

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Kent Police



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Contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| Vulnerability in numbers | 3 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| How effective is the force at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims? | 7 |
| 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?..... | 11 |
| 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? | 17 |
| Summary of findings | 25 |

Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Kent Police

England and Wales

464

350

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

Kent Police

England and Wales

15.0

15.8



Crime

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

Kent Police

England and Wales

61.8

61.6

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

Kent Police

England and Wales

+1.3%

+2.2%

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

Kent Police

England and Wales

4.7%

10.7%

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

Kent Police

England and Wales

11.3%

10.0%

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

Kent Police

England and Wales

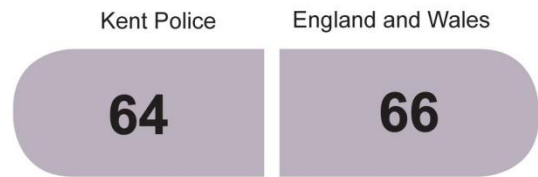
+9.7%

+20.8%



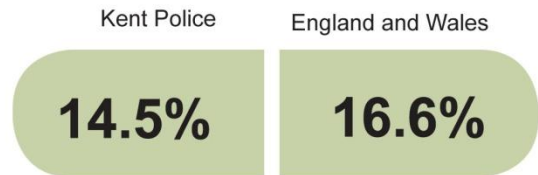
Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

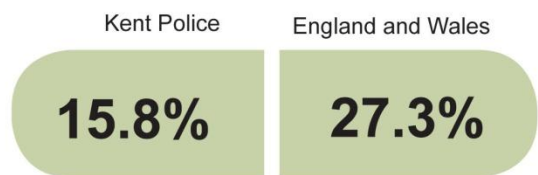


Charge rate

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

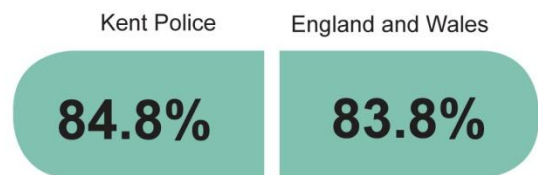


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



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 Kent Police.

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

Summary



Requires improvement

Kent Police is committed to protecting vulnerable people from harm. It has well-established processes in place to identify repeat and vulnerable victims, and generally provides a good service in doing so and responding appropriately, so the public can be confident that many victims are well supported. Commendably the force has invested in tackling domestic abuse, missing persons and child sexual exploitation cases, and is working to improve its services, including working with academic institutions that provide external quality assessment. However, there are some important areas where more improvement is needed to ensure the service is consistent and so that vulnerable people, particularly children, are kept safe. Given the scale of the challenge in this area and risk that is posed to some of the most vulnerable people, the force requires improvement.

HMIC found that the force's initial response to support vulnerable victims of domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour, and to find missing children, is good. Call-takers demonstrated professionalism, empathy and reassurance, and investigations were generally carried out effectively.

HMIC's crime inspection report in November 2014 recommended that investigating officers for medium and standard risk domestic abuse cases should have the professional skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties. The domestic abuse investigations that we reviewed relating to all levels of risk were supervised, had clear rationales for the approach taken, showed evidence of routine consideration of how to protect (or safeguard) victims, and were generally considered to be effective. The force has the lowest charge rate in England and Wales for domestic abuse at 16 percent. Whilst the force's high compliance rate with the National Crime Recording Standards accounts partially for this low charge rate, the force needs to fully understand all the factors to ensure outcomes for victims are appropriate.

The force has developed a comprehensive plan in an effort to improve its response to child protection. However, we found that frontline constables and police staff's knowledge of how to identify the risk factors associated with child sexual exploitation was limited. The force needs to ensure that its plans achieve greater understanding and management of child sexual exploitation by officers and staff. This inspection considered how well-prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation.

The protecting vulnerable people board plays an important and effective part in the force's plans to improve services, drawing together all the major strands of the force's work to improve responses to vulnerable people. Frontline officers are responsible for targeting high risk offenders who present a risk to vulnerable people, demonstrating that protecting vulnerable people has become the focus of everyday policing activity.

The force is strongly committed to partnership working and HMIC found some excellent examples of this. Two notable examples are the multi-agency task force in Margate where 14 agencies work closely together to provide efficient support and guidance for victims, and the multi-agency integrated support service for victims in Ashford, where Victim Support and other voluntary agencies work alongside Kent Police staff providing advice and guidance to vulnerable victims. The county's central referral unit provides multi-agency support to vulnerable people and ensures that immediate steps are taken to help make victims safe.

