

# PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Durham Constabulary



December 2015

© HMIC 2015

ISBN: 978-1-911194-23-1

[www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic)

# Contents

<b>Vulnerability in numbers .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>How effective is the force at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims? .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Summary .....	7
How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need? .....	8
How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims? .....	12
How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe? .....	13
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? .....	16
Summary of findings .....	24

## Vulnerability in numbers



### Calls for assistance

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

Durham Constabulary

**297**

England and Wales

**350**

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

Durham Constabulary

**25.2**

England and Wales

**15.8**



### Crime

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

Durham Constabulary

**52.8**

England and Wales

**61.6**

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

Durham Constabulary

**+0.4%**

England and Wales

**+2.2%**

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

Durham Constabulary

**3.7%**

England and Wales

**10.7%**

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

Durham Constabulary

**10.6%**

England and Wales

**10.0%**

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

Durham Constabulary

**+26.2%**

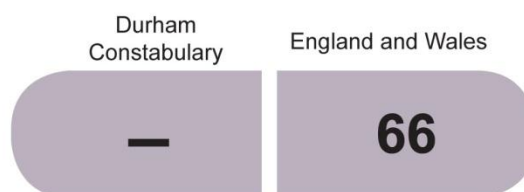
England and Wales

**+20.8%**



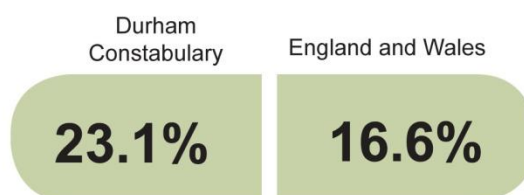
## Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

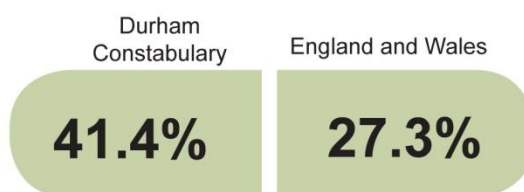


## Charge rate

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

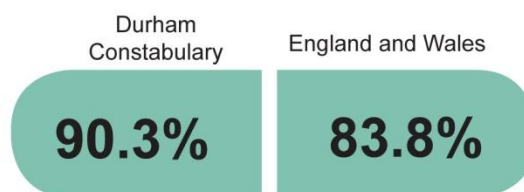


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



## Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015



**\*Durham Constabulary was not able to provide data for the number of domestic abuse arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes.**

**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 Durham Constabulary.

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

## Summary



**Good**

Protecting vulnerable people and supporting victims is a high priority for Durham Constabulary. Both the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable are committed strongly to improving services to protect and support vulnerable people and victims. HMIC judges the constabulary as good at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable and supporting victims.

The constabulary has clear and consistently-applied processes in place to identify repeat and vulnerable victims. It has regular and robust supervisory processes for the oversight and scrutiny of incidents to ensure an appropriate and timely response.

To help achieve the constabulary's commitment to improve the services provided to vulnerable people, Durham Constabulary has invested significantly in training staff. HMIC found a good level of knowledge and understanding during this inspection.

The constabulary uses innovative ways of working to protect and support vulnerable people, often in partnership with other agencies.

Durham Constabulary has good arrangements with partner agencies to keep vulnerable people safe. The constabulary is working hard to enhance these arrangements further.

Overall the constabulary provides a good response to missing children and safeguards them well. It has made good progress in its preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation.

HMIC found effective work being done to tackle domestic abuse. Staff understand how to safeguard domestic abuse victims and the constabulary uses technology to improve its response and to provide support to victims.

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

Durham Constabulary is good at identifying those who are vulnerable and assessing the risks they face and support they need. It has a strong commitment to improving the service provided to vulnerable people. Both the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the chief constable take a personal lead on the issue. This commitment is reinforced in the PCC's Police & Crime Plan 2013-17 and in the constabulary's strategic priorities, called Plan on a Page.

### Identifying those who are vulnerable

Forces define vulnerability in different ways. The majority of forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime<sup>1</sup> or that referred to in ACPO guidance.<sup>2</sup> Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

Durham Constabulary uses its own definition and defines vulnerability as:

"A person is vulnerable if as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of, or protect themselves or others, from harm, exploitation or other adverse impact on their quality of life.

"Adverse Impact; deterioration of health, mental and/or emotional well-being or; an inability to carry out normal day to day routine though fear & intimidation.

