



PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability)

A national overview

December 2015

© HMIC 2015

ISBN: 978-1-911194-56-9

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic

Contents

In numbers: The police response to vulnerability in England and Wales	3
Introduction	5
About HMIC’s PEEL effectiveness inspection	5
About this report	6
Methodology	7
How effective are forces in England and Wales at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims?	8
Overall grades	8
Principal findings	10
How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?	10
How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?.....	13
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 children and victims of domestic abuse), and how well prepared is it to tackle child sexual exploitation?	16
Conclusions and next steps	20
Next steps.....	20
Glossary	22
Annex A – About the data	24
Annex B: HMIC’s approach to areas for improvement, causes of concern and recommendations	26

In numbers: The police response to vulnerability in England and Wales



Calls for assistance

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

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



Crime

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

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

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

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

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





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



Introduction

The primary purpose of the police is to prevent crime and disorder and to protect people. Victims of crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) who are vulnerable in some way¹ are often those who are at the greatest risk of harm, and so are in particular need of the police's protection and support. They are also entitled to enhanced service from all parts of the criminal justice system, under the provisions of the UK government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime.²

Cases involving vulnerable victims are often both complex and sensitive. Their resolution frequently requires the police to work closely with partner organisations (such as local authorities, or health and education services). Calls for help from vulnerable victims also represent a considerable amount of the overall demand on the police's time. For example, in the 12 months to 31 March 2015, the police in England and Wales received an average of more than 100 calls an hour about domestic abuse.

The extent to which a police force is successful at identifying, protecting and supporting those who are vulnerable is therefore a core indicator of its overall effectiveness. In recognition of this, in summer 2015 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) included an examination of the response of all 43 police forces in England and Wales to vulnerability as part of our annual PEEL³ effectiveness inspection programme.

About HMIC's PEEL effectiveness inspection

Findings from HMIC's full 2015 PEEL effectiveness inspection (including overall effectiveness grades for all 43 forces in England and Wales) will be published in February 2016. At the same time, all forces in England and Wales will receive an overall effectiveness grade, as well as individual grades and assessments against the four core effectiveness questions, which are:

¹ Such as through their age, disability, or because they have been subjected to repeated offences, or are at high risk of abuse, for example.

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

³ The PEEL inspection programme examines police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy. For details of the inspection questions and methodology, see www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/peel-assessments/how-we-inspect/2015-peel-assessment/

1. How effective is the force at preventing crime and anti-social behaviour, and keeping people safe?
2. How effective is the force at investigating crime and managing offenders?
3. How effective is the force at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims?
4. How effective is the force at tackling serious and organised crime, including its arrangement for fulfilling its national policing responsibilities?

This report sets out the grades and findings for question 3. While these will also contribute to the overall effectiveness grade for each force published in February 2016, given the critical importance of protecting and supporting vulnerable victims, HMIC decided to release the vulnerability inspection results separately and in advance, so that forces could act upon the findings as quickly as possible.⁴

About this report

This national overview report summarises the top-line findings of this inspection, and sets out the grades (of outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate) given to each force. It is intended to be read alongside other reports which are (or will be) based on the vulnerability inspection findings. These are:

- 43 reports which set out the individual findings for each force area;
- The thematic report on the police response to domestic abuse, *Increasingly everyone's business*, which is a follow-up report to our 2014 report, *Everyone's business*;⁵
- reports published as part of HMIC's rolling child protection inspection programme (see footnote 6 on the next page);
- the overarching PEEL effectiveness thematic report, due for publication in February 2016; and
- a thematic report on police management of cases of missing and absent children, and of child sexual exploitation, due for publication in spring 2016.

All reports are or will be available on HMIC's website:

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic

⁴ Forces were also immediately alerted to any findings which were immediately damaging to or endangering victims.

