

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Hertfordshire Constabulary



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary

251

England and Wales

350

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary

11.5

England and Wales

15.8



Crime

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary

49.0

England and Wales

61.6

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary

+10.2%

England and Wales

+2.2%

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary

34.3%

England and Wales

10.7%

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary

10.3%

England and Wales

10.0%

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary

+46.3%

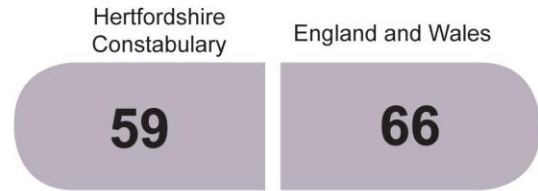
England and Wales

+20.8%



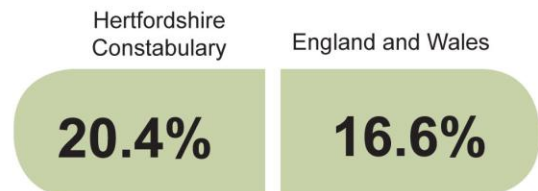
Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

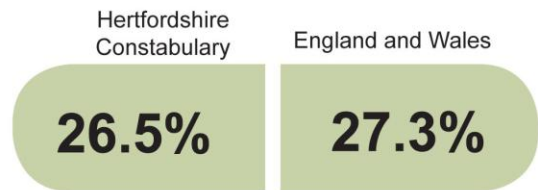


Charge rate

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

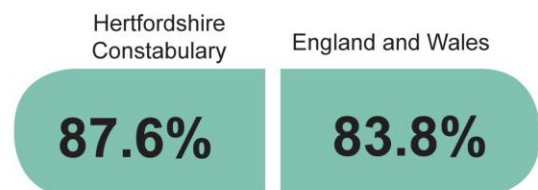


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015



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 Hertfordshire Constabulary.

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

Summary



Requires improvement

Hertfordshire Constabulary is generally good at identifying vulnerable people and often responds well initially to meet the needs of victims who are vulnerable. However, there are important areas where improvement is needed to ensure that the constabulary's service is consistent and that it keeps safe vulnerable people, particularly missing children. Given the scale of the challenge and the risk these weaknesses pose to some of the most vulnerable people, HMIC judges that overall the constabulary requires improvement.

HMIC acknowledges that the constabulary is committed strongly to improving the services to protect vulnerable people. Police officers and staff understand and share this commitment. The constabulary has committed significant effort and resource to improve services to the public.

The constabulary ensures that it identifies vulnerable victims early enough and this in turn helps ensure that the police response is appropriate. Hertfordshire records the highest proportion of crimes involving a vulnerable victim of all forces in England and Wales. It effectively identifies repeat and vulnerable victims and responds to them well. It also investigates crimes committed against the most vulnerable victims well. Generally, the constabulary allocates the right level of expertise to investigations based on the complexity of the case. However, HMIC found areas for improvement in the quality of investigations and the degree of supervision.

The constabulary has invested additional resource into the specialist services that support those who are vulnerable and keep them safe.

The constabulary's response to missing and absent children needs to improve. There is good work from the small specialist team, but there is a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities between the majority of frontline staff, who help to deal with vulnerable children who are missing or absent, and the specialist units. As a result, there is a risk that Hertfordshire may not be managing effectively its investigations into missing children or working as well as it should to understand and prevent vulnerable children from repeatedly going missing.

The constabulary has made a good start in ensuring that it is well prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation and should build on this approach to ensure consistent operational practice.

Staff are well-trained in dealing with domestic abuse and the constabulary has made good progress since HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014. The proposed police restructure aims to provide better services for victims of domestic abuse through joining up its safeguarding functions with the investigations.

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary is effective in identifying vulnerability and assessing victims' needs.

Improving the service provided to vulnerable people is a priority within the Hertfordshire police and crime commissioner's Police and Crime Plan 2015–2020 and its importance is understood and supported by officers and staff at all levels. The constabulary assesses annually the greatest threats and risks for policing the county, drawing on a range of information sources including partner organisations. This assessment takes into account the vulnerability of victims in determining the overall level of threat and risk. The constabulary has also shifted its emphasis significantly towards safeguarding victims.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

Hertfordshire Constabulary 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 Crime¹ or that referred to in ACPO guidance.² Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

Hertfordshire 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.”