"Situation or Circumstances:

- A person can be considered vulnerable at all times or; only while a certain set of circumstances exist. The following factors may indicate that someone is vulnerable;
  - Repeat Victimisation (not restricted to the type of crime/ASB reported)
  - Family Circumstances (e.g. Child at Risk, carer for vulnerable child or adult)

---

<sup>1</sup> *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](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf)

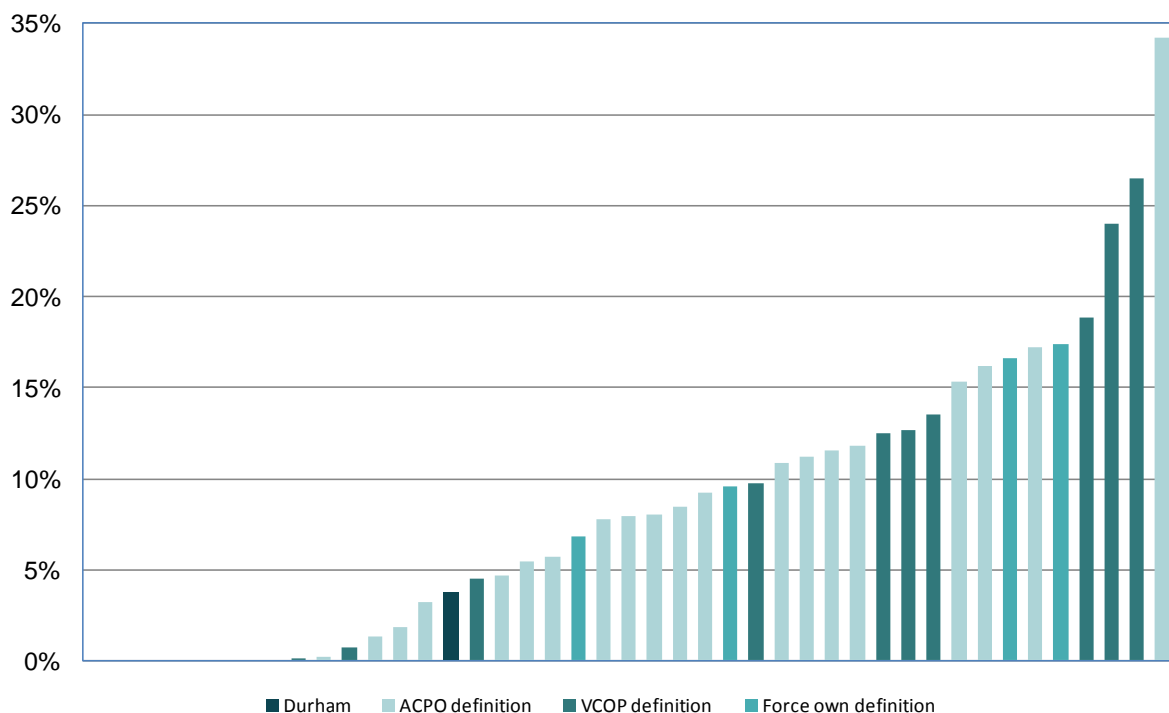
<sup>2</sup> The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is now the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). *ACPO Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults*, NPIA, 2012, is available from [www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/](http://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/)



- Personal Circumstances (Consumption/dependency upon drugs/alcohol)
- Health (physical / mental / emotional well-being)
- Equality & Diversity (Race, age, gender, disability, religion, nationality, lifestyle choice, etc.)
- Economic Circumstances"

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, 3.7 percent of all recorded crimes in Durham Constabulary 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 whether a victim is vulnerable on crime recording systems 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 reviewed how Durham Constabulary deals with incidents involving vulnerable people at the first point of contact. We found that most incidents are reported by phone to the constabulary's communication centre. When a call is received from a member of the public, a call handler makes an assessment of threat, harm, risk,

investigation, vulnerability and enforcement (THRIVE) and, using the national decision model,<sup>3</sup> decides the most suitable response.

This provides a structured approach to assessing all crime and non-crime incidents focusing on the victim's needs and not just the type of incident.

HMIC found that the constabulary has trained well its staff who answer calls. They are assisted in deciding the most appropriate response to such calls by using an automated checking mechanism which searches the constabulary's IT systems, using the address where the incident is happening and a combination of the caller's name and telephone number. This search provides details of any previous incidents or warnings, and may include a response plan advising officers attending the scene of what actions they need to consider when dealing with the incident. These checks highlight if a victim has already been identified as a vulnerable or repeat victim and will assist in determining the initial response and risk assessment.