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

Kent Police is good at identifying those who are vulnerable, and is improving how it assesses the risk that they face and what is needed to keep them safe. The force has clear and established processes to identify repeat and vulnerable victims, including analysis of crime reporting, investigation outcomes, intelligence material and learning points from high-profile investigations. Problem profiles which provide an analytical assessment of an issue of concern are produced for domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, and missing persons by an analytical team and include recommendations for improvements. The new force control strategy (the plan which sets out the force's operational priorities) has protecting vulnerable people as a stated priority. This should assist the force in providing the service to vulnerable victims and witnesses to which it aspires.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

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

Forces define vulnerability in different ways. The majority of forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime¹ or that

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

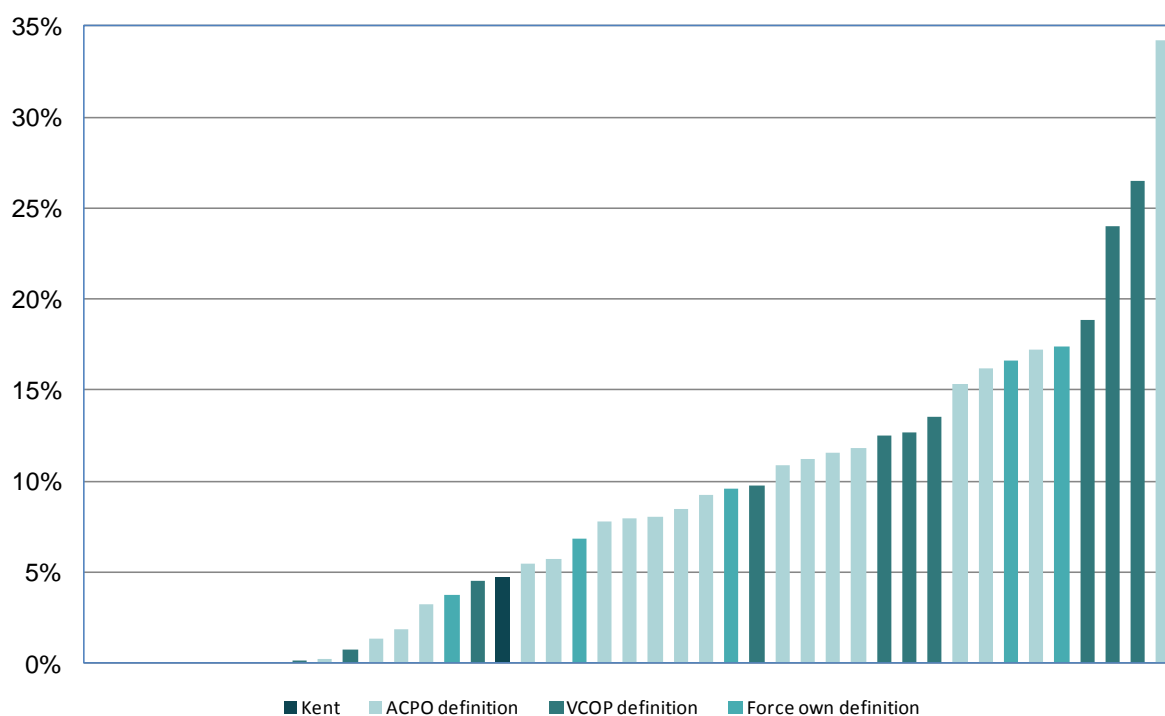
referred to in ACPO guidance.² Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

Kent 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, 4.7 percent of all recorded crimes in Kent Police were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. Eight forces were unable to provide this data at the time of data collection. There is no standard way in which forces are required to record 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

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

Call-takers demonstrated professionalism, empathy and reassurance throughout all the sample of calls that HMIC examined. Appropriate questions are asked of the caller that led to an initial indication of immediate threat and risk. Safeguarding³ advice is routinely offered and call-takers are confident in interrupting callers to clarify and accurately record information, showing persistence with distracted or reluctant callers. This means that the information gathered at the first point of contact is of a good quality.

The incident management IT system highlights a caller's previous contact history by way of a number of 'flags' that appear on the computer screen when an address or telephone number are keyed in. The force has recently reduced the number of flags to simplify what was becoming a cluttered system, and has removed those for repeat victim and vulnerable people, replacing them with a single raised service flag to identify all types of incidents that require additional attention. HMIC inspectors found that vulnerable people are being identified and supported in the control room and that the raised service flag is being used. However, some control room staff are not sure of exactly what incident types are covered by the raised service flag, which means that some support for vulnerable or repeat victims may be missed.

Front counter staff in police stations are being trained by the use of NCALT⁴ packages on mental health, learning disability awareness, public protection initial response, missing and absent children. This training is aimed to give them greater confidence in dealing with these issues.

Assessing levels of risk and need

Staff in the control room are being trained in the THRIVE⁵ risk assessment tool, which will be launched later in 2015. In the meantime, staff use the force's single risk assessment model (RAM) to assess risk. They also have access to the force's computer system, which contains additional information including warning markers on individuals. Dispatchers, who deploy officers to incidents via radio in the control room, will advise initial responders of previous history and information about the nature of a caller's vulnerability.

