

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Dorset Police



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Dorset Police

England and Wales

230

350

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

Dorset Police

England and Wales

8.9

15.8



Crime

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

Dorset Police

England and Wales

47.5

61.6

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

Dorset Police

England and Wales

-3%

+2.2%

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

Dorset Police

England and Wales

0.2%

10.7%

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

Dorset Police

England and Wales

10.7%

10.0%

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

Dorset Police

England and Wales

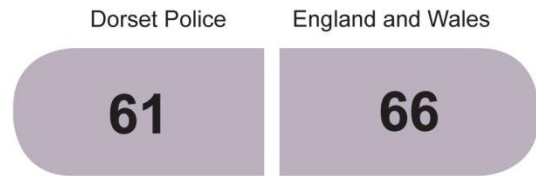
+61.9%

+20.8%



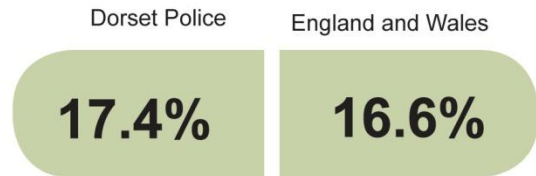
Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

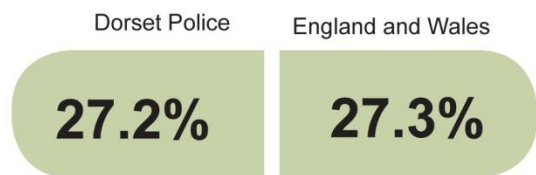


Charge rate

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

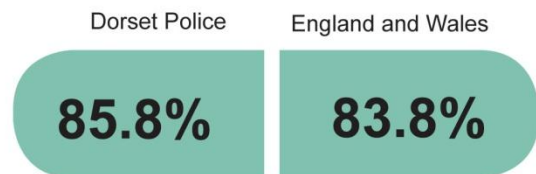


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015



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 Dorset Police.

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

Summary



Good

Dorset Police's strategic priority to protect vulnerable people from harm and support victims is set out clearly by its chief officer team. Through firm direction, strong supervision and up-to-date training the workforce is well prepared to respond to this challenge. As a result, victims and vulnerable people are placed at the centre of all police activity. Representatives from partner organisations who were interviewed during the course of the inspection were complimentary about the way that Dorset Police embraces and takes forward the benefits of working closely together. HMIC observed productive joint working with statutory bodies and other service providers to safeguard¹ vulnerable people at all levels. For these reasons, HMIC judges that the force's performance is good.

The force has in place a clear process of risk assessment for vulnerability issues, which is monitored robustly and managed closely after the initial contact with the police. This ensures long-term support measures are put in place where necessary. Dorset Police take positive steps to ensure that the response to the victim is based on their needs rather than the type of crime which has been committed. This is important as traditionally some police forces have been preoccupied with identifying vulnerability issues only for offences where it is more obvious that these exist, for example domestic abuse. This has occasionally meant that the force has overlooked some victims' needs. However, Dorset Police considers the vulnerability of all individuals who ask for their services, irrespective of the nature of their request.

The force has mature arrangements in place to share important information with other organisations. This means that it gives careful consideration to forming safety plans and it identifies ways to keep vulnerable victims safe.

¹ The term safeguarding means providing protection and support to ensure the safety of a vulnerable person and prevent further harm.

In spite of this progress, HMIC believes that the force could do more to meet its obligations which are compulsory under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. The code sets out the service that victims can expect from all organisations, including the police that have a role in the criminal justice system. In Dorset, the requirement to update victims of critical developments in investigations did not appear to be clearly understood.

This stands in the way of HMIC considering the force's service provision to be outstanding.

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

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.