The constabulary has defined what makes a caller a repeat or vulnerable victim. Call handlers use these definitions to identify vulnerable and repeat victims at the first point of contact. In the case of a caller being identified as a vulnerable or repeat victim, this is recorded on the constabulary's systems in a way that will highlight the issue for future calls.

Incidents can also be reported to the front enquiry offices at local police stations. HMIC spoke to call-handlers working in the communication centres and staff working in front enquiry offices. They demonstrated a good understanding of their role and responsibilities in identifying vulnerability at the earliest opportunity and assessing the risks a person faces and what is needed to keep them safe.

### **Assessing levels of risk and need**

During reality-testing HMIC found that call-handlers effectively assess threat, harm and risk in order to decide the most appropriate response to an incident especially those involving vulnerable and repeat callers and victims.

Supervisors in the communication centre carry out regular and robust quality assurance checks to ensure all incidents relating to repeat or vulnerable victims are appropriately assessed and managed. This includes all incidents involving domestic abuse, missing persons, anti-social behaviour and child sexual exploitation. The incident manager (an inspector based in the communication centre) also oversees and scrutinises all incidents involving a victim assessed as being at high risk of harm.

---

<sup>3</sup> National decision model (NDM) is specific to policing. It provides a consistent framework in which decisions can be examined and challenged, both at the time and afterwards. It is composed of six key elements: the police code of ethics being central to the decision; gather information; assess threat and risk; consider powers and force policy; identify options; and take action and review what happened.

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

HMIC found that the constabulary assesses the risk facing people and what is needed to keep them safe for all who come into contact with the police as either victims of crime, victims of anti-social behaviour or offenders who enter custody. These assessments allow support services to be targeted to meet victims' and offenders' needs.

To provide the most appropriate support to vulnerable victims, the constabulary has invested more resource in the parts of its organisation which works to keep them safe. To help improve the services provided to vulnerable people, Durham Constabulary has made significant investment in training staff. HMIC spoke to a range of staff including 24/7 response officers, staff working in the communication centre and front enquiry offices. Most staff confirmed that they had received recent training to help them identify and manage effectively incidents involving vulnerability, especially those relating to domestic abuse.

The constabulary has established an initiative to enhance this investment in training, called safeguarding champions. This has involved providing additional training to selected staff from 24/7 response and neighbourhood policing teams. Training covers safeguarding issues including domestic abuse and the champions then share this learning with their colleagues, and act as a point of reference and guidance for all safeguarding matters.

In addition, the constabulary has recently created a new post of safeguarding training co-ordinator to professionalise safeguarding awareness and training, and to strengthen the safeguarding champions initiative.

Alongside this work, the constabulary has invested in training specialist officers to improve the services it provides to victims identified as being at greater risk of harm. These officers work alongside neighbourhood policing staff as part of the safeguarding neighbourhood command. These arrangements have given the constabulary the flexibility to move resources to meet peaks in demand especially those associated with vulnerability. Even while finding budget savings, the constabulary has not reduced the number of these specialist officers. However, due to a significant increase in these officers' workload over the last 12 months the constabulary is reviewing staffing levels to ensure it can meet future demand.

The constabulary continues to invest in new technology to enhance further the way it supports and protects vulnerable victims during criminal proceedings. For example, improvements have been made to the criminal justice experience for children and vulnerable adults by allowing them to give their evidence to a court from a remote site through a video-link.

## How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?<sup>4</sup>

The constabulary responds well to vulnerable victims treating them as a priority with the appropriate response (as soon as possible and in any case within 60 minutes). It supports those victims who are the most vulnerable.

### Response officers

HMIC found that the police officers who respond to incidents are clear that improving the service they provide to vulnerable people is a priority. Those attending incidents know how to assess risk and keep victims safe. In the case of incidents involving domestic abuse, officers use a domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence (DASH)<sup>5</sup> risk assessment process. This process takes full account of risks to any children in the house, irrespective of whether the children are present at the time of any incident. The constabulary requires staff to record additional information under a section called 'through the eyes of the child'. This is a prompt for officers to think about the child in that home and make comments based on how a child may view the situation.

Officers understand that they must ensure the safety of the victim and children and put the necessary measures in place to protect them. For example, this could be the allocation of a mobile phone to the victim providing immediate contact with the constabulary's communication centre, or it could be relocating a victim to a place of safety.