Control room supervisors review at least five calls by their staff member each month to make sure they are reaching the right standards. The review includes accuracy of grading based on threat, risk and vulnerability, along with attitude and empathy demonstrated towards the caller.

³ The term safeguarding means providing protection and support to ensure the safety of the vulnerable person and prevent further harm.

⁴ National Centre for Applied Learning Technologies (NCALT) a computer based training system used by many police forces to inform and train staff on bespoke issues. A wide range of NCALT packages are available.

⁵ The THRIVE concept assesses threat, harm, risk, investigation opportunities, the vulnerability of the victim and the engagement level required to resolve the issue.

They then go through these with the call-taker, identifying good practice and setting out areas for improvement when these are required.

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

In terms of the police then providing services that best meet the victim's needs, HMIC found that in Kent the requirements of some vulnerable groups are better understood than others. The force has a good understanding of the needs of people who are vulnerable because of domestic abuse, and responds to these well. The understanding of and response to the needs of missing and absent people is well established, however, the force is improving its knowledge of and response to child sexual exploitation.

In order to provide the most appropriate support to vulnerable victims, Kent Police has invested more resource in the parts of its organisation, which works to keep them safe. The force has introduced domestic abuse coordinators to local policing commands, who offer advice and guidance on safeguarding and investigations. It has also appointed a child sexual exploitation analyst who works closely with the public protection unit. In addition, the force has deployed a missing person coordinator and seven missing person liaison officers to improve its response to vulnerable missing people, including children.

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

Kent Police responds well to the immediate and longer term needs of vulnerable victims. The force has established processes to ensure that the response to vulnerable victims is appropriate and reflects their needs. These include the processes within the central referral unit, whose role it is to share information quickly and efficiently with partners. This should reduce risk for vulnerable victims including children and vulnerable adults.

The use of a single risk assessment tool (RAM) by staff in the control room is of clear benefit, as all staff understand it and use it to inform their decisions about how to respond to a call for service. The move to the THRIVE risk assessment tool is intended to build upon both the RAM and the skills of staff to improve further the response to vulnerable people across all areas of policing. However, the force will need to ensure a smooth transition between the two processes so that the service provision to vulnerable victims remains of a consistently high standard.

⁶ 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.

Response officers

A clear process is followed by frontline staff when assessing risk and addressing the nature of a victim's vulnerability. Safeguarding measures are identified through the DASH⁷ form, which is completed at all domestic abuse incidents. This form provides the route by which victims of domestic abuse identified as high risk are referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC).⁸ The force's incident management system uses a public protection unit tag which ensures that these cases are picked up by the appropriate staff without delay. We found evidence of frontline staff assessing mental health concerns and recording this information on their risk assessment forms, meaning that vulnerable victims are likely to receive an effective multi-agency response when it is appropriate.

Officers attending domestic abuse incidents have good knowledge of how to assess risk and keep victims safe, and can refer to an aide-memoire called the '7 step care plan', which they all carry. This document includes guidance in dealing with domestic abuse incidents, including information on available services from other agencies and the use of injunctions or court orders. It provides frontline staff with practical guidance while they are out on patrol, which means that victims can receive effective support and safeguarding from the outset. Frontline staff are also aware of the need to identify clearly on the DASH form if children are present at domestic abuse incidents.

In more specialist units, we heard that the focus of the activity was concentrated on keeping the victim safe in the longer term. We saw evidence of the force taking the initiative in this area across a range of operations and investigations. In particular, the work of the paedophile online investigation team (POLIT) is notable and effective. This means that offenders find Kent a more difficult place in which to operate and this in turn helps to reduce the risk to vulnerable children.

The domestic abuse single point of contact officers are recognised as a positive move by the force, and partners generally spoke positively of their relationship with these officers. However, they felt that the officers' understanding of coercive and controlling behaviour by offenders needed improvement. This was despite officers having recently received domestic abuse training that covered this. HMIC found that some but not all officers spoken to had an understanding of these issues.

⁷ Most forces use the domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence risk identification, assessment and management model (DASH), available from www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/risk-and-vulnerability/#risk-identification-and-assessment

⁸ MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) – a regular local meeting where information about high-risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies. By bringing all agencies together at a MARAC, and ensuring that whenever possible the voice of the victim is represented by the IDVA, a risk-focused, co-ordinated safety plan can be drawn up to support the victim.

Some officers do not fully understand the risk assessment questions on DASH, and wrongly grade too many cases as medium when partner agencies subsequently assess them as high risk. Partners felt that sometimes the focus of frontline officers was on completing the DASH form, without fully understanding the issues or the impact on the victim.

The force is fully committed to partnership activity, which responds to the nature of a victim's vulnerability. We found evidence of routine contact with children's services, social housing providers, a range of health care providers, local authorities, education services and charities. There are good examples of the force's commitment to working with others, such as agreements in East Kent with care homes which promote information-sharing, joint assessments of need, joint planning, professional trust within the interagency network and a multi-agency approach.

