crime reports. It was not clear to us if staff always recognised those victims who were entitled to additional measures and support.

Working with partners

The force works with a number of different organisations to protect those who are vulnerable and to support victims. This work is currently focused on the Devon MASH, the Cornwall multi-agency referral unit (MARU), the Plymouth Advice and Assessment Service and the Torbay Safeguarding Hub. Although arrangements differ across these areas they all share information about vulnerable people, so that

risk can be identified better and plans put in place to keep them safe. HMIC observed the multi-agency safe guarding hubs (MASHs) and multi-agency child sexual exploitation meetings (MACSEs), and found that police, social services, mental health, local authority housing, children and adult services and non-statutory partners work together effectively to safeguard victims.

The force is committed to having a single safeguarding process and at the time of the inspection was working with its partners to create a central safeguarding team. In addition to these multi-agency arrangements, and to support police action to keep victims safe, the force is seeking to roll out the vulnerability identification screening tool (ViST) to all areas. HMIC views this as a positive step in the safeguarding process that will improve consistency in this work.

With specific regard to missing children, HMIC considered the Devon MASH's social network analysis (SNA) to be an innovative approach. The analysis of over 1,100 items of data from police, partner agencies and stakeholders identified over 500 individuals and produced a top 20 list of children vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and potential offenders, some of whom were previously unknown. This demonstrates that this approach has significant potential, both for identifying vulnerable individuals and allowing for early intervention opportunities with both victims and offenders.

We also found a range of positive work with partners which sat outside the MASH. The force has strong relationships with partners to identify repeat and vulnerable victims of anti-social behaviour. HMIC spoke to officers and members of partner agencies who described various meeting structures across the entire force area where partners, including local authority anti-social behaviour case workers, housing staff, youth offending teams and other organisations, would meet with police to assess risk and prioritise action. These meetings are normally led by the local authority anti-social behaviour workers who co-ordinate the response. This has resulted in effective arrangements to share information and provide a cohesive response and early intervention to prevent the escalation of anti-social behaviour.

Devon and Cornwall holds multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)¹⁰ with professionals from other bodies to safeguard those considered to be at the highest risk of harm. The MARACs are well-established and partners reported positively that they are effective in safeguarding vulnerable victims of domestic abuse. However, some members of the force's partner organisations did identify problems that they experienced in accessing information from police computer systems in relation to domestic abuse cases. The force is aware of these issues and is seeking to address them.

¹⁰ MARACs (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) – local meetings where information about high-risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies.

How well does the force respond to and safeguard specific vulnerable groups (missing and absent & victims of domestic abuse), and how well prepared is it to tackle child sexual exploitation?

The first three questions have explained how the force identifies those that are vulnerable, the response that is provided to them and what action the force takes to investigate crimes and to work with partners to keep victims safe. This question looks specifically at how the force deals with three specific areas of vulnerability: domestic abuse, missing and absent children and its preparedness to deal with child sexual exploitation.

Missing and absent children

There is a good response to reports of missing and absent children in the force. Missing and absent children are a priority for the force and it has clearly understood processes for managing missing persons, especially children. A person is classified as absent if they are not where they are expected to be but they are not considered to be at risk. Whereas, if they are classified as missing the police are obliged to take steps to locate them, as the level of perceived risk is higher. If any missing cases are categorised as high risk, they are reviewed by the criminal investigation department and feature prominently in all force briefings. They are also assessed by the MASH in order to explore vulnerability to child sexual exploitation with a view to early intervention to reduce the risks to victims and identify suspected offenders.

The force uses the COMPACT computer system to manage cases of missing children. Where these have been assessed as high risk, the investigations are managed through the force command and control computer system (STORM) which the force uses to assess progress and give staff the task of undertaking enquiries. HMIC found consistently high levels of supervision of high-risk cases by staff within the force control room and by the force critical incident manager. HMIC also found evidence that progress is reviewed by senior investigators. For example, a detective inspector who, having reassessed the case of a 14-year-old vulnerable girl, took ownership of the investigation and documented clearly the reasons for the increased risk assessment and transferred the investigation to specialist investigators to undertake. The child was found safe and well.

The force has invested in missing person safeguarding officers but HMIC found a lack of clarity in relation to the role of these officers. The officers saw themselves primarily as a point of contact with access to other partner agencies and considered that they did not perform any role in the quality assurance of missing person investigations. While the initial response to missing children is good, the force does not use 'trigger plans' or similar in relation to children who go missing repeatedly and does not use long-term multi-agency plans in relation to repeat missing children.