This way of working means that levels of risk are quickly determined. Appropriate action is then taken including referral to partner agencies, for example the local council children's and adult services. During reality-testing officers confirmed that in cases where risk is identified to a child they would complete a vulnerable child form. This alerts the constabulary's protecting vulnerable persons (PVP) department and local authority children's services of the concern or identified risk.

---

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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](http://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/risk-and-vulnerability/#approaches-to-risk-assessment)

## **Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims**

Constabulary supervisors provide oversight and scrutiny of incidents involving vulnerable and repeat victims. This is right through from call handling to initial response and investigation, especially those incidents relating to domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour, missing persons and child sexual exploitation. HMIC attended five local daily management meetings and found that some provided appropriate scrutiny, management and coordination of resources to ensure a timely and appropriate response. However, we found these meetings to be inconsistent across the constabulary with varying supervisor involvement to ensure the force was protecting vulnerable victims from further harm and that it was actively looking for perpetrators.

## **How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?<sup>6</sup>**

Durham Constabulary conducts good quality investigations and works well with partners to safeguard and protect victims effectively.

### **Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people**

The constabulary has a strong focus on providing good quality investigations especially for those crimes or incidents of anti-social behaviour involving repeat or vulnerable victims. Sergeants oversee and scrutinise crime reports to ensure that the investigation is being progressed with appropriate care being provided to the victim. In addition, staff on the central crime desk quality-assure the investigation process before any crime is finalised. However, during reality-testing HMIC found a lack of oversight and scrutiny by supervisors to ensure activities to arrest people wanted for questioning as part of an investigation were prioritised and recorded.

HMIC reviewed 40 investigations,<sup>7</sup> 13 of which were identified as involving a vulnerable person. In the majority of cases we found that the constabulary identified vulnerability at an early stage, and its investigations were of a high standard, effectively supervised and with a clear focus on the victim's needs.

---

<sup>6</sup> The question within the PEEL inspection methodology asks "How well does the subsequent police action and work with partners keep people 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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 of vulnerability and the effectiveness of the investigation.

## **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 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,<sup>8</sup> which they can use to explain how the crime has affected them.

HMIC found that staff knew how they adhered to the requirements of the code of practice. However, some staff were unclear about the enhanced services the code provides for victims of domestic abuse.

Since the code of practice was introduced Durham Constabulary has made improvements to the way victims are supported. The constabulary has made particular efforts to improve victim satisfaction regarding follow-up contact with victims of crime and anti-social behaviour. The constabulary uses a victim's contract which is agreed with every victim when a police officer attends either a crime or an incident. The contract ensures that the victim determines the frequency and means by which the force keeps the victim updated regarding progress of the investigation. Victim contracts are reviewed by supervisors and senior managers to ensure quality and compliance. We consider that the constabulary should remind staff of the requirements of the code of practice and explain how they relate to the constabulary's other initiatives to improve victim care.

The constabulary has processes to enable officers and staff to understand and act on the views of vulnerable victims. For example, supervisors make contact with some victims of crime to hear about their experiences and to ensure they have received a high-level of service. In addition, independent domestic violence advisers work closely with officers and staff. This provides the opportunity to feedback the views of victims formally. The constabulary also uses domestic abuse surveys to seek the views of victims, which is helping the constabulary develop the services it provides.

---

<sup>8</sup> The victim personal statement (VPS) gives victims an opportunity to describe the wider effects of the crime upon them, express their concerns and indicate whether or not they require any support. Provisions relating to the making of a VPS and its use in criminal proceedings are included in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code), which was published on 29 October 2013 and came into force on 10 December 2013.

## Working with partners

The constabulary works closely with partners to protect the vulnerable within communities. For example there are two multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs)<sup>9</sup> for children and adults, one in County Durham and one in Darlington. In these, staff from the constabulary work alongside staff from other agencies such as children's, adult and health services to share information and agree joint action to safeguard vulnerable individuals.

Formal partnership arrangements exist with multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)<sup>10</sup> operating in each of the two local authority areas. Their purpose is to bring relevant agencies together to share information and provide a co-ordinated response to victims of domestic abuse. All victims assessed by the police or partner agencies as high-risk victims are discussed at MARAC. Victims who suffer a further episode of violence within 12 months from the date of the MARAC are also discussed. As part of this inspection, HMIC attended two MARACs. We found that the meetings are chaired well, information was shared effectively, actions agreed and those responsible for delivering them were held to account.