Dorset uses the definition from the ACPO guidance and defines a vulnerable adult as:

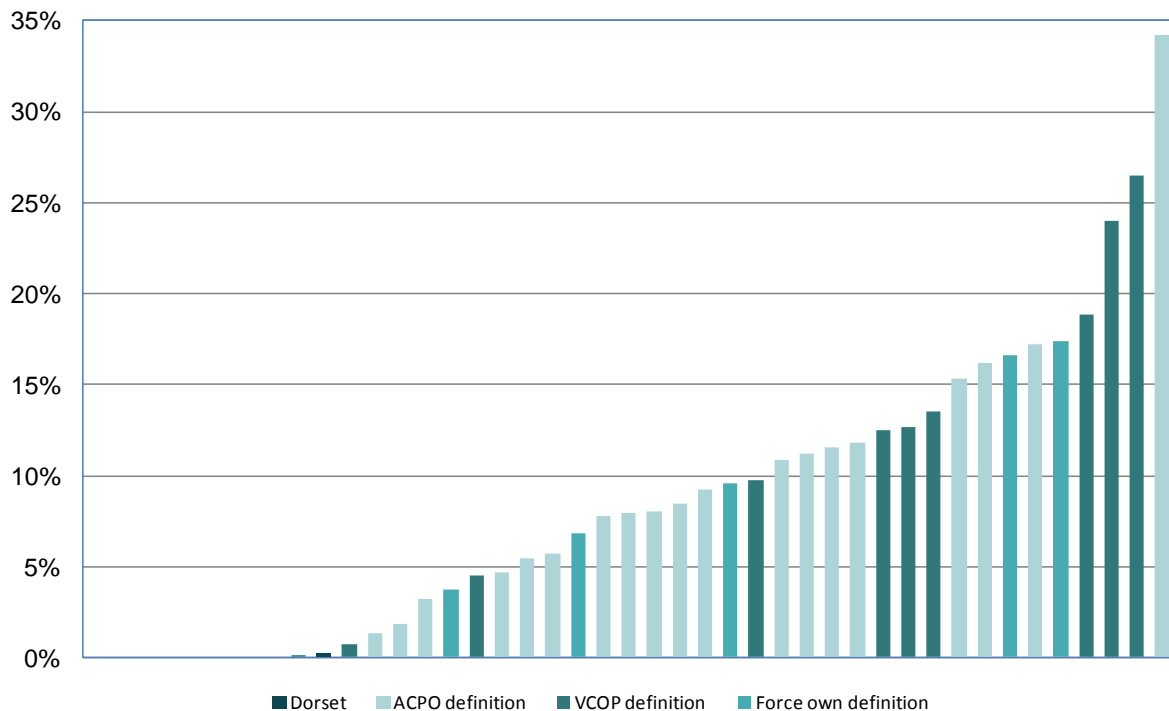
“Any person aged 18 years or over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental, physical, or learning disability, age or illness AND is or may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.”

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, 0.2 percent of all recorded crimes in Dorset 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.

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, is available from www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/

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

Assessing levels of risk and need

HMIC’s inspection found a strong and focused commitment to improving the service provided to vulnerable victims. The force goes to considerable lengths to identify repeat victims correctly and those who are vulnerable, which allows it to provide a tailored response to users of its service.

The force clearly understands and assesses crime trends and patterns of offending and uses this information to identify potential risks to vulnerable victims. For example, the force has identified times of peak demand for incidents of domestic abuse and uses this information to ensure sufficient resources are available for deployment. The force has a number of processes in place to identify those at risk. This includes the daily scanning of incidents by the force intelligence bureau (FIB), the production of a weekly threat assessment, monthly reviews of vulnerable victims and bi-monthly fora which ensure that resources are aligned with emerging trends in crime and victimisation.

To improve service at the first point of contact, the force has implemented a call handling procedure known as THRIVE⁴ in the force control room. This assists

⁴ The THRIVE concept assesses threat, harm, risk, investigation opportunities, the vulnerability of the victim and the engagement level required to resolve the incident.

101/999 call handlers in identifying the vulnerability of callers irrespective of the reason for them making contact with the police.

Determining the level of risk using the THRIVE model is reinforced by access to live-time intelligence. The FIB now provides a round-the-clock facility in the control room, known as FIB24. Officers within this unit have immediate access to all force intelligence systems which helps Dorset Police develop the right response to calls for its service. HMIC found evidence of FIB24 contributing actively to deployment decisions and these led to an escalation of the response in certain cases.

The force subscribes to the mantra of 'getting it right first time'. HMIC found call-handling procedures to be rigorous and police deployments are based on the needs of victims and vulnerable people. HMIC found that this sets a good tone for the service provided during the course of subsequent investigations.