⁵ *Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse*, HMIC, 2014. Available at www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publications/improving-the-police-response-to-domestic-abuse/

Methodology

Our vulnerability inspection was designed to answer the overall question:

‘How effective are forces at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims?’

To answer this, HMIC developed four sub-questions:

1. How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?
2. How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?
3. How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?
4. How well does the force respond to and safeguard specific vulnerable groups (missing and absent children and victims of domestic abuse), and how well prepared is it to tackle child sexual exploitation?⁶

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 relevant practitioners (including Independent Domestic Violence Advocates, outreach and refuge workers).

In every force, we interviewed chief officers and held focus groups with police 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, and of children shown to be at risk of child sexual exploitation.

Throughout the inspection, we identified good practice and positive progress, as well as issues or areas which give rise to causes of concern or areas for improvement. Where appropriate, we have made specific recommendations to forces on issues that need to be addressed urgently to protect vulnerable people from harm (see Annex B for more information on HMIC’s approach to areas for improvement, causes of concern and recommendations).

⁶ This inspection has focused on the force’s assessment of 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. This inspection did not test the quality of how the force conducted these complex child abuse investigations with other agencies such as children’s services, because these issues are covered in HMIC’s rolling programme of child protection inspections. Available at www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/our-work/child-abuse-and-child-protection-issues/national-child-protection-inspection/

How effective are forces in England and Wales at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims?

Overall grades

This is the first time that we have graded forces on their effectiveness at protecting vulnerable people from harm (although HMIC has examined many aspects of vulnerability through a range of other inspections). As a result of these findings, across the 43 forces,⁷ HMIC found that:

- no forces were judged to be outstanding at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm and supporting victims;
- 12 forces were judged to be good (Cheshire, Derbyshire, Dorset, Durham, Greater Manchester, Gwent, Lancashire, Merseyside, Norfolk, Northumbria, Sussex, Thames Valley);
- 27 forces were judged to require improvement in at least one of the areas considered in this inspection (Avon and Somerset, Cambridgeshire, City of London, Cleveland, Cumbria, Devon and Cornwall, Dyfed Powys, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Humberside, Kent, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Metropolitan, Northamptonshire, North Wales, North Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, South Wales, South Yorkshire, Suffolk, West Yorkshire, Wiltshire, West Midlands, West Mercia, Warwickshire); and
- 4 forces were judged to be inadequate⁸ (Bedfordshire, Essex, Staffordshire, Surrey).

We also found 31 forces had either causes of concern, areas for improvement, or both.

The number of forces judged to be inadequate or to require improvement is high. We would stress that, as the following sections show, many forces provide a good service to some vulnerable victims, some of the time; but there are important areas in which the police response needs to improve, and in which small failures may have tragic consequences.

⁷ A report setting out the findings and (where applicable) areas for improvement and causes of concern for each force is available from www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic

⁸ Forces were graded inadequate if we found serious weaknesses in the force's arrangements to safeguard and investigate cases involving vulnerable people. The relevant force reports contain full details.

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.

As with all HMIC inspections, we immediately alerted forces to where we found details of poor practice and risk, so they could work to address them at once. HM Inspectors also wrote to and met with the chief constables of forces judged to be inadequate, in order to offer further insight into the inspection findings.

It is important also to note that a judgment of requires improvement or inadequate in no way negates or undermines the work of dedicated officers and staff who are putting the needs of vulnerable victims first. Across the board we found examples of committed and talented officers and staff going above and beyond to meet the needs of vulnerable victims, sometimes in the most difficult of circumstances. Workloads were often high, and the cases frequently complex; but many staff and officers handle them effectively and sensitively, with a clear focus on achieving the right outcome for victims.

Putting in place the right support, responding to and even in some cases identifying vulnerable victims is often a difficult and sensitive job. HMIC places on the record its thanks to the officers and staff who fulfil this job effectively and with dedication, day in and day out.

Principal findings

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

Identifying those who are vulnerable

HMIC found that every force either has a stated priority about the importance of responding to vulnerability; or has placed a focus on this in another way; or has done both.