The constabulary also works with other agencies to support vulnerable offenders away from committing crime. Often this is by addressing issues such as mental health, relationships, accommodation and employment. In partnership with criminal justice agencies and academia, the constabulary has set up an initiative known as 'checkpoint'. Individuals enter into a contract to prevent further offending which may involve them wearing an electronic tag or receiving treatment for drug or alcohol addiction. The scheme is due to be evaluated by Cambridge University in late 2015.

The constabulary's threat and risk meetings ensure it prioritises activities to address the most dangerous and most vulnerable people in the community, often by adopting a multi-agency problem-solving approach. This includes those who are serial perpetrators of violence, children repeatedly missing from home, children at risk of sexual exploitation, vulnerable adults at high-risk of harm and repeat victims.

---

<sup>9</sup> A multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) brings together into a single location key safeguarding agencies to better identify risks to children (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 ensure that the most appropriate response is provided to effectively safeguard and protect the individual.

<sup>10</sup> 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 them 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 constabulary responds well to children who go missing. Durham Constabulary has adopted the national guidelines for dealing with missing and absent<sup>11</sup> children. For over 12 months the constabulary has been running a pilot scheme using the absent category in circumstances in which a child over 13 years' old who is not in a place they are supposed to be and where there is no risk. At the time of this inspection, the constabulary was in consultation with partner agencies to evaluate the scheme. A joint decision will then be made whether to adopt the category on a permanent basis.

The constabulary understands and analyses information about missing children, particularly those children who go missing from care homes. For instance, it routinely identifies the top ten premises from which children regularly go missing. However, an important part of this understanding is derived from the information provided by children when they are found. This process is called a return interview and, in Durham, is carried out by a dedicated team on behalf of the two local authorities. HMIC found inconsistencies in the number of return interviews being completed and the processes in place to pass information from these interviews to the constabulary. This is especially important for gathering intelligence to identify those children at risk of sexual exploitation and the perpetrators.

The constabulary has processes in place to provide appropriate oversight and scrutiny of incidents involving missing and absent children. This was evident during reality-testing in the constabulary's communication centre and with 24/7 response team supervisors. Staff demonstrated a good level of understanding of the potential risks to children reported missing and the actions they must take to reduce those risks.

---

<sup>11</sup> 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.



Interviews with staff and representatives from other agencies provided evidence of the constabulary working in partnership to reduce the risks to missing and absent children often through forums such as local children's safeguarding boards (LSCBs).<sup>12</sup> The constabulary has created a problem profile<sup>13</sup> for missing children. This is improving the constabulary's understanding of the issue and is helping to inform how they work together with partners to tackle it.

A review by HMIC of six cases involving missing and absent children found the initial response to be timely and appropriate. We saw evidence of regular reviews by supervisors of both the investigation and the levels of risk to the child. In all cases the child had been found and a safe and well check had immediately been completed and recorded by an officer. Officers made referrals appropriately to other agencies such as social services.

### **Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation**

The constabulary ensures it is well-prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. This inspection has focused on actions and activities the constabulary has taken to understand and identify the extent to which children are at risk of 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 constabulary 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.

The constabulary's commitment to tackle child sexual exploitation is reinforced in its child sexual exploitation strategy and action plan. Progress is monitored and managed through a meeting called the force leadership group, chaired by the chief constable and attended by the PCC or his representative.

A key part of the action plan has been to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation internally with staff and externally with other organisations and members of the public. To achieve this, the constabulary has developed a brand around the theme of ERASE (educate and raise awareness of sexual exploitation). A range of awareness events have been delivered by both LSCBs which have provided training to over 1,000 professionals from various agencies. Conference days have also been provided to secondary school children to educate them about grooming for child sexual exploitation and healthy relationships.

---

<sup>12</sup> Local safeguarding children boards have a statutory duty to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

<sup>13</sup> A problem profile is intended to provide the constabulary greater understanding of established and emerging crime or incident series, priority locations or other identified high-risk issues. It should be based on the research and analysis of a wide range of information sources, including information from partner organisations. It should contain recommendations for making decisions and options for action.

Within the constabulary, an internal communications plan has been implemented to ensure staff are aware of ERASE and child sexual exploitation including call-handlers and police community support officers (PCSOs). In addition, the constabulary has provided a new training package aimed at protecting children from abuse called 'Intervene to Protect a Child'. This training is delivered by an internationally-renowned leading expert in the subjects of sexually-motivated abduction, murder and assault of children. During reality-testing HMIC found staff have a good understanding of child sexual exploitation but some are less clear about their roles and responsibilities in tackling the issue. HMIC acknowledges that at the time of this inspection, the constabulary is in the process of providing a training programme on child sexual exploitation which is due to be completed at the end of August 2015.