The Devon MASH is working to understand better data relating to missing and absent children and the links to child sexual exploitation and is using the social network analysis (SNA) tool to achieve this. Previously, the SNA has been used for the successful investigation of terrorism and drug crime. The Devon MASH holds family profile meetings which identify children at risk of harm. Towards the end of 2014 the MASH profiled several regular missing children cases in the Newton Abbot and Exeter areas and found names that appeared repeatedly through several of the young people's networks. SNA is in the early stages of development but already has shown positive results for identifying potential victims of child sexual exploitation and suspected perpetrators, and allows for multi-agency interventions to be identified at an early stage.

The force engages the voluntary sector to help safeguard missing children. Representatives of each local authority speak to children upon their return to gain a better understanding of the reason for their absence, and to assess their risk of child sexual exploitation which is then discussed at the multi agency child sexual exploitation (MACSE) meetings.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

The force is making progress but has more work to do to ensure that it is prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. This inspection has focused on actions and activities that the force has taken to understand and identify the extent to which children are at risk of child sexual exploitation and the policies, practices and procedures it is putting in place to tackle this. It did not test the quality of how the force conducted complex investigations with other agencies such as children's services, as these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.

The force is making progress with its ability to respond to cases of child sexual exploitation. It has undertaken analysis and research to improve its understanding of the risks from child sexual exploitation. It is also actively working with partners to improve its joint understanding and response. HMIC found that staff are aware that child sexual exploitation is a priority for the force and the ongoing one day training being given to all staff is increasing awareness. HMIC received consistent feedback from staff that this training is of a high standard and beneficial to their work.

However, force computer systems are not able to flag victims or perpetrators of child sexual exploitation which has an impact on the ease with which research and assessment can be carried out. HMIC found that staff briefings and daily management meetings did include child sexual exploitation victims and perpetrators, but some staff did not know how to access the advice and guidance in relation to child sexual exploitation investigation or disruption tactics.

The MACSE meeting structure is well-supported by partner organisations and provides a process to share information and co-ordinate the response to identified child sexual exploitation risks. The force has a number of active organised crime

investigations ongoing in relation to child sexual exploitation. Teams such as child protection staff, local investigation teams and children's services work together in response to child sexual exploitation cases.

The work of the Devon MASH in using social network analysis to identify children at risk of child sexual exploitation has previously been identified as worthy of note. The force now needs to build on this and other approaches to ensure that child sexual exploitation risk is identified across the force at an early stage and that continuing investigation and protection of the young people involved is carried out by staff with the right level of expertise, working in partnership with the right agencies.

Domestic abuse

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 2 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 13 percent of all police recorded crime. Across England and Wales during the same period there was a 21 percent increase, with domestic abuse accounting for 10 percent of all police recorded crime.

In March 2014, HMIC published a report on domestic abuse entitled *Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse*.¹¹ It concluded that the overall police response to victims of domestic violence was not good enough and called on forces to take urgent action to improve the effectiveness of the service they provide to victims. As a result of this inspection Devon and Cornwall Police produced an action plan that demonstrated its strong commitment to addressing domestic abuse at a senior level within the force. The force has reviewed this plan continually with clear tracking of progress against the identified areas for improvement. Nearly all of the areas identified have been addressed and the force is on course to complete the remainder of the actions by the end of December 2015. HMIC is satisfied that the force has taken the necessary steps to improve its effectiveness in this area.

The force is seeking to develop its understanding of its response through a number of actions including reviewing the feedback from focus groups of domestic abuse victims held by Women's Aid. The force and the PCC clearly intend to increase the reporting rates of these offences.