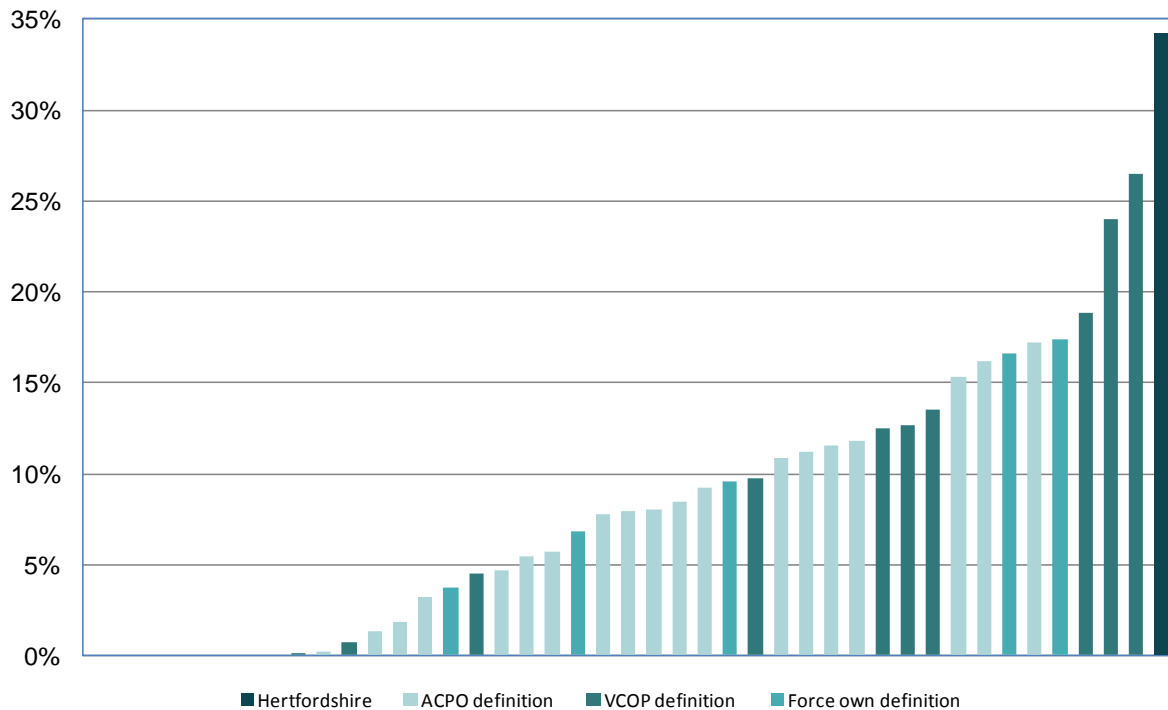
The proportion of crime recorded which involves a vulnerable victim varies considerably between forces, from 0.03 percent to 34.3 percent. For the 12 months to 31 March 2015, 34.3 percent of all recorded crimes in Hertfordshire Constabulary were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. Eight forces were unable to provide this data at the time of data collection.

¹ *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

² 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/

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

Staff who answer 999 calls and those who deal with public enquiries in police stations are skilled in dealing with callers and ask the right questions to identify risk and vulnerability appropriately so that they can make an accurate assessment of the police response needed. They understand and apply the constabulary’s definition of a vulnerable victim. However, the computer system used by call-takers does not automatically flag up if a caller is already known to the police as a vulnerable person. This means that the call taker may miss important information concerning the vulnerability of an individual, potentially not appreciating fully an individual’s history when handling a call is received, and therefore not understanding fully the risks. This means that the call-taker may not give the response the priority it needs and the response officers may not be fully aware of the situation when they make their judgements on risk and safeguarding at the scene. The constabulary recognises the limitations to its IT systems and, together with Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Bedfordshire Police, is due to implement a new crime and intelligence system in 2016, which it expects will address this issue.