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

In terms of the police then providing services that best meet the victim's needs, HMIC found that in Dorset the requirements of vulnerable victims is well understood. For example, the force shares a missing persons' database with social services. This ensures that more becomes known about the circumstances of the disappearance in the course of investigations. The force has recently introduced new software which identifies persistently-targeted victims with greater accuracy. New training techniques have been introduced, officers joining the force work with community-based service providers to learn more about vulnerability, and qualified detectives receive joint training alongside other social care professionals.

HMIC also acknowledges the force's resolve to invest in new investigative teams and adjust operating procedures to ensure that emerging threats and the priority to support vulnerable victims are properly resourced. Examples of this include:

- a joint venture with social services and other service providers to protect young people who may be at risk of child sexual exploitation;
- a programme to reach out to newly-settled communities who may be at risk, such as young people at language schools, is in place to raise awareness of potential perpetrators; and
- a safeguarding referral unit that makes provision for a daily exchange of information with partner organisations, to ensure that safety plans can be put in place for vulnerable victims who have been identified over the previous 24 hours.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁵

Police response officers are as equally committed as control room staff to putting the victim first and prioritising the needs of vulnerable people. HMIC considers that having vulnerability issues as a force strategic priority is translated into routine operational activity to the extent that it is recognised that these values have now become part of the culture of the force.

Response officers

From our discussions with response officers we concluded that the force's interactions with vulnerable people at the point of crisis are unerringly victim-focused. They are characterised by immediate care for a victim's needs, taking positive steps to confront those who present harm and providing choices for the victim on how matters can be resolved.

The force systematically identifies risk to victims, using the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH)⁶ risk assessment in domestic abuse cases. If children are involved a single combined risk assessment form (SCARF) is completed. SCARF risk identifiers are commonly used by all child practitioners in Dorset.

HMIC considers that the consistent approach to the assessment of risk provides a firm platform to review the longer term needs of victims. HMIC also found good use of legislation to put immediate safeguarding measures in place to protect victims. Domestic violence protection notices (DVPNs)⁷ which restrain offenders from returning home or making unwanted contact with victims are increasingly used by the force.

Supervision of response to vulnerable victims

The force sets high standards of supervision for incidents associated with vulnerable victims. A chief inspector is in overall command of the control room around the clock, supported by control room supervisors, other senior officers (known as critical incident inspectors) and frontline sergeants.

⁵ The question within the PEEL inspection methodology asks "How well does the force respond to vulnerable victims?" HMIC has amended the heading in this report to make it clear to the reader that this section focuses on the initial police response to vulnerable victims, rather than the overall police response to vulnerable victims.

⁶ 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

⁷ Domestic violence prevention notices may be issued by an authorised police officer to prevent a suspected perpetrator from returning to a victim's home and/or contacting the victim.

As well as supervising all incidents in the control room, supervisors in Dorset quality-assure the work of their staff by listening to recordings of 999/101 calls. Any concerns are fed back to the call handler and any systemic shortcomings are referred to the training unit for organisational improvement.

HMIC examined missing persons' reports and found there were clear policies on supervision in place. Periodically, critical incident inspectors and sergeants are required to reconsider the risk to the individual concerned and redirect the investigation if the circumstances have changed.

Further checks and balances are put in place on a daily basis at management meetings. Here senior officers scrutinise and hold local managers to account for crimes associated with vulnerable victims. At these meetings, HMIC found evidence of effective follow-up interventions to pursue known offenders and protect vulnerable people. Officers are detailed to track down high-risk domestic abuse offenders who have not been arrested and complete any new lines of enquiry relating to missing persons.

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

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

HMIC examined a small sample of case files⁹ in which vulnerable victims were identified. HMIC also interviewed investigators in specialist investigative units and frontline officers who also investigate crime.

The force has a clear policy to allocate crime in line with threat, risk and harm. This builds well on the identification of vulnerability issues by call handlers at the first point of contact with the force.

Investigations are generally of a good standard and we found evidence of good supervision and direction. Investigation plans are routinely used to ensure that all lines of enquiry are pursued in a timely fashion. It was also clear that supervisors ensure the full range of legal remedies was considered in achieving the best possible outcomes for victims.

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.

This represents progress; when HMIC last inspected domestic abuse investigations in Dorset in 2014, we considered that the views of the victim were under-represented in deciding how matters should be concluded.

Particular reference was made to DVPNs, domestic violence protection orders and Clare's Law.¹⁰ These represent a range of preventive legislation, either to stop offenders making subsequent contact with victims or to disclose details of a person's violent past to spouses or partners in the interest of the spouse or partner's safety.