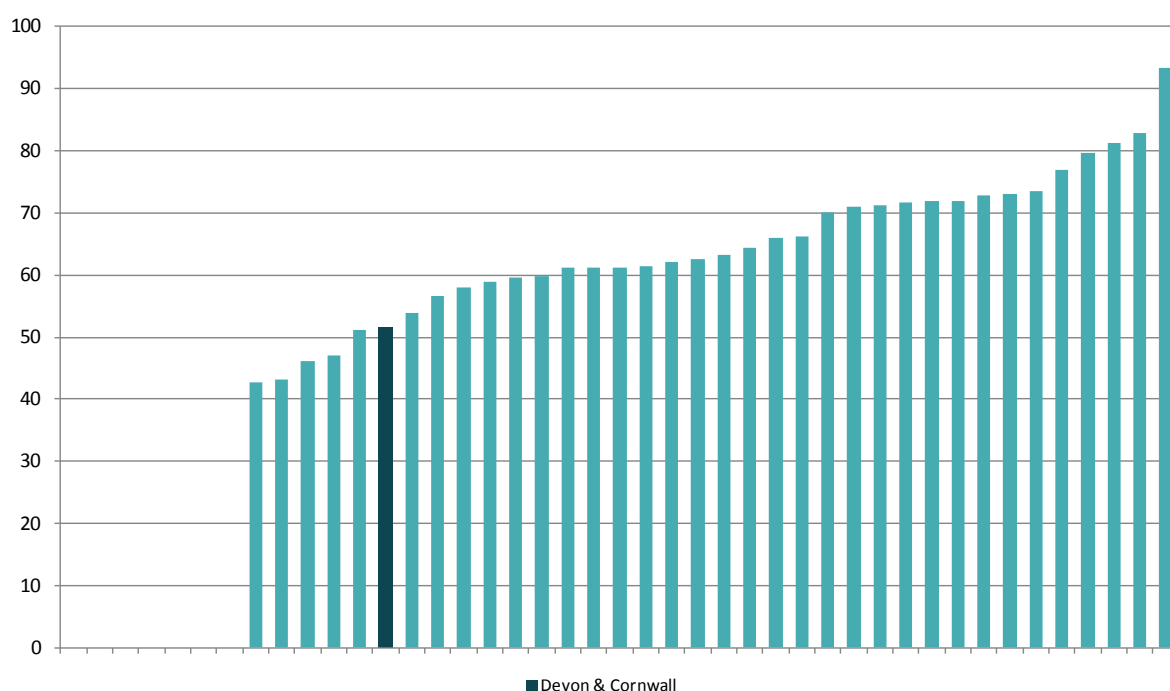
Officers attending incidents involving domestic abuse will assess risk using the DASH risk assessment; the force has processes in place to check that appropriate risk levels have been applied. However, HMIC found evidence that in some cases safeguarding staff within the force public protection unit (PPU) who conduct the secondary assessment of risk are reluctant to amend the initial officer's assessment.

¹¹ *Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse*, HMIC, March 2014. Available from: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/improving-the-police-response-to-domestic-abuse.pdf

Officers and staff see Safeguarding activity as a priority and we found good evidence that this occurs at both the time of the initial response and the subsequent assessment within the PPUs. Crime prevention officers play a major role in making victims' homes safer. Domestic abuse perpetrators are included in briefings for staff and are reviewed at daily management meetings by senior leaders.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Devon and Cornwall Police made 52 arrests.

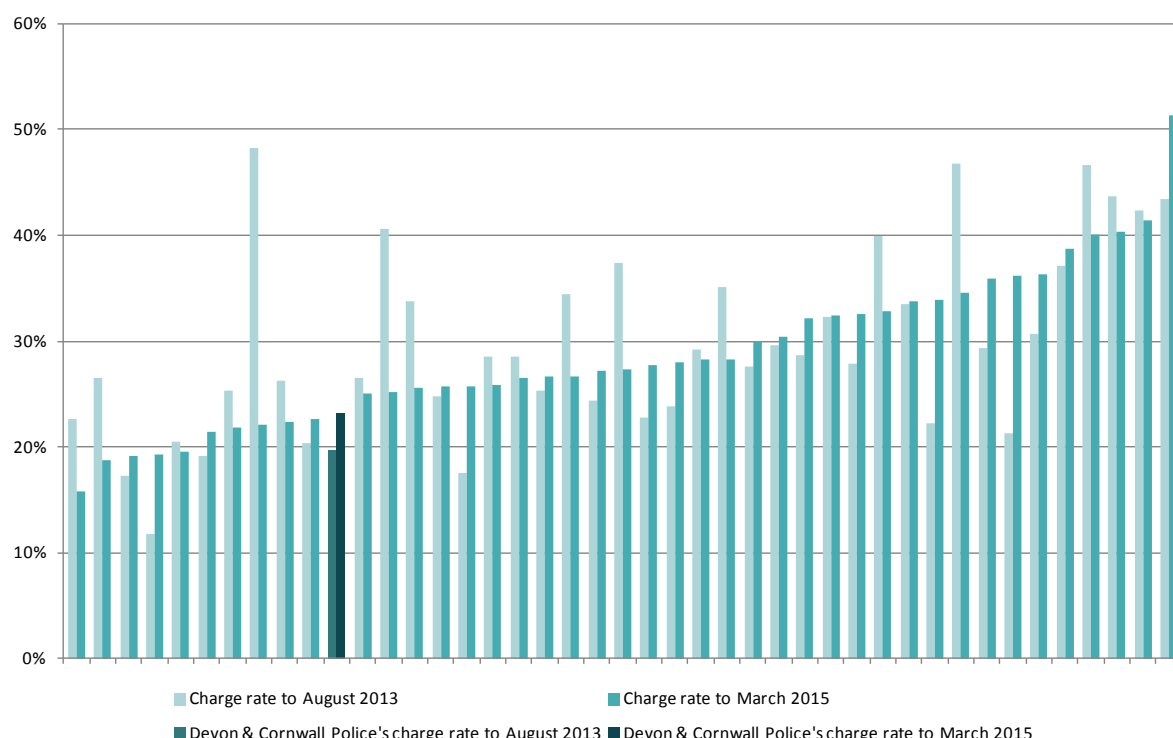
Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015