Assessing levels of risk and need

Hertfordshire Constabulary's approach to assessing the levels of risk victims face, and what is needed to keep them safe, is effective. When a 999 or 101 call is received, the call-taker assesses the situation and decides the appropriate police response in-line with the constabulary's graded response policy which includes the mandatory police attendance at certain categories of crime or incident. The constabulary recognises that the needs of the victim rather than the type of crime should determine the police response. Supervision is effective in checking that risk is being properly recognised and assessed.

Together with its constabulary partners (Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire), Hertfordshire has agreed in principle to introduce a structured assessment to be used by call-takers in the control room based on the level of threat, harm and risk posed by the incident. This assessment is known as THRIVE (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement). This technique enables the staff receiving calls for police attendance to assess fully the relative risk to the victim, the level of threat, and the opportunities to investigate a crime. This should help ensure that the police response is more proportionate to the risk and threat to the victim. The new approach is being implemented to support the future collaboration of the public contact centres across the three forces in Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire.

When a 999 or 101 call is received, control room supervisors place a high priority on checking that risk is assessed properly and that vulnerability is identified at initial contact. Supervisors carry out quality assurance checks to ensure that calls are dealt with properly and risk is correctly assessed. However, these checks are carried out for each call-handler and we found no formal process for identifying common themes or sharing learning on what works well and any areas for improvement. The constabulary is already working to address this issue. HMIC found that the constabulary closely supervises domestic abuse incidents, with an expectation that supervisors oversee such calls in live-time whenever possible. Domestic abuse incidents are only closed after a supervisor has checked that all necessary steps have been taken.

Hertfordshire has recently established an incident resolution team within the control room as a pilot scheme. This team is responsible for resolving some calls at the first point of contact without deploying a police officer to the scene. HMIC found good evidence of staff assessing risk and ensuring the victim is safeguarded, as well as effective investigation processes in place.

Staff in the control room provide response officers with comprehensive background information when they dispatch them to attend an incident. This includes details of the initial assessment of risk and vulnerability. Having this information available to them enables officers to make a better assessment of the risk a victim faces, and what is needed to keep them safe, when they arrive at the scene.

Antisocial behaviour incidents that are not assessed as high risk do not generally get an immediate police attendance. They are passed to specific staff on the community focus desk, where the staff carry out additional checks to review vulnerability and ensure that risk has been correctly assessed, before allocating to the appropriate safer neighbourhood team for a slower time response.

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary understands the requirements of some vulnerable groups better than others. The constabulary is improving its understanding of and response to people who are vulnerable because of domestic abuse. This is through a combination of better local analysis and use of national guidance, together with closer working with partner organisations (including the voluntary sector) to provide a joined-up response.

Hertfordshire's understanding of and response to the needs of missing and absent people requires improvement.³ There is good work from the small specialist team, but there is a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities between the majority of frontline staff and the specialist units. As a result, lines of enquiry and investigations are not being monitored effectively on the constabulary database. This together with insufficient supervisory reviews means that investigations are not being progressed as effectively as possible and missing children may not be given the level of support and safeguarding they need. The constabulary must ensure that frontline staff understand their role and responsibilities as well as those of the missing persons unit. The constabulary must also ensure that its investigations and lines of enquiry are progressed quickly to ensure that vulnerable children are protected.

The constabulary has commissioned an analysis of the scale and nature of the problem across the county, so that it can ensure its services are meeting victims' needs.

The constabulary is still developing its approach to tackling child sexual exploitation, and is working with partners to improve the current understanding of the scale of the problem.

To provide the most appropriate support to vulnerable victims, the constabulary has invested more resource in the parts of its organisation which work to keep them safe. This has led to a very positive step of the creation of several new teams and structures.

³ A person is classified as absent if they are not where they are expected to be but they are not considered 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. In Hertfordshire, constabulary policy is that no child under 13 years old or under will be treated as 'absent'.

This includes a new combined safeguarding and investigative department, which brings together staff responsible for safeguarding victims with those who carry out specialist investigations into crimes against vulnerable victims.

Hertfordshire Constabulary has a child online safeguarding team (in recognition of the growing risk of children being sexually exploited online) with a covert capacity and victim identification capability working to identify children from images found on offenders' computers.