The force recognised that victims of repeated offences should be prioritised and officers took their responsibility to safeguard victims seriously. Long-term safety plans are recorded in crime reports with references to put support for the victim in place by other service providers.

Compliance with the codes of practice for victims of crime

HMIC found that the force could do more to ensure the requirements of the code are being adhered to consistently. Some officers were not aware of their responsibilities to provide updates within specific timeframes; these included the responsibility to notify victims when offenders are released from police stations or courts. These are important notifications, as if victims unexpectedly see or hear from their abusers this can add significantly to the trauma that they are experiencing.

The force also has obligations under the code to take statements from certain victims to bring the attention of courts to the psychological impact they are experiencing. In another requirement of the code, in certain circumstances, witnesses are entitled to special measures. These include such provisions as giving evidence by video-link rather than appearing in court if they feel particularly intimidated. HMIC found that compliance with these responsibilities is erratic. In specialist teams the understanding and application of these requirements are routine, elsewhere the picture is less certain.

Another shortcoming was the responsibility to agree a 'contract' with victims. Such contracts are designed to ensure that victims receive updates of investigations by their preferred means of contact and at intervals which suit them. Although inspectors found that a focus on victims was a common trait in investigations, failure to record contact in accordance with the code makes it difficult for the force to be assured that its service to victims is of an acceptable standard.

¹⁰ Clare's Law, the domestic violence disclosure scheme, is designed to provide victims with information that may protect them from an abusive situation before it ends in tragedy. The scheme allows the police to disclose information about a partner's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts. The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme is named after Clare Wood who was brutally murdered in 2009 by her former partner George Appleton, who had a record of violence against women.

Working with partners

Dorset Police has well-developed relationships with partner organisations and joint working practices to support vulnerable people and address victims' needs. HMIC found the force to be influential in the development of policy and operational practice in the county's children and adult safeguarding boards.¹¹

The force hosts a number of units which include representatives from other statutory partner organisations and the charity sector. HMIC found these arrangements have improved the timeliness and quality of information sharing and they lend themselves well to forming safety plans to support victims. The force is in dialogue with principal stakeholders to take these arrangements a step further and develop a multiagency safeguarding hub (MASH). These safeguarding hubs co-locate service professionals in a secure environment to develop safety plans for individuals irrespective of the nature of offending. These developments have proved to be a successful enhancement to safeguarding elsewhere in the country, yet progress in Dorset has been slower than anticipated.

The force has also devised a number of protocols with other service providers to ensure that a focus is maintained on organisational development and learning. These include joint reviews of domestic homicides. If shortcomings in the service provided by any organisation are identified, areas for improvement are considered and joint training packages are developed in response to them.

¹¹ Local safeguarding children boards and local safeguarding adult boards have a statutory duty to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and adults to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

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 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

The force has in place a robust system of quality assuring the management and investigation of missing 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. If they are classified as missing the police are obliged to take steps to locate them, as the level of perceived risk is higher.

Investigations remain the responsibility of critical incident inspectors and information is routinely gathered about the individual by the missing persons unit (MPU). The MPU, a joint police and social services collaborative team, has direct lines of communication with other partner organisations which means that a common understanding of the risk of harm is constantly known. On all occasions, risk assessments are reviewed at periodic intervals throughout the duration of a child's absence until they are found.

The force works well with partner organisations to tackle repeatedly missing children. This is demonstrated by alerts being sent to all service providers when an individual known to them is reported missing. In addition the MPU has developed action plans for frequent absconders. These plans draw on an historical analysis of who the individual was with, where they were and what they had been doing on previous occasions. This gives the force a head start in searching for the individual during subsequent periods of absence and ensures that it considers all lines of enquiry in finding the child and keeping them out of harm's way.

There is a statutory requirement for local authority children's services to conduct interviews with children on their return to find out the reasons for their disappearance. At the time of our inspection the timeliness and detail of feedback from children's services following these interviews was inconsistent. This may mean that the circumstances which triggered the child's absconding are overlooked.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

This inspection has focused on actions and activities 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 these complex investigations with other agencies such as children's services as these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.¹²

Dorset Police has good processes and procedures in place to respond to children at risk of child sexual exploitation. In common with partner organisations and other forces in the south-west region, Dorset Police now uses the Barnardo's sexual exploitation risk assessment framework (SERAF) as its baseline for understanding an individual's vulnerability. The force routinely uses 'markers' (digital file notes) if a child is deemed to be at risk, and these are considered in determining the SERAF assessment.