The first step of an effective response is obviously to identify accurately and reliably if a caller is vulnerable in some way. However, we found there is a lack of consistency as to how vulnerability is defined. Most forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime⁹ or that referred to in ACPO guidance.¹⁰ Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions. This means that conceivably a victim who is identified as vulnerable in one force is not so identified in the neighbouring force area, and so could receive a different level of service.

The lack of a single definition of vulnerability also contributes to inconsistencies in the proportion of crime recorded as involving a vulnerable victim, with eight forces unable to provide these data at all. As Figure 1 (on the next page) shows, the figures vary significantly between those forces that do collect this information, with a vulnerable victim identified in between 0.03 percent and 34.3 percent of all police-recorded crime for the 12 months to 31 March 2015.

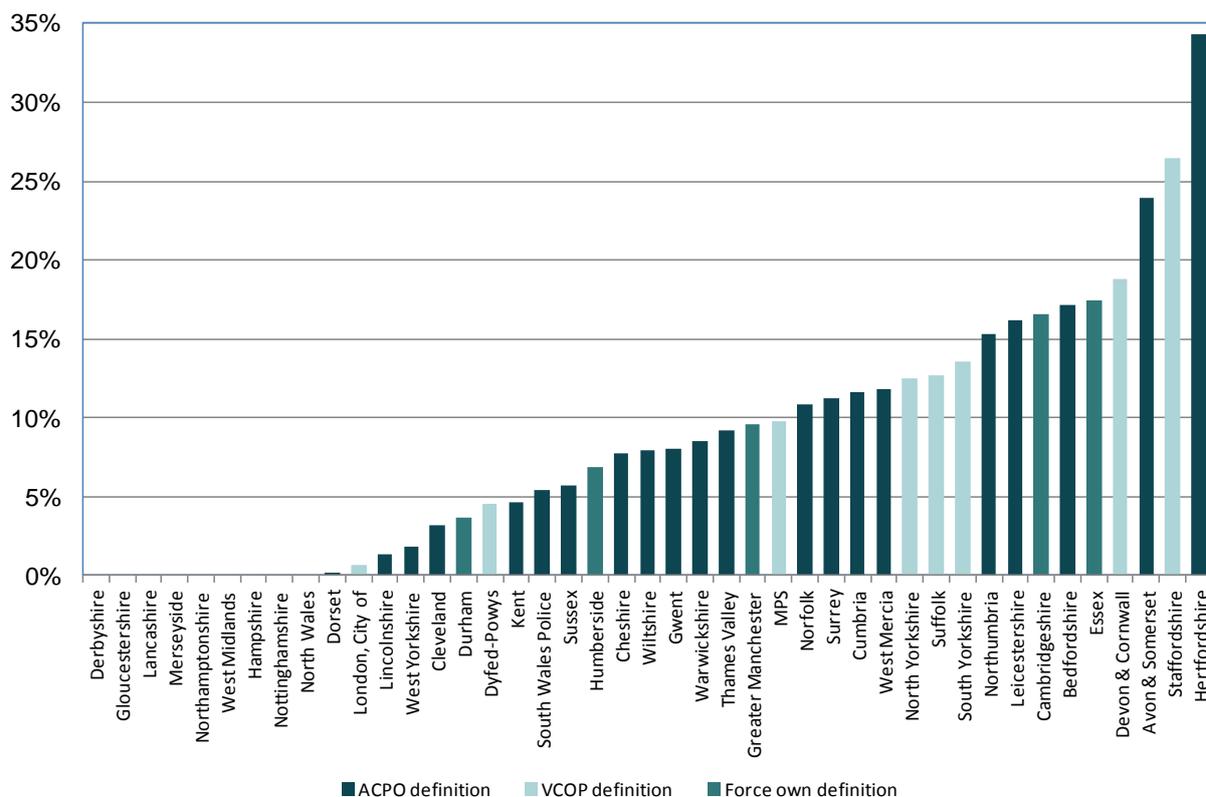
As a result, HMIC found that there remains a lack of high quality data across the police service relating to vulnerable people.