In addition, the constabulary's dedicated child sexual exploitation unit (known as Halo) works closely with other organisations to identify those most at risk of harm, to investigate and prosecute offenders and raise awareness within the constabulary.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁴

Hertfordshire Constabulary generally 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 mental health staff working out-of-hours alongside police staff, answering 999 calls to provide a better service for people with mental health issues, and a risk assessment process which helps to identify and support victims of anti-social behaviour.

Response officers

The majority of Hertfordshire Constabulary officers who respond to vulnerable people are knowledgeable with a good understanding of risk and vulnerability in domestic abuse cases. Hertfordshire has invested in additional training and it was recently the pilot for the College of Policing specialist interactive training for domestic abuse. This reflects a strong commitment to improve the constabulary's response to victims of domestic abuse.

The constabulary has provided additional training to a group of specialist domestic abuse emergency response officers (DAEROs). A number of staff have also been identified on each response team who can act as domestic abuse coaches, providing advice and guidance to their colleagues.

Response officers demonstrate a good understanding of how they would identify individuals with health and/or social care needs. HMIC found processes in place for both children and adults who need additional support to be referred on to partner organisations such as social services.

⁴ 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 response to vulnerable victims, rather than the overall police response to vulnerable victims.

These processes are understood well by staff and, in those incidents that HMIC reviewed, we found that they identify and address these issues appropriately and consistently.

HMIC found that officers have a mixed level of understanding of the options available to them to safeguard victims, this view was reinforced by partner organisations who identified a lack of consistency in the police approach. Some response officers have a good understanding of the range of actions they can take to keep a victim safe, for example parking a marked police vehicle near a victim's address or providing an emergency mobile phone where a victim's own phone had been seized for evidential reasons. However, some officers are less knowledgeable.

Safer neighbourhood teams, and in particular PCSOs, have a good understanding of their local communities including who are their vulnerable and repeat victims. They make contact with vulnerable people in their area to provide reassurance and keep them safe. They put in place appropriate safeguarding measures including the use of cameras to provide reassurance and help secure evidence.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

In domestic abuse cases, supervisors play an active role in checking and approving officers' initial risk assessments and safeguarding as well as any subsequent investigation. Generally, supervisors recognise the importance of properly assessing risk so that the police response can be tailored to manage the risk and protect vulnerable victims.

Risk assessments in relation to missing people are always checked and signed-off by an inspector, irrespective of the level of risk.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁵

The constabulary has invested to improve the quality of its investigation of crimes committed against vulnerable people and how it keeps them safe. However, the constabulary still needs to improve the service it provides.

Hertfordshire Constabulary is reviewing how it provides local policing services. It has increased the number of staff working to safeguard vulnerable people. From September 2015, the constabulary will bring together under a single command those staff responsible for safeguarding victims and those who carry out specialist

⁵ 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.

investigations into crimes against vulnerable victims. The constabulary expects this approach will provide extra capacity and therefore a more effective service for vulnerable victims.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

HMIC reviewed a sample of investigations,⁶ in some of which vulnerable victims were identified. The constabulary was good at effectively identifying vulnerability at an early stage of an investigation and, where vulnerability was identified, there was clear evidence that staff took action to safeguard victims. However, fewer than half the cases reviewed showed clear investigation plans and many plans lacked effective supervision. There was also a lack of recorded victim care plans.

Hertfordshire Constabulary should ensure that its investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people is well-supervised so that it can be confident that it is consistently managing the risk and complexity of these cases correctly, the right people with the right skills can investigate and the constabulary takes all opportunities to keep safe those who are vulnerable.

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. The code sets out the service victims of crime can expect from all organisations, including the police, which have a role in the criminal justice system.

HMIC found that Hertfordshire does not offer all victims of crime in Hertfordshire the opportunity to make a victim personal statement⁷ at the appropriate time, explaining how the crime has affected them, as set out in the code of practice. This is a victim's right, can strengthen prosecution evidence and help both to secure a successful outcome and make it clear to the offender the consequences and gravity of his or her behaviour. The constabulary should make sure this is explained and offered consistently, and in good time.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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 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.