The force's policies have ensured that officers understand the duty they have to take positive action, particularly at domestic abuse incidents. We saw examples of arrests being made in the best interests of protecting people. Details of high-risk offenders who have not been apprehended are discussed at daily management meetings and shift briefings, and officers given the job of ensuring their arrest.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁹

Kent Police is good at keeping victims safe and working with partners to achieve this. The central referral unit (CRU) is the starting point for partnership working in this area, and is working very well. The force has a centralised public protection unit (PPU) which incorporates specialist departments. This includes the combined safeguarding team (CST), which deals with sexual offences against children where there is either a familial relationship or position of trust. The team also deals with incidents of child concern/neglect, all child protection, and historical child abuse where the victims are now adults. The POLIT investigates online offending where offenders abuse child victims and use the internet to circulate images of this abuse, while the sexual offences investigation team (SOIT) investigate sexual offences and non-position of trust offences and are supported by the CST.

⁹ 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.

Staff are appropriately trained as investigators. The force reported there are 765 PIP2-accredited¹⁰ officers and 94 SCAIDP-qualified¹¹ officers. CST officers are trained in achieving best evidence (ABE),¹² and all SOIT officers are tier 2 trained so can conduct interviews in serious and complex cases. This means that investigations are likely to be of a good standard and victims receive a professional and effective service.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

HMIC reviewed investigations¹³ which were identified as involving a vulnerable person. Our dip-sampling of case files, telephone calls for service and incident records demonstrated that the force generally carries out effective investigations. However, this was not always documented. Identification of vulnerable people and effective safeguarding were evident and well managed with certain crime types (domestic abuse and serious sexual offences for example). However, the same was not the case for aspects of vulnerability which featured in less obvious crime types, which means that vulnerable victims might be missed. Supervision was generally good, but again varied dependent upon the seriousness and type of crime. Additional support is provided by a detective inspector until 3.00am, and by the on-call detective chief inspector between 3.00am and 7.00am. The detective chief inspector on-call rota is well-established and there are sufficient officers in the force to cover this role.

The PPU provides an overnight specialist officer for the force to provide expert advice and guidance to officers regarding the initial management of sexual offence incidents

The force does not have an investigation unit dedicated to investigating domestic abuse. High-risk domestic abuse cases are investigated by detectives within the criminal investigation departments (CID), who are not specialists at investigating this kind of offending. Uniformed staff on the local policing teams investigate medium and low-risk cases.

¹⁰ PIP2 (Professionalising Investigation Programme) ensures that staff are trained, skilled and accredited to conduct the highest quality investigations.

¹¹ SCAIDP (Specialist Child Abuse Investigator Development Programme) is a developmental route that supports achievement of competence, led by the College of Policing.

¹² The video-recorded statement of young victims and witnesses with the police is usually described as the ABE DVD. It is usually played as their evidence-in-chief at trial.

¹³ 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.

However, the domestic abuse investigations we reviewed (at all levels of risk) had supervisory oversight, rationales for how the investigations were progressed and routine consideration of safeguarding, and were generally considered to be effective.

Compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime

The force has an inconsistent approach to the completion of victim personal statements.¹⁴ Some staff are quite clear that it should be completed at the same time that the original statement is taken, while others HMIC spoke to were of the view that this was too soon. These officers preferred to complete the statement closer to the time of any court proceeding. This is contrary to the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime.¹⁵ The witness care unit, which is housed in the multi-agency integrated support service for victims in Ashford, has put in place processes to manage this issue better, and to capture delayed personal impact statements. However, there remains a risk that the voice of some victims of crime may not be accurately heard within the criminal justice process.

Kent Police and its police and crime commissioner have engaged Birkbeck University to research domestic abuse victims' experience of, and views on, the service the force provides to them. This will be used to inform improvements to services. The aim is that it will enhance the force's understanding of the impact and quality of the service that it provides.

¹⁴ 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 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.

¹⁵ The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime places a statutory obligation on criminal justice agencies to provide a standard of service to victims of crime or, where the victim died as a result of the criminal conduct, their relatives. *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

Working with partners

The force works well with other organisations. It is an active member of local safeguarding boards¹⁶ and community safety partnerships with shared protocols and information sharing agreements in place. This has led to operations to protect vulnerable children based upon partner agencies sharing information that identified children who were vulnerable to child sexual exploitation, and those perpetrators seeking to abuse them. The operations involved arresting suspects and safeguarding children.

HMIC was encouraged to see the positive approach the force has taken to working with partners, through its commitment of staff to the CRU. This facility provides an environment where information about vulnerable adults or children can be quickly shared between partners, a working strategy developed and immediate steps to take to ensure that the victim is safe.

The CRU's role is to ensure that information is shared quickly between partner agencies. Initially this was around child protection but as the service has grown it now also encompasses adult protection. Partners present in the CRU with the police are adult protection, children's services, representative from health, and the local authorities. The unit carries out a daily search and initial triage of all domestic abuse incidents with children present, to ensure that all such cases have received appropriate initial action and that they are properly referred to social services staff in the CRU.