It is of concern that some forces are still unable to provide data on the vulnerable people they have identified and supported, or evidence that they understand related performance data. More work is also needed to explain the wide variation between forces in some of the available data.

⁹ *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*, Ministry of Justice, October 2013. Available at www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf

¹⁰ *ACPO Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults*, NPIA, 2012. Available at www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/ To note, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) replaced the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) on 01 April 2015.

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 collection

While HMIC found signs of some progress in the consistent initial identification of vulnerable people (including through better use in some forces of IT systems which flag up if a caller is a repeat victim),¹¹ HMIC found 13 forces have causes of concern or areas for improvement relating to the victim's initial contact with the force.

Areas for improvement in some forces include:

- ensuring front counter staff receive the same training in how to identify vulnerability (and access to processes/systems to help with this) as call-handlers; and
- making sure there is effective supervision of call-handlers.

In addition, we found the support offered to those who are assessed as high risk to be generally more consistent than that provided to people identified as being at medium or standard levels of risk. Our reality testing also still found examples of call-

¹¹ Availability and use of these systems were highlighted as areas for improvement in *Everyone's business*, HMIC, 2014 as well as in HMIC's two earlier reports on the police's response to anti-social behaviour: *Stop the Rot*, HMIC, 2010; and *A Step in the Right Direction*, HMIC, 2012. All reports available from www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic

handlers who were not good enough at assessing and identifying vulnerability, and of inappropriate risk assessments at first contact.

Assessing levels of risk and need

Risk assessments (whether at first point of contact with the police, or by an officer responding to a call) are used to ascertain the level of risk of harm to the victim, so that an appropriate response or support can be provided.

Overall, HMIC found 15 forces have causes of concern or areas for improvement relating to risk assessments. Reasons for this included:

- an inconsistent completion of risk assessments by staff, with no apparent action to address this failing;
- staff in some forces are given discretion as to whether to complete risk assessments, with some evidence that this had resulted in them not being done in cases where the force's procedures required them to be;
- risk assessments of domestic abuse victims are being completed over the telephone, rather than face-to-face. HMIC has significant concerns about this in cases of intimate partner violence, not least because the perpetrator may be present at the time of the call, which could influence the victim's response and mean that the call-handler would fail to capture the full extent of the risk posed;
- in some forces, processes to identify children at risk in domestic abuse households are still not reliable or effective; and
- some forces have delays in secondary assessment processes, and referrals to other organisations (this was often due to a lack of capacity– see pp.13-14).

Use of THRIVE

The THRIVE system¹² is now being used in the control rooms in many forces, and provides a structured way of assessing the threat, harm, risk and investigation opportunities associated with a call, the vulnerability of the victim, and the engagement level required to resolve the issues. While this is designed to allow the police to tailor the service they provide according to the particular needs of the victim, there is evidence of some staff applying it to reduce or ration competing demands, rather than to tailor their service to the needs of victims.

¹² The threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement decision-making model.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?¹³

We found examples of response officers who acted quickly, professionally and kindly not just to safeguard vulnerable victims, but to put them at their ease.

However, HMIC also considers there to be areas for improvement in the way some forces respond to calls for help from vulnerable victims. In particular, our inspections highlighted the need for all forces to ensure response officers have access to means of collecting photographic or video evidence.

We also found some evidence that while the response to and immediate safeguarding of victims assessed as high risk is generally effective, this is not the case for those assessed as medium or standard risk. While it is right that those at the greatest risk of harm receive the most immediate protection, forces should assure themselves that they are providing all victims with the support they need.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?¹⁴

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

While HMIC found some examples of investigations being conducted effectively and thoroughly, inspectors noted both across vulnerability as a whole, and in relation to some types of offending within it (e.g. domestic abuse – see next section) that there needs to be a focus on ensuring the right people with the right skills are available and allocated to the right investigations, and that they have manageable workloads. As a result, we found 20 forces have causes of concern or areas for improvement relating to the investigation stage.