Victims should also be kept updated about the progress of their case. During our file review, HMIC found that not all investigators in Hertfordshire Constabulary did so. If victims are not told about key decisions made during the progress of an investigation, it means they may not have important information about someone who could pose a risk to them and this may reduce their confidence in the police.

Working with partners

The constabulary works effectively with a range of different organisations in order to protect those who are vulnerable and support victims. This includes the recent formation of a new county wide multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH),⁸ where local services such as health, education and social services work alongside the police in the same building and share information about vulnerable people, so that risk can be identified and comprehensive and coordinated plans put in place to keep them safe.

Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)

As the new MASH develops, the constabulary has an existing joint children's services and police investigation team (JCPIT) that investigates child protection issues and provides an effective means for sharing information about risk. The JCPIT ensures that information about children at risk is disseminated appropriately between all relevant organisations. A similar process is in place in relation to adults, although the team is not co-located. Where safeguarding requirements are identified, police and social workers in the JCPIT deploy to safeguard victims and witnesses and to conduct an investigation.

The constabulary also refers vulnerable victims to independent domestic abuse and sexual assault advisors for additional support and help, and works closely with the voluntary sector to share information, and to support and safeguard vulnerable victims.

The constabulary has effective processes in place for working with partners to manage the response to missing and absent children, especially those who are from care homes. Social services and police missing person co-ordinators hold a joint weekly meeting to review children who regularly go missing with a view to preventing future absence. This is supplemented by a quarterly meeting between care home representatives, social services and the police missing persons' unit.

Operation Protector is an agreement between Hertfordshire County Council and the constabulary to develop a joint response to protect children who are the subject of child protection plans. The agreement included joint visits where police provide

⁸ 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 ensures that the most appropriate response is provided to effectively safeguard and protect the individual.

support for social workers to discharge their functions when conducting safeguarding visits to vulnerable children. However, HMIC is concerned that PCSOs are conducting these checks without the necessary training, which may mean that a child at risk does not receive the correct protection. The constabulary is currently reviewing the agreement but should ensure that only fully trained and authorised officers carry out this role.

Hertfordshire Constabulary participates in multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)⁹ with professional bodies to safeguard those considered to be at the highest risk of harm. HMIC found good participation by all relevant organisations with clear evidence that the MARAC is safeguarding effectively victims and children through information-sharing and joint action-planning. The constabulary has responded to concerns regarding inappropriate referrals or poor quality intelligence being provided as part of the MARAC process and has worked closely with partners to improve the process. A dedicated co-ordinator has been appointed to ensure that MARACs are properly-resourced, attended and managed with effective data-sharing agreements in place.

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 constabulary identifies those that are vulnerable, the response that is provided to them and what action Hertfordshire Constabulary takes to investigate crimes and to work with partners to keep them safe. This question looks specifically at how the constabulary 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's approach to managing missing and absent children requires improvement. There is a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities within the constabulary for dealing with missing and absent children. There are also some weaknesses in the way information systems are used as well as in the quality of supervision.

The constabulary is developing its understanding of the nature and scale of the problem of missing and absent children in Hertfordshire. It has conducted some analysis to identify children who go absent or missing most frequently, and is using

⁹ 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.

this to inform preventive activity. However, at a strategic level, little research has been done and there is no constabulary-wide analysis of the scale and nature of the problem. Hertfordshire expects that bringing the missing persons unit into the safeguarding command alongside other specialist units will help it to identify and investigate links between missing and absent children and any risk of child sexual exploitation.

The constabulary has set up a dedicated team to deal with missing persons. Although staff within the team are experienced and highly committed, it is a small team with limited capacity. The unit works well with children's social services and children's care homes, enabling appropriate information sharing, but the lack of capacity means that it has not been able to replicate this approach with foster carers and schools.

HMIC found that frontline officers are unclear who is responsible for lower-risk missing person investigations. This means that investigations may not be progressed as quickly as they should to locate and safeguard vulnerable children. HMIC also found a lack of awareness and understanding towards missing and absent children among frontline officers.