Tackling child sexual exploitation is a clear priority for the constabulary, which has understandable policies and procedures in place to guide staff in the identification and management of such incidents. To develop its understanding of child sexual exploitation further, the constabulary has compiled a problem profile using its own and other agencies' data. This is helping to address the threat, harm and risk posed by child sexual exploitation across the constabulary area. For example, a child sexual exploitation disruption toolkit has been compiled to tackle perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. As part of this toolkit the constabulary provides a facility to allow anyone to inform them of potential perpetrators by sending an email with their concerns direct to the constabulary's central referral unit. This means that action can be taken at the earliest opportunity, often in partnership with other agencies. The constabulary promotes this facility in presentations, ERASE leaflets and child sexual exploitation awareness events.

Support is available from specialist officers and other organisations to ensure vulnerable children are protected. For example, the two MASHs provide valuable support to address child sexual exploitation. The constabulary also works in partnership with other agencies through various fora. For instance, officers from the PVP department attend the multi-agency missing and exploited groups (MEGs) which are held within each of the two local authority areas (County Durham and Darlington). The primary focus of these groups is to identify and protect children at risk of sexual exploitation. HMIC spoke to staff and representatives from partner agencies, who felt that the MEGs were contributing positively to the protection of vulnerable children.

To enhance the way the constabulary and other agencies monitor and manage child sexual exploitation and missing and absent children, a dedicated ERASE team is currently being established. The team is to be led by a detective sergeant, and includes an intelligence officer, two PCSOs and an administration support officer. It will focus on the early identification of young people who are reported missing or absent and those at risk of sexual exploitation. One area for which the team will provide particular oversight and scrutiny is return interviews for missing and absent

children, ensuring that important intelligence is passed to the constabulary. The team will also take the initiative to disrupt the activities of perpetrators and ensure that good practice is used across the constabulary.

### **Domestic abuse**

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 26 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.

HMIC found that the constabulary is working effectively to tackle domestic abuse, which is a clear priority for the constabulary. This has been especially reinforced since December 2013 when the first ever regional strategy to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) was launched in the North East by the region's three PCCs (for Cleveland, Durham and Northumbria). Together, they devised a 20-point plan to provide support and protect women and girls who are victims of violence or abuse of any kind.

The VAWG strategy contains pledges relating to:

- Domestic and sexual violence and abuse;
- Human trafficking and sex work;
- Forced marriage and so-called honour crimes;
- Harassment and stalking; and
- Female genital mutilation.

The constabulary has made good progress since HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014. Durham Constabulary received a positive report and recommendations from this inspection and those made in HMIC's national report were incorporated into an action plan.

HMIC has since reviewed this plan and provided feedback to the constabulary. The plan demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing domestic abuse at a senior level within the constabulary, with it being highlighted as a priority within the PCC's police and crime plan. The constabulary has addressed most recommendations, but the following three areas were identified as requiring further progress:

- The constabulary's development of a victim satisfaction survey, specifically for domestic abuse victims;
- The constabulary does not have an up-to-date domestic abuse problem profile; and

- The constabulary needs to explain fully the timescales and its procedures in response to HMIC's recommendation that it should review how the constabulary reviews safety plans and informs victims of bail decisions for those perpetrators released from court, especially those cases considered high-risk.