HMIC found the CRU to be very effective, which means that the speed with which it offers vulnerable victims safeguarding and multi-agency support is excellent. Importantly the unit provides a 24-hour service which enhances the force's capability to safeguard the most vulnerable irrespective of when that need arises. However, not all staff are aware of this, which means that some victims may not receive the levels of support available to them as quickly as they should.

The multi-agency task force based in Margate focuses on health inequalities, crime and anti-social behaviour, improving housing stock and quality of life, and empowering communities. It is a good example of close partnership working leading to a better level of service for victims. The extent of partnership involvement with 14 agencies including adult mental health, Kent County Council and Thanet District Council, means the team is able to identify those vulnerable to harm and put in place an appropriate response to protect them.

¹⁶ Local safeguarding children boards and local safeguarding adult boards have a statutory duty to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and adults to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

The force uses good processes to learn from formal reviews, such as serious case reviews, and employs a case reviewing officer to complete this work. There are currently ten outstanding actions from domestic homicide reviews, covering such issues as policy changes, allocation of resources, interactions with other agencies, awareness raising or training. The recommendations are not discharged until agreed by the protecting vulnerable people board, which demonstrates the strong governance in use by the force.

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

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

The force is strengthening its ability to respond to and safeguard vulnerable groups. The protecting vulnerable people board, chaired by an assistant chief constable, ensures a clear overview of all the strands of vulnerability and to help the force to understand and manage the force's response to vulnerable people better. The clear demarcation lines and links between this board and the other boards should ensure that there is no duplication of effort. It is evident that the force has recognised the need to be organisationally robust in this area, and there are early indications that this board will be crucial to transforming the force's approach to keeping vulnerable people safe.

Missing and absent children

HMIC found that the force is delivering a good service in the way it deals with missing people. The investment in bespoke missing person posts on each local policing area and three coordinators is positive. The force procedures for dealing with missing people appear to be well understood from the control room to frontline officers. The force has a problem profile for missing persons that recognises the risk of child sexual exploitation, as well as other risk factors such as mental health, gang links and drug use. The force policy and procedure encompasses the processes for intensifying and heightening the response within the force and between agencies, including truancy and links to child protection processes.

The force has not adopted the absent¹⁷ category and instead records children as either missing or repeat missing. The rationale for not using the absent category is the belief that not doing so provides a better safety net around safeguarding vulnerable children, and that to introduce the absent category would lead to it losing valuable intelligence gained from return interviews.

The missing person staff have a good understanding of the nature of the victim's vulnerability and particularly of sexual exploitation in relation to missing children. Their engagement with other agencies in raising the awareness of child sexual exploitation risks and submitting intelligence is notable. The force makes use of child abduction notices¹⁸ and had 36 in place at the time of the HMIC inspection, actively monitoring these within the PPU. Our review of files about missing people found that investigations were generally of an adequate standard. Files provide a clear explanation for the risk grading assigned, most showed evidence of regular supervisory review by inspectors, and actions were given out and allocated in most cases. Once a missing child has been located, safe and well, the force carries out return interviews and shares the resulting intelligence, including with the local safeguarding board.

Kent Police uses a missing person's case management computer system to manage missing person enquiries, but this does not link up to the force's intelligence system. While the force has given clear direction to officers to ensure intelligence is placed on the system, we found that the force is still missing out on understanding intelligence which may protect vulnerable people. The force sees the implementation of a new IT approach that will link the force's systems together later in 2015 as the solution to this problem.

The force control room processes for dealing with missing persons are good, and include an initial risk assessment. All reports assessed as high risk are given an immediate response grade, and staff have a flowchart to use which makes the process very easy to follow. This means that the force is good at identifying and responding to missing people, including vulnerable missing children.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Child Abduction Warning Notices were formerly known as Harbourers' Warnings. They can be issued against individuals who are suspected of grooming children by stating that they have no permission to associate with the named child and that if they do so they can be arrested under the Child Abduction Act 1984 and Children Act 1989.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

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

Tackling child sexual exploitation is viewed by the force as one of its highest priorities and this is reflected in its planning and the related strategic documents. However, the force also recognises that its child sexual exploitation intelligence picture is incomplete, partly because little intelligence is identified and flagged as such. The force has taken steps to improve this position with an allocated child sexual exploitation analyst, and its deployment (through Operation Titan) of small teams of uniformed officers into discrete demographic areas which has provided the foundations of some successful operations such as Operation Lakeland and Operation Mercia. At the time of the inspection the force had a comprehensive plan to improve its child protection response, which included the commitment of additional staff to establish a multi-agency team by November 2015. However, HMIC found that the force's frontline knowledge of child sex exploitation is limited and that it does not understand fully the levels of child sexual exploitation in the county, and as a consequence vulnerable children are likely to remain at risk.