In common with most forces, Hertfordshire Constabulary uses a dedicated IT system to record missing people reports and investigations. However, HMIC found that the system is not being used correctly by frontline officers to obtain information, collect and complete the tasks assigned to them, relying instead on the missing persons unit to direct activity. This places additional pressure on the small, specialist team and risks that critical child safeguarding actions may be missed.

Local neighbourhood teams do not have effective relationships with care homes in their areas, again relying on the missing persons unit to take responsibility for this engagement. Redistributing responsibility for working with care homes would enhance the constabulary's ability to protect vulnerable children through longer term problem-solving and to improve attitudes towards missing and absent children.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

Hertfordshire Constabulary has made a good start in ensuring that 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 child sexual exploitation and the policies and practices procedures it is putting in place to tackle it. 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 is beginning to develop its understanding of child sexual exploitation in Hertfordshire. It has carried out a comprehensive analysis to understand better the scale and nature of the problem in the county which is an important step towards ensuring that the police and partner response is effective in protecting children and identifying and prosecuting offenders. The constabulary is working with regional police teams to better understand the links between child sexual exploitation and organised crime groups and to develop improved intelligence in this area.

Hertfordshire Constabulary has worked with partner organisations to set up the Halo team, as a specialist resource for tackling child sexual exploitation. It is an effective unit with representation from social care and is working well to raise awareness of the issues within the constabulary. However, beyond this specialist team, levels of awareness among officers and staff of child sexual exploitation are not consistent or as well developed as they should be. Co-locating the police child sexual exploitation team with staff from children's services is likely to improve co-ordination of activity and intelligence sharing.

Staff from the Halo team have provided some training to frontline staff, with the aim of improving officers' awareness of the signs of child sexual exploitation when undertaking their daily activities. The Halo team has also provided training to probation officers and provide an input at schools to alert them to the signs of child sexual exploitation. Computer training packages have also been made available to staff, but these are not compulsory.

A low number of child sexual exploitation crimes were recorded in Hertfordshire in the last year, although the constabulary recognises a significant amount of crime is not reported. It is running campaigns to encourage reporting, notably Say Something If You See Something.¹⁰ The constabulary has also set up an online child sexual exploitation team (COST) which is a positive step, and HMIC is encouraged to see the use of covert techniques to tackle child sexual exploitation. However, the team's activities are generating a high volume of work and this should be carefully managed to ensure that the COST is able to maintain the high quality of its output. We found a similarly high pressure of work on the historical child abuse team.

¹⁰ Say Something If You See Something, Hertfordshire Constabulary, 2015. Available from: www.herts.police.uk/advice/child_protection/halo/adults_and_professionals/say_something_campaign.aspx

Domestic abuse

Hertfordshire Constabulary's response to victims of domestic abuse is improving following the HMIC domestic abuse inspection in 2014. The constabulary has made some progress on the recommendations in its action plan. The constabulary prioritises domestic abuse and demonstrates a clear commitment to improving its response to this type of offending. Hertfordshire has a policy of taking action when attending a domestic abuse incident to safeguard the victim. However, we found that while frontline staff have been provided with a checklist of measures available to provide safeguarding from the point of initial reporting and throughout the investigation they are still applied inconsistently.

We are concerned to find that the investigation of domestic abuse cases remains fragmented, resulting in confusion over roles and responsibilities between specialist and other teams, and a disjointed service to victims. HMIC also found some evidence of poor quality supervision of domestic abuse investigations, with written investigation plans missing in some cases.

Hertfordshire Constabulary has recently invested considerable time and resources in providing specialist interactive training as part of a College of Policing pilot for domestic abuse. The constabulary mandated that all frontline staff undertook the training, and we found that it has been well-received by frontline officers. This significant investment will help the constabulary to achieve the necessary cultural change. The skills and attitudes of officers responding to domestic abuse incidents continue to vary widely. The quality of service received by victims of domestic abuse is dependent on individual officers, some of whom lack basic knowledge and awareness of available measures such as injunctions.