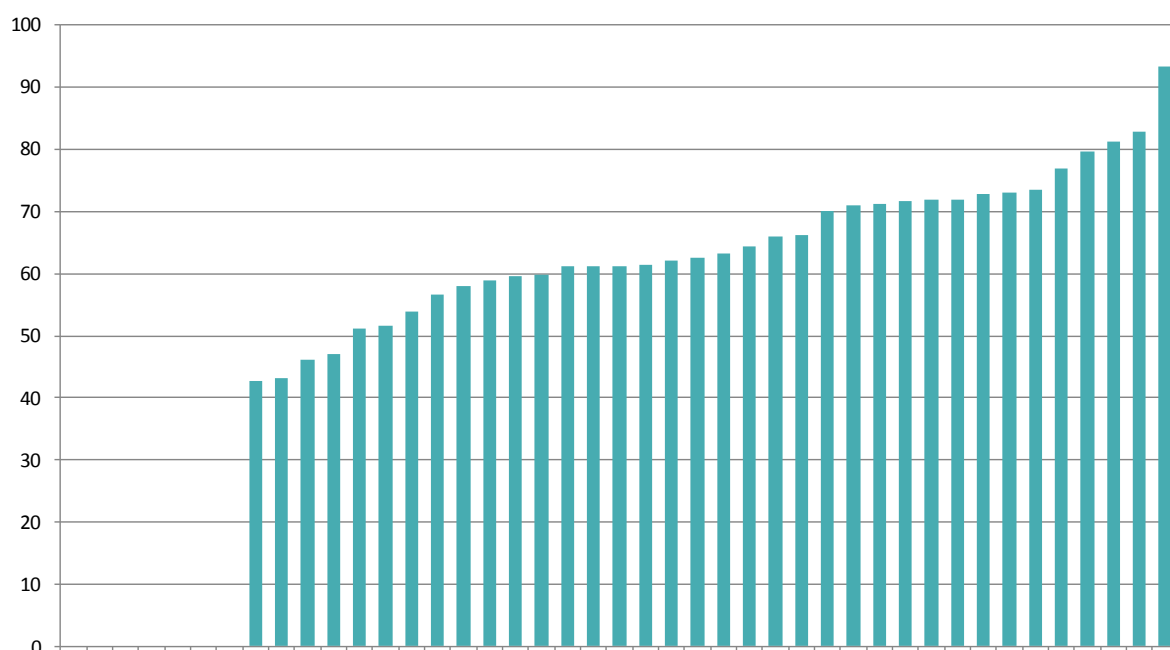
During this inspection we reviewed these areas and found the constabulary had made good progress. For example, it has conducted various surveys to find out the views of victims of domestic abuse and this is now shaping how and what services the constabulary provides. In addition a domestic abuse problem profile has been compiled which has helped to inform how the constabulary and their partners work together to tackle it. To ensure victims are informed of court decisions at the earliest opportunity, details are now emailed from the court to the constabulary to ensure the victim is updated, the risk reassessed and safety plans updated.

The constabulary has invested significantly in training staff to help achieve the aims of its domestic abuse action plan and the VAWG strategy. The constabulary is focusing on improving the way its officers make victims safe and how they identify and address coercive or controlling behaviour by perpetrators. Frontline staff we spoke to during this inspection demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities to support and protect victims of domestic abuse and the investigative opportunities available to them to gather evidence to prevent further abuse. They assess the level of risk and harm to victims using a domestic abuse stalking, harassment and honour-based violence (DASH) risk assessment process. This process is vital in ensuring that Durham Constabulary provides appropriate protection and support to a victim at the earliest opportunity. However, HMIC found that the constabulary does not fully supervise and scrutinise this important process to ensure that its officers carry it out effectively.

Following the risk assessment process, staff in the domestic abuse investigation teams (DAIT) complete and review safety plans for high-risk victims. Plans for medium and standard-risk victims, where a perpetrator has been arrested, are usually developed and reviewed by the prisoner handling teams (PHT) with support and advice provided by the DAIT. PHTs will maintain responsibility for these plans until the perpetrator is charged and bailed. However, during reality-testing we found that it was not clear who was responsible for safety planning arrangements for medium and standard-risk victims, from the time a perpetrator had been charged through to his or her court proceedings.

The way Durham Constabulary records data on its crime and custody systems does not allow it to provide data on arrest rates for domestic abuse offences. Durham was one of seven forces which could not provide this data.