Source: HMIC data return

The force's charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 23 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is an increase since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection when the force rate was 20 percent for the 12 months to 31 August 2013, compared with 30 percent for England and Wales.

Figure 3: Domestic abuse charge rate for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 compared to the 12 months to 31 August 2013



Source: HMIC data return

HMIC also examined the force's use of new legal powers to protect victims. Domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) were introduced in England and Wales in 2014 to prevent a suspected offender from returning to a victim's home or contacting the victim. The force began using DVPOs in June 2014; it made 53 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 51 were granted. Seven DVPOs have been breached. Breaches occur when the offender fails to comply with the condition of the order and is taken back before the magistrates' court. This represents a DVPO breach rate of 14 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹²

In some policing areas within the force, neighbourhood officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) are actively involved in ongoing safeguarding plans for domestic abuse victims. In Cornwall this includes the use of Cocoon Watch.¹³ In other areas the focus of activity for neighbourhood teams included vulnerable people but excluded domestic abuse victims.

¹² The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

¹³ Cocoon Watch is a mini-neighbourhood watch where after an incident, immediate neighbours are asked to keep an eye on the home for a few weeks and to report anything or anyone suspicious to the police.

HMIC surveyed practitioners who work with domestic abuse victims seeking their views on whether they had seen improvements in the force's response to domestic abuse since March 2014. Of the 25 respondents, 11 stated they had seen a slight improvement. This is lower than seen in most other forces.

In Devon and Cornwall a number of different teams have a role in contacting the victims of domestic abuse, including SODAIT, Safeguarding and Victims Care Unit, together with other support and statutory organisations. The force may wish to reassure itself that there is no duplication of contact and that this process is being co-ordinated.

Summary of findings



Requires improvement

Devon and Cornwall Police generally provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and responds well to them. However, there are several areas where improvement is needed to ensure that the service is consistent and vulnerable people are kept safe. Given the scale of the challenge in this area and risk that is posed to some of the most vulnerable people, overall HMIC judges that the force requires improvement.

HMIC acknowledges that the force has committed significant effort and resource to improve the service to the public on vulnerability and supporting victims.

The force effectively identifies vulnerable victims. Its sexual offences and domestic abuse investigation teams provide a specialist response to crimes committed against vulnerable victims. However, the teams are not yet fully resourced which means that some vulnerable victims do not receive this tailored support.

Reports of missing and absent children are a priority for the force, with clearly-understood and well-supervised processes for finding missing or absent children. Professionals in the multi-agency safeguarding hubs assess vulnerability to child sexual exploitation and take early action to reduce the risks to victims. The force is making progress on its ability to respond effectively to cases of child sexual exploitation.

The force response to domestic abuse is thorough with an action plan that has accountability at senior officer level and a clear process for tracking progress of actions against areas identified for improvement so that officers are correctly assessing risk and taking effective action to keep victims safe.

Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its investigation of cases involving vulnerable victims, specifically in relation to serious crime, by ensuring it carries out investigations to the required standards with proper supervision and plans and actions recorded.
- The force should improve its response to reports of persistent and repeat missing children by ensuring it uses information from previous missing episodes to develop a co-ordinated and prioritised response.
- The force should improve its response to children at risk of sexual exploitation by ensuring approaches to identify and assess children are consistently applied across the force and that staff with the appropriate professional skills and experience investigate cases.
- The force should improve its investigation of domestic abuse by ensuring it has sufficient staff with the appropriate professional skills and experience to investigate cases.