The force provides a bespoke five-day training course covering the issues of domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation. It initially ran this course for specialist officers, but is provided it to all frontline officers and staff. The force is aware of the College of Policing's child sexual exploitation NCALT package, which the chief constable personally endorsed and which all staff had to complete in March 2015. Despite this, frontline officers have little understanding or grasp of child sexual exploitation as an issue within their work. This means that vulnerable children may be being failed by the force without the force recognising the fact. The force has work to do if child sexual exploitation is to be understood properly by all its staff and for victims to be provided with the quality of service that the force prides itself on.

The serious crime directorate has a strong focus on child sexual exploitation committed by organised crime groups,¹⁹ which is evident from the number of operations commissioned by them. However, we found that the current force control strategy (the plan which sets out the force's operational priorities, which has child sexual exploitation as its first priority) does not match the reality in local policing

¹⁹ Organised crime can be defined as serious crime planned, coordinated and conducted by people working together on a continuing basis. Their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain. Organised criminals working together for a particular criminal activity or activities are called an organised crime group.

divisions, where a number of tasking meetings and briefings either fail to cover child sexual exploitation and other vulnerable people or pay little attention to them. In June 2015, the force agreed a new control strategy in which vulnerable people feature across all six priorities. The force will need to ensure all areas of the force recognise and work to the control strategy if the document is to have the desired impact.

Kent Police follows the 2012 national ACPO-led²⁰ action plan on child sexual exploitation, and through this process concluded that a bespoke child sexual exploitation action plan for the force was required. The action plan is now in place and should provide the force with firm improvements in its understanding and management of child sexual exploitation.

HMIC found the force intranet site does not have clear links to policy and guidance on child sexual exploitation. Guidance is contained within a broader child abuse document which is difficult to find and as a result staff did not access it to improve their knowledge.

Domestic abuse

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 10 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.

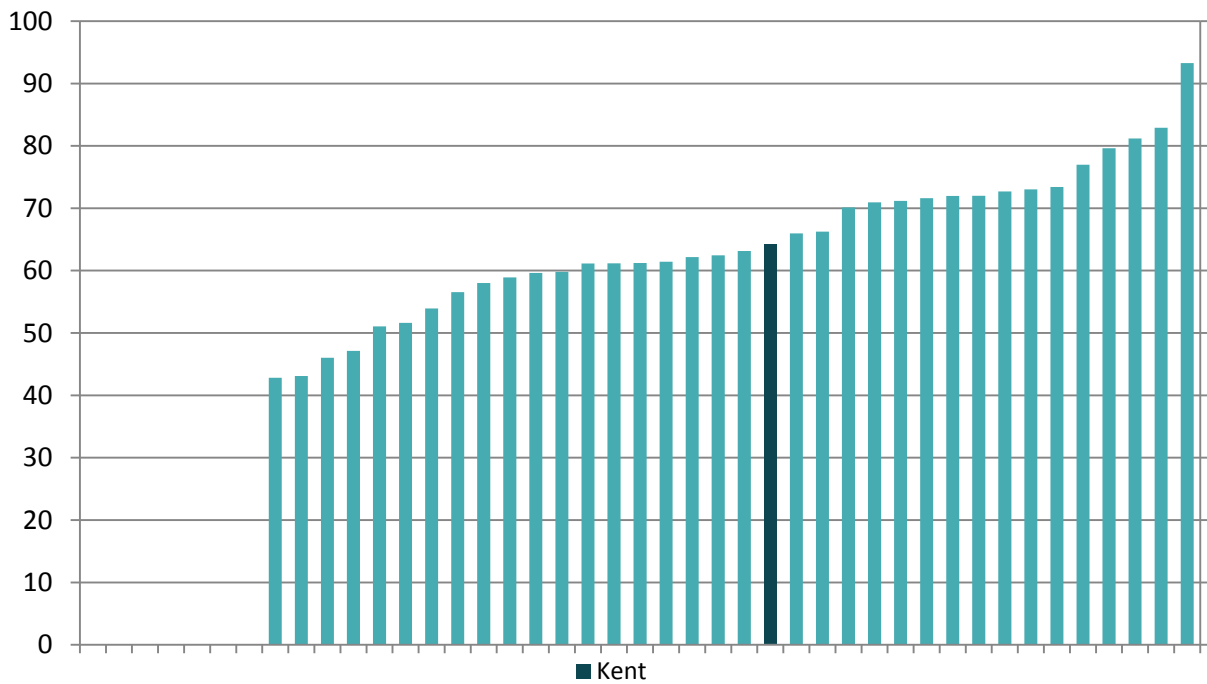
Tackling domestic abuse remains a priority for the force. The introduction of domestic abuse co-ordinators on local policing divisions has added a layer of assurance that the needs of victims are continually assessed and their cases managed in conjunction with partner agencies after initial police contact. HMIC heard from partner agencies that the force engages readily and effectively with them to manage high-risk cases.