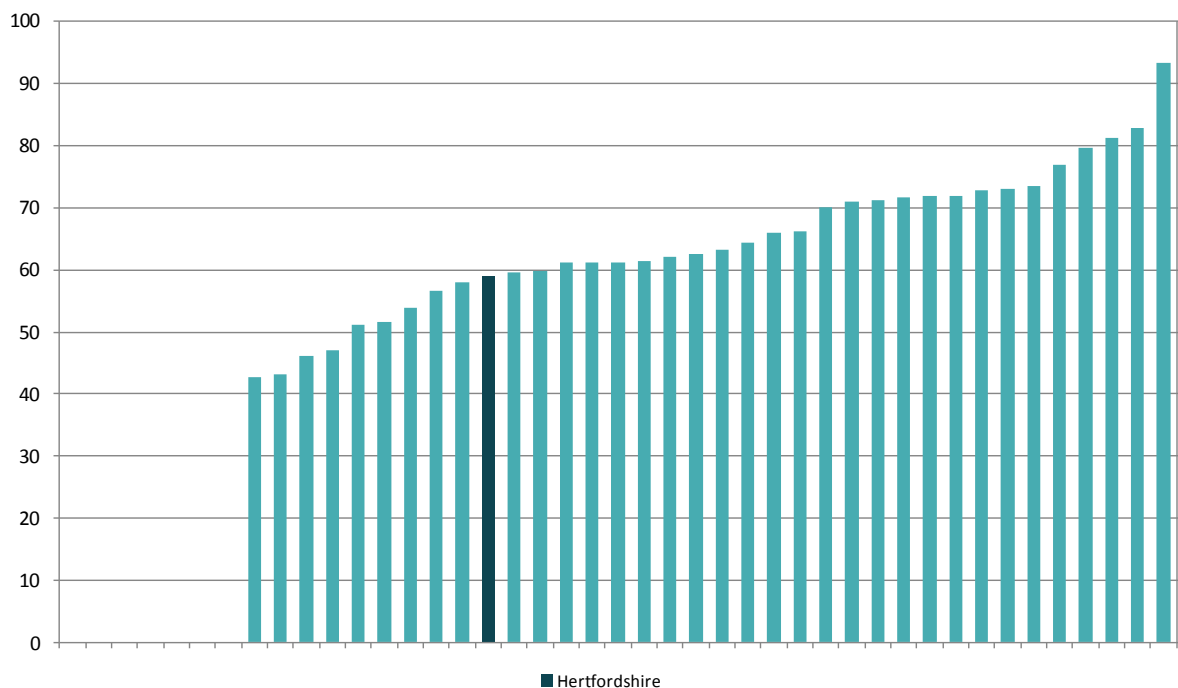
Although there have been recent improvements to the MARAC, HMIC is concerned that the quality of some information being fed into the conference is not good enough. The MARAC, although set up to deal with the highest-risk cases, is still trying to deal with a very large number of lower-risk cases. As a result, there is a risk of a loss of focus on protecting the most vulnerable victims. The constabulary should apply its new MARAC referral criteria properly, so that the system is not overwhelmed at the expense of the most vulnerable victims.

The domestic abuse response team (DART) is intended to support problem-solving but its capacity is insufficient to fulfil its remit, and, in practice, it is limited to monitoring domestic violence protection notices and orders, and promoting the use of Clare's Law. The constabulary should review the terms of reference and capacity of the DART to ensure that it is able to provide a better service for victims of domestic abuse.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 46 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 10 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 Hertfordshire Constabulary made 59 arrests.