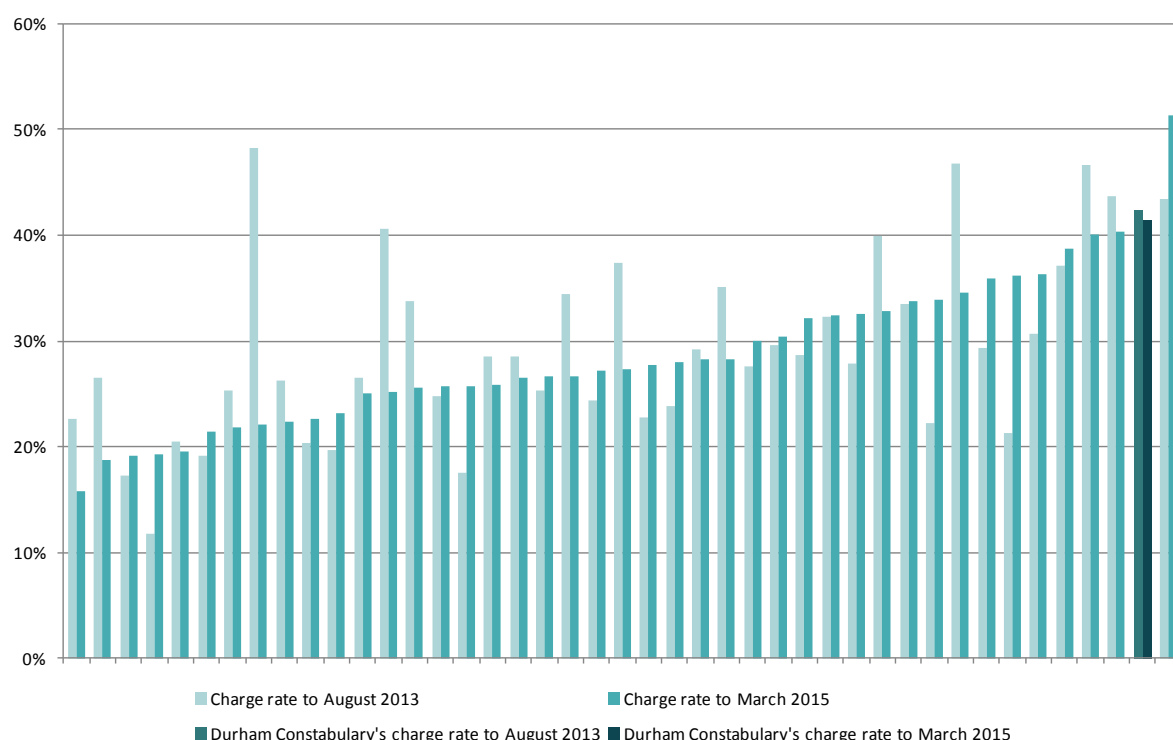
**Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015**



**Source: HMIC data return**

The constabulary's charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 41 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is a decrease since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection when the constabulary rate was 42 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**

The constabulary is using technology to enhance further how it supports victims and manages investigations. For example, through the use of body-worn video cameras officers can obtain evidence to support prosecutions if the victim is unwilling to support proceedings (often due to the victim being too frightened).

The constabulary has secured additional funding to improve the services for victims of domestic abuse and provide interventions for perpetrators. For instance, it has secured government funding to establish a dedicated domestic abuse innovation team. The constabulary expects the full team to be in place by September 2015. One of the team's priorities is to improve the response and support the constabulary provides to victims assessed as being at standard and medium-risk of harm.

Officers have embraced new preventative measures such as domestic violence prevention notices (DVPNs).<sup>14</sup> It is clear they are being used.

HMIC also examined the constabulary'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

<sup>14</sup> DVPNs (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. Following the issue of the DVPN the police must apply to the magistrates for a domestic violence prevention order (DVPO). The DVPO will be granted for a period of up to 28 days.

contacting the victim. The constabulary began using DVPOs in July 2014; it made 46 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 44 were granted. Nine 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 20 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.<sup>15</sup>

However, HMIC found inconsistencies in the way DVPOs were monitored and managed across the constabulary. At the time of this inspection the issue was being addressed by giving neighbourhood policing team staff the skills to take over the management of DVPOs and DVPNs.

The constabulary works effectively with other organisations to keep victims safe. For example the constabulary and Durham University have jointly funded a dedicated policing domestic abuse researcher to understand the initial response to domestic abuse. This work helps the constabulary to develop effective training to improve its victim focus and identification of coercion and control. The constabulary has also shared with the university the initial findings from its survey of victims of domestic abuse to maximise the opportunities this valuable process provides.

---

<sup>15</sup> The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

## Summary of findings



**Good**

Protecting vulnerable people and supporting victims is a high priority for Durham Constabulary. Both the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable are committed strongly to improving services to protect and support vulnerable people and victims.

The constabulary has clear and consistent processes in place to identify repeat and vulnerable victims. Regular and robust supervisory processes are in place for the oversight and scrutiny of incidents to ensure an appropriate and timely response.

To help achieve the constabulary's commitment to improve the services provided to vulnerable people, it has made a significant investment in training staff.

The constabulary uses innovative ways of working to protect and support vulnerable people, often in partnership with other agencies.

Good arrangements are in place with partner agencies to keep vulnerable people safe. The constabulary is working hard to enhance these arrangements further.

Overall the constabulary provides a good response to missing children and safeguards them. It is making good progress in its preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation.

HMIC found that the constabulary is doing effective work to tackle domestic abuse and staff understand how to safeguard domestic abuse victims. The constabulary uses technology to improve its response and provide support to victims.