The force response to domestic abuse forms part of the performance framework by which Kent Police measures its activities. The framework is built upon six distinct strands: community, victim, offender, threat, risk and harm, a supported workforce, and standards and integrity. Within each of the six strands, there are a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures, audit and inspection activity and feedback.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Kent made 64 arrests.

²⁰ The Association of Chief Police Officers is now the National Police Chiefs' Council.

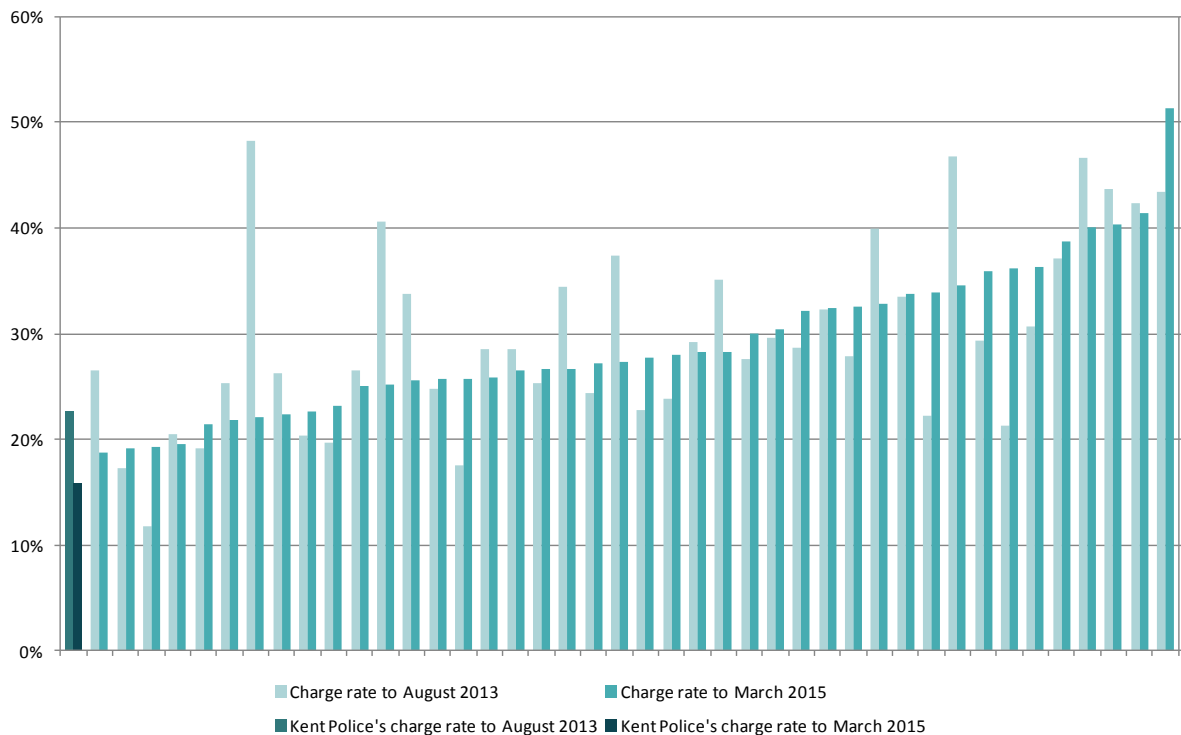
Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March



Source: HMIC data return

The force’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 16 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is a decrease since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection when the force rate was 23 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 force has the lowest charge rate in England and Wales for domestic abuse at 16 percent. HMIC recognises the effect that the improvement in the force’s crime recording processes (to ensure compliance with the National Crime Recording Standards)²¹ will have had on the charge rate. We note that the force has one of the highest rates of crime recording accuracy in the country, which means that domestic abuse offences that previously would not have been recorded are now being recorded properly. This may explain the force’s low charge rate in part, but it is unlikely to be the full reason.

In addition to the low domestic charge rate, the force also has a high proportion of cases that fail to due to evidential difficulties, including when the victim does not support police action. This is of particular concern in domestic abuse cases where victims may be subject to controlling and coercive behaviour by the perpetrator and therefore less likely to be supportive of police action against the perpetrator.

²¹ NCRS: national crime recording standards ensure that crimes are recorded consistently and accurately.

The force must continue to monitor and assess its low charge rate to ensure that it understands fully the reasons behind this and then takes action to address this. The force has a domestic abuse action plan created after the HMIC inspection in 2014. It has taken steps to address our recommendations; three remain outstanding, but all are being progressed. The force needs to monitor the continuing MARAC capacity as there are concerns that demand is outstripping capacity, because referrals to the MARAC have increased rapidly and will require continued consideration.

The force's domestic abuse policy and procedures are easily accessible on the intranet. During our fieldwork we found evidence that the force takes immediate steps to protect victims of domestic abuse. There is a positive intervention policy and frontline staff understand well the risk assessment form. This form provides a systematic way to identify the risks to victims or others, and formulate and record immediate protection plans. Officers and staff throughout our inspection described in detail actions that they were required to take when dealing with domestic abuse cases.