Forces have continued largely to protect their investment in public protection resources. HMIC found that police officers in specialist protecting vulnerable people units generally conduct more effective investigations than non-specialists, but that in

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ The question in 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.

several forces they felt overstretched. HMIC concurs with this; we have several concerns around the capacity of these units and the teams that work within them, based on:

- considerable variations in the working patterns of specialist staff, with some forces relying on 'on call' provision overnight or at weekends;
- teams not being fully staffed due to large numbers of vacant posts, maternity leave or long-term sickness absences; and
- staff within specialist units being tasked with additional duties, which diverts their attention away from their direct public protection functions.

As a result, we found (for instance) some domestic abuse investigations including high risk cases are allocated to non-specialist staff because of capacity issues.

Compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

Victims of criminal conduct are entitled to a range of services from organisations in the criminal justice system. The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime¹⁵ sets out the minimum standards expected of these organisations, and is a principal component of the government's overall commitment to helping victims of crime to navigate the criminal justice system, and to identify what they can expect at all stages of the process. This includes at the police investigation stage, where the Code states that:

- victims can elect to give a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) at the same time as their witness statement, to explain in their own words how the crime has affected them (and are entitled to be offered the chance to read their VPS aloud at any court hearing);
- victims should receive information about the criminal justice process, who is responsible for doing what within the force, and any actions relating to the suspect (for example, bail conditions or release from custody); and
- victims are entitled to receive regular information up-dates and to be consulted about the possible outcomes of their case.

However, HMIC's inspection found that more than half of forces have a stated area for improvement related to compliance with the Code of Practice. While most of these concern the need for consistent completion of a VPS, we also found forces where:

- victims are not being provided with updates of their case; and

¹⁵ *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*, Ministry of Justice, October 2013. Available at www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf

- the force is not adequately discussing with the Crown Prosecution Service the need for 'special measures' to help vulnerable victims through the criminal justice system (an example would be making an application to allow a victim to give evidence in court via a video link, or behind a screen).

Working with partners

An effective response to vulnerable victims frequently requires both statutory and voluntary sector organisations to work together, in order to undertake joint risk assessments and safety planning to address victims' often complex needs.

HMIC found evidence of effective, imaginative and positive work between the police and partner organisations, which is helping to protect those who are vulnerable and support victims. This includes work both with other public services, and with the voluntary sector.

For instance, we found evidence of:

- Women's Aid representatives patrolling with police officers on Friday nights, to help with high-risk cases;
- good police involvement and leadership in established multi-agency partnerships, especially in MARACs¹⁶ and (in many but not all parts of England and Wales) MASHs;¹⁷
- police school liaison work to teach young people about healthy relationships and internet safety; and
- close links between forces and schools attended by children affected by domestic abuse.

There were also (limited) areas for improvement identified (six forces have causes of concern or areas for improvement noted). We found that some forces need to focus on what information they share with partner agencies, and when and how they share it, in order to provide coherent and consistent support. In particular, we found problems in sharing data caused by incompatible or inaccessible IT systems (although partners were finding workarounds to these problems).

In addition, HMIC found MASHs and MARACs with particularly heavy workloads, which in some areas is resulting in backlogs of cases. This means that some victims may experience delays in receiving longer term support.

¹⁶ MARACs are regular local meetings where information about high risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies.

¹⁷ A multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) brings together staff from police and partner agencies who work from the same location, sharing information and ensuring a timely and joined-up response to protect children and vulnerable adults.

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

The first three vulnerability sub-questions explored how forces identify vulnerable people, the response they provide, and the action taken to investigate crimes and work with partners to keep them safe. This question looked specifically at how forces deal with three specific areas of vulnerability: domestic abuse; missing and absent children; and its preparedness to deal with child sexual exploitation.