SERAF assessments can be made by police officers or other child practitioners and prompt a three tier response that reflects the risk identified. Significant risk means an immediate referral to the child sexual exploitation team for case management, moderate risk means that child sexual exploitation records are opened and a diary note is set to review the case within three months and mild or minimal risk means that a single-agency response is undertaken.

Dorset Police's state of preparedness to combat child sexual exploitation is also strengthened by the establishment of a dedicated team to investigate abuse. Comprising of four detectives and a social worker, the team manages all cases that are assessed as being 'significant' in terms of risk. The team currently develops safety plans for children falling within that remit; it is also responsible for protectively targeting known or suspected offenders. The force acknowledges that as it develops understanding of offending patterns, the team's capacity to pursue offenders is likely to need updating.

In the immediate future, the force is considering merging the MPU with the child sexual exploitation team in recognition that links already exist between this type of abuse and runaway children.

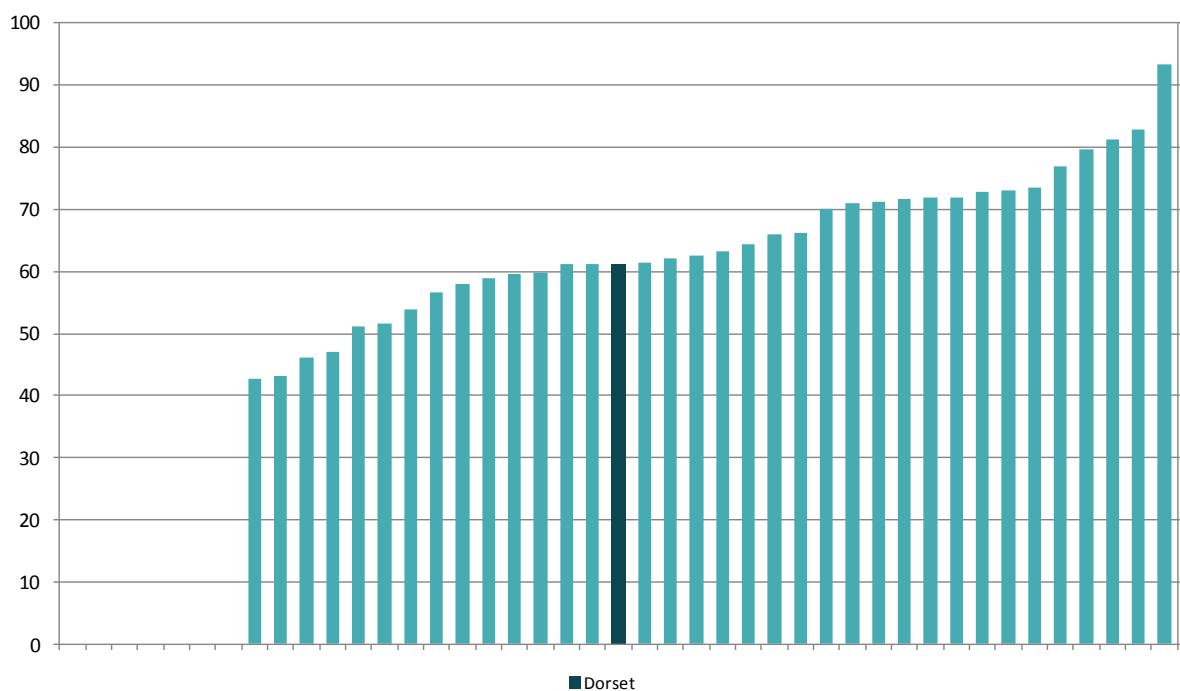
¹² HMIC's National Child Protection Inspections, available from: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/our-work/child-abuse-and-child-protection-issues/national-child-protection-inspection/

Domestic abuse

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 62 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 11 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.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Dorset Police made 61 arrests.