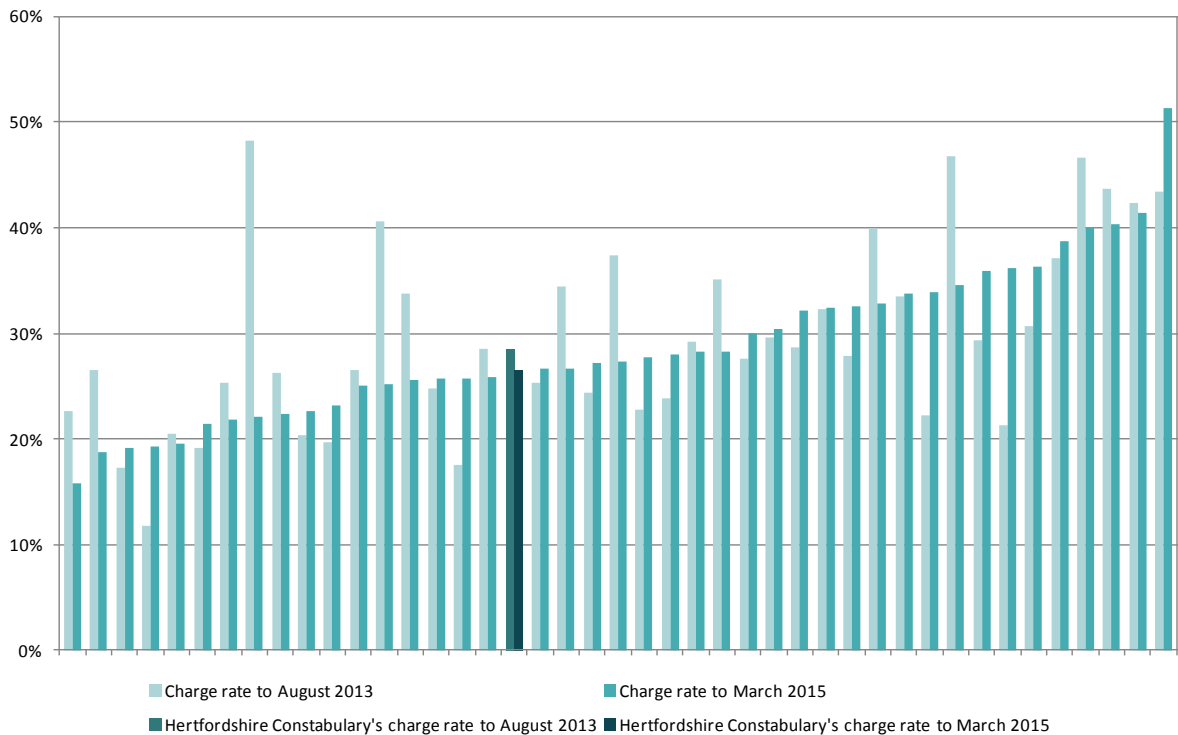
Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015



Source: HMIC data return

The constabulary’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 a decrease since the HMIC domestic abuse inspection in 2014 when the constabulary rate was 28 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 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 contacting the victim. The constabulary began using DVPOs in July 2014; it made 78 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 75 were granted. Twelve 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 16 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹¹

¹¹ The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

Summary of findings



Requires improvement

Hertfordshire Constabulary generally provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people, and responds well to them. It has made good progress since last year, improving its approach to domestic abuse and setting up a county-wide multi-agency safeguarding hub to provide more effective joined-up services with partner organisations to safeguard children better.

We found that Hertfordshire Constabulary, at all levels, is strongly committed to improving its services to protect vulnerable people. The constabulary has invested extra resource into its specialist services that support those who are vulnerable and keep them safe. We found a strong focus on ensuring that vulnerable victims are identified early enough to ensure that the police response is appropriate.

However, the constabulary needs to improve its response to missing and absent children. We found good work from the small specialist team, but there is a lack of clarity over responsibilities for missing children among the majority of frontline staff. This poses a risk that the constabulary may not be managing effectively its investigations into missing children and work to understand and prevent vulnerable children from repeatedly going missing.

The constabulary has made a good start in ensuring that it is well-prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation and must now build on this initial approach with its partners.

Areas for improvement

- The constabulary should improve the investigation of cases involving vulnerable victims specifically in relation to the quality of investigations and their effective supervision.
- The constabulary should improve the consistency of its safeguarding of children who are the subject of protection plans by ensuring staff with appropriate skills and experience conduct visits as part of the agreement with Hertfordshire County Council.
- The constabulary should improve its compliance with the duties under the code of practice for victims of crime specifically in relation to victim personal statements and keeping victims informed regarding the progress of their case.
- The constabulary should improve its response to missing and absent children by ensuring that it develops further its understanding of the scale and nature of the issue. The constabulary should also ensure that its frontline staff and supervisors understand their roles and responsibilities for investigating and safeguarding, and that constabulary systems designed to support the management of cases are effectively used.