Domestic abuse

The thematic report, *Increasingly everyone's business*, sets out the full findings on the police response to domestic abuse, and the progress made since HMIC last inspected this area (in 2014).¹⁸

In summary, we found that police leaders, officers, police community support officers (PCSOs) and staff have acted on the message of our 2014 report, and now see tackling domestic abuse as an important priority for them; and there have been improvements to the overall police response as a result.

However, there is still much more to be done, and HMIC found a number of areas for improvement. Those that cause HMIC particular concern include:

- difficulties in identifying repeat callers and victims due to limitations of force computer systems;
- although the THRIVE (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability and Engagement) decision model appears to be starting to be established with more forces using it, there is evidence of some staff applying it to reduce or ration competing demands rather than tailoring the service to address the needs of victims;
- inconsistent awareness particularly among response staff of coercive and controlling behaviour. Where training is provided, there is still undue reliance on e-learning packages;
- domestic abuse investigations still largely being allocated based on crime type and complexity rather than the assessment of risk;
- confusion in some forces over roles and responsibilities in relation to the safeguarding of victims at medium and standard risk;

¹⁸ *Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse*, HMIC, 2014. Available at www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publications/improving-the-police-response-to-domestic-abuse/

- significant increases in workloads in specialist public protection teams;
- limited application of Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs), and lack of appropriately robust action in enforcing breaches of these and other orders;
- significant increases in the number of high risk cases being identified mean the capacity of MARACs to safeguard victims is becoming an issue for police and partners;
- inconsistency in the application of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime;¹⁹
- better analysis of police and partner organisation data is needed to understand performance and how domestic abuse is dealt with in force areas; and
- limited evidence of victim engagement to provide forces with feedback on the service provided and how this can be improved.

The inspection report concludes that there is clear evidence that the leadership of forces (actively supported by police and crime commissioners) have acted to improve the response to domestic abuse since the publication of *Everyone's business*. The police service should immediately appreciate that change needs to start now to ensure that there is effective and consistent operational practice across all force areas.

Missing and absent children

The police treat cases of people who are missing²⁰ from home more seriously and with greater urgency than those who are considered to be absent.²¹ This is because, if there is no 'apparent risk' that would mean the absent person should be treated as missing (in accordance with the definition), the expectation is that the individual will return of his or her own accord, without the need for a police investigation.

The full thematic on the police management of cases of missing and absent children, and of links to preparedness to respond to child sexual exploitation, will be published in Spring 2016. This section summarises some of the principal findings.

¹⁹ *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*, Ministry of Justice, October 2013. Available at www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/victims_code_2013.pdf

²⁰ The NPCC definition of missing is: "Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character to the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another." Quoted in *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. Department for Education, June 2013, p.6. Available from www.gov.uk

²¹ The NPCC definition of absent is: "A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be and there is no apparent risk." *ibid*.

Most children who go missing are found, or return of their own accord, safe and well. While the experience is distressing for parents or carers, they can be reassured that in most straightforward cases the police's response is timely, proportionate and appropriate. HMIC found that, where the immediate risks are assessed as very high, police action is immediate and coordinated.

However, HMIC found variation in how police forces define and collect data on missing and absent children:

- although the majority of forces use the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) definitions of 'absent' and 'missing', there are some local interpretations. A few forces do not use term 'absent'; some categorise all those who are missing below a certain age as 'missing' irrespective of the nature of the concern; and one force uses the category 'absent' only for children who are looked after by the local authority; and
- the length of time a person has been missing before they are categorised as missing 'long term' varies from over 24 hours to 6 months, with some forces not categorising incidents in this way at all.

This results in inconsistent data, which in turn leads to some forces not having a good understanding of the nature and scale of the problem in their area.