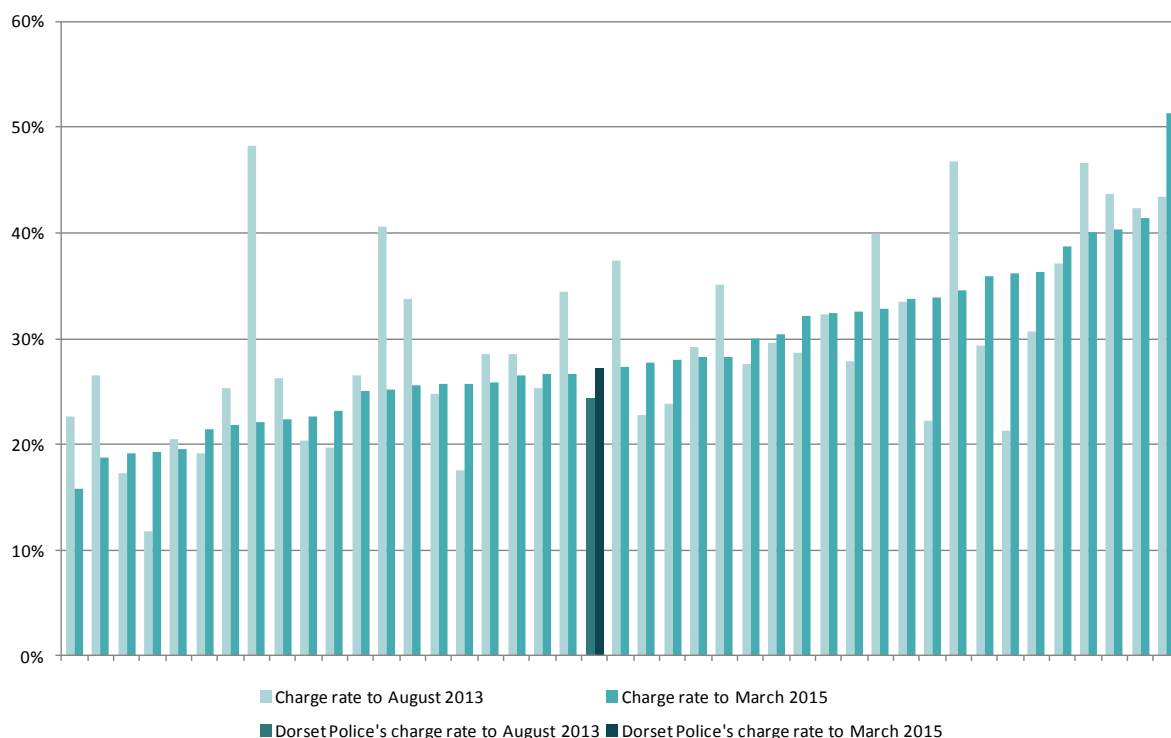
Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015



Source: HMIC data return

The force's charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 27 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 24 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



HMIC observed partnership committees at work which are known in Dorset as multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs).¹³ These fora draw together social services, housing authorities, drugs and alcohol treatment providers, the NHS, education and the probation services to consider the needs of victims and address the offending behaviour of domestic abuse perpetrators. MARACs typify the maturity of partner relations in Dorset, attended by senior representatives who are empowered both to commit resources and remain accountable for the measures put in place to support victims.

Summary of findings



Good

Dorset Police has made good progress in putting clear processes in place to identify repeat and vulnerable victims. The force makes accurate assessments of the risks that victims face, its response to them is consistent and it works well with partner organisations to protect vulnerable people. HMIC judges that the force's performance is good.

The force shares information effectively with partner organisations. This takes place either through the force's safeguarding referral unit or in the multi-agency teams established to support missing children and protect young people who are susceptible and at risk of grooming and sexual exploitation. The co-location of the police and statutory bodies in a secure environment is a successful way to provide tailored support to victims in Dorset.

HMIC also noted that the voice of the victim is more prominent than has been the case previously and that adult safeguarding has developed exponentially. Both of these were areas of concern in inspections in 2014.

The standards of investigations are generally a strength, albeit that they are more assured in specialist teams than elsewhere in the force. While not doubting that victims are at the heart of police investigations in Dorset, the force needs to keep better records of contact with victims and of their entitlements that are compulsory under the victim code of practice. This would be more in line with the outstanding service that the force is striving to achieve.

¹³ MARACs (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) – meetings where information about domestic abuse victims who are at risk of serious harm is shared with local partner agencies to ensure that comprehensive safeguarding measures are put in place.