We found evidence of supervisors reviewing incidents of domestic abuse and missing persons, and of a wide range of guidance and products used by the force to protect victims, based on the nature of their vulnerability.

Work that has been commissioned by the force with Birkbeck University will lead to the introduction of a perpetrator-specific DASH process. The force intends to explore motivation and any underlying reasons for offending among domestic abuse offenders and help them understand their needs, leading to harm reduction. This work is at an early stage but shows the force's desire to understand better and then reduce offending.

Force policy is that a DASH form will always be filled out for a domestic abuse incident, and HMIC found that this was being followed by officers. Officers record DASH details in their pocket book, and then transfer the details to the online crime system for a sergeant to then review the risk assessment. All high-risk cases go to the PPU for safeguarding and the CID for investigation, while medium or standard-risk cases go to uniformed officers for investigation and safeguarding.

HMIC found that staff had an appreciation of when updates are required, along with the enhanced measures for vulnerable victims as required by the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. The force produces a daily spreadsheet, highlighting investigations in which victim updates are approaching the date they are due to be provided. Not only is this a useful tool for managers to use as part of their supervisory responsibilities, it also demonstrates the force's commitment to compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime.

As part of our fieldwork we observed a MARAC. We found that a large number of cases are brought to the meeting as a result of professional judgment and not just because of established triggers, such as high-risk assessment or the identification of

a repeat victim. Safety and security measures are put in place to protect victims and this extends to the offer of refuges where appropriate. This is positive as it means that the views of professionals involved in this area are seen as valuable in the MARAC process, and that the process does not rely solely on a system of standardised triggers as a basis of referral, however as previously stated the capacity of the MARAC will need to be constantly reviewed if demand is not to outstrip capacity and reduce the effectiveness of the MARAC.

HMIC also examined the force's use of new legal powers to protect victims. Domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) were introduced in England and Wales in 2014 to prevent a suspected offender from returning to a victim's home or contacting the victim. The force began using DVPOs in September 2014; it made 81 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 78 were granted. Fourteen 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 18 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.²²

HMIC found examples of DVPOs and DVPNs²³ being used across the force although nearly all were generated by frontline staff. Those officers spoken to who were investigating high-risk domestic abuse cases were found not to be well-informed about the DVPOs and DVPNs and legislation such as Clare's Law.²⁴ The level of training offered to these officers was the same as that offered to those investigating medium and standard risk cases.

The force's domestic abuse action plan includes an action regarding domestic abuse training, which is yet to be completed and does not identify those officers dealing with high-risk domestic abuse as a group to prioritise. This means that officers investigating high-risk cases of domestic abuse may not have the appropriate skills with which to conduct effective investigations and may provide victims with a substandard level of service.

²² The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

²³ 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.

²⁴ Clare's Law (the domestic violence disclosure scheme) is designed to provide victims with information that may protect them from an abusive situation before it ends in tragedy. The scheme allows the police to disclose information about a partner's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts. The domestic violence disclosure scheme is named after Clare Wood who was brutally murdered in 2009 by her former partner George Appleton, who had a record of violence against women.

Summary of findings



Requires improvement

Kent Police is committed to protecting from harm those people who are vulnerable. It has established processes to identify repeat and vulnerable victims. The protecting vulnerable people board is an essential element in the force's plans to improve services, drawing together all the main strands of work into one meeting.

HMIC found that the force's initial response to support vulnerable victims of domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour, as well as missing children, is good. However, frontline constables and police staff's knowledge of child sexual exploitation is limited. This needs to improve.

Kent Police has the lowest charge rate in England and Wales for domestic abuse offences. The force needs to continue to monitor and assess this area to ensure that it fully understands the reasons and to ensure the outcomes of these cases are appropriate.

The central referral unit provides multi-agency support to vulnerable people and ensures that immediate steps are taken to ensure that victims are safe.

Kent Police has invested in tackling domestic abuse, missing persons and child sexual exploitation and continues to try to provide improvements to its services, including working with academic institutions. Frontline officers are given tasks to target high risk offenders. This demonstrates that protecting vulnerable people has become the focus of everyday policing activity.

Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its response to victims of domestic abuse by ensuring officers and staff who investigate and safeguard victims assessed as at high risk are appropriately trained, specifically in relation to preventive measures such as domestic violence protection orders and the domestic violence disclosure scheme.
- The force should improve compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime specifically in relation to victim personal statements.
- The force should continue to monitor and assess outcome data for domestic abuse to ensure that it has a full understanding as to why it currently has such a low charge rate, and consider what appropriate steps it might take to bring more offenders to justice through the criminal justice system.
- The force should improve its response to children at risk of sexual exploitation by ensuring it understands the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation, and that frontline staff have an appropriate level of knowledge of the factors to identify cases and understand how to respond.