In addition:

- there are weaknesses in the current risk assessment processes. For instance, if a child is not defined as being at high risk, then the level of protection and support afforded them is inconsistent, and at times lacking;
- a return interview (in which a trained professional talks to the young person about why he or she ran away, the experience of being away, and any issues that need to be resolved) is not always undertaken. While in some cases this might be an appropriate decision, the evidence for this is often not recorded on the case files; and
- we found few trigger plans (plans to locate a child quickly when he or she goes missing frequently) even in those forces where their use is part of locally agreed practice.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

Our examination of forces' preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation found that resources dedicated to this have increased across England and Wales. Training and staff development have been provided; some specialist teams have been developed; and knowledge of how best to respond and tackle the problem is growing.

Nevertheless, forces are at very different stages of preparedness. For example:

- implementation is patchy, and initial commitment has not always been sustained;
- there is a wide variation in training between forces, and an absence of evaluation of how effective it has been; and
- some new measures (such as the production of child sexual exploitation profiles, return interviews and trigger plans) are taking a long time to gain traction and to influence practice positively and consistently.

Good practice is highly dependent on skilled and knowledgeable staff. Forces have made progress in establishing expertise through staff training and the development of specialist posts and teams. Overall, the practice of specialist teams is notably better than the practice of non-specialists.

We found that while forces have put in place essential practice tools such as assessments, inter-agency discussions, trigger plans, abduction notices or other disruption techniques, their use is variable, even within teams. The level of oversight and supervision of cases is also inconsistent. Implementation is still too dependent on the commitment of individual staff or the expertise of a few key staff.

Police and children's social care services routinely exchange information and confer over cases that need immediate responses. Arrangements such as multi-agency teams have led to improved cooperation and more efficient organisation of tasks.

Finally, we found that while police forces are working to help prevent child sexual exploitation through (for instance) partnership activity with sectors and organisations involved in the night-time economy (such as the hotel industry), and disruptive activities with those suspected of abuse, these measures have yet to be evaluated.

Conclusions

Our findings indicate that while there has been progress in elements of forces' response to and management of cases involving domestic abuse victims, there is much more to do before HMIC can judge the police's response to protecting all vulnerable people to be outstanding.

We in no way underestimate the difficulties inherent in many cases involving vulnerable people, and would reiterate that in the majority of cases, the police is not the only body that needs to respond in these cases. Other partners must play their part and work closely together in pursuit of the shared goal of immediate and continuing support and protection.

To assist with this, HMIC considers that a wide-ranging effort across public services both nationally and locally is required, to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our communities get the support they need, when they need it. Though they have a critical role to play in safeguarding and supporting vulnerable people, this should never be seen as the sole responsibility of the police service.

While progress within forces to raise awareness about issues relating to vulnerable people is positive, the police service should now create a deeper understanding of and commitment to addressing the often complex needs of vulnerable people. Part of this would be through ensuring that the service has an organisational culture that is focused on training and uses data and evidence of what works to support effective responses and identify areas where further senior leadership focus is required.

This inspection found clear evidence that the leadership of forces (actively supported by police and crime commissioners) have acted to improve the response to domestic abuse since the publication of *Everyone's business* 18 months ago. We now call on forces to ensure this is translated into ever more effective and consistent operational practice across all geographical areas, so that all vulnerable victims receive the protection and support they need.

Next steps

In light of the causes of concern arising from this inspection in the four forces which received an overall grade of inadequate, HMIC expects each of these forces to provide evidence, by the end of January 2016, of its progress in addressing our recommendations. HMIC will then review this in advance of its 2016 inspection programme, and publish its findings on whether these forces have improved.

The findings from the 2015 inspection will be included in and contribute to each force's overall effectiveness grade, due to be published in February 2016.

In addition, a report focused on the police's response to missing and absent children and preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation will be produced in late Spring 2015.

Finally, HMIC will repeat this vulnerability inspection as part of PEEL 2016.

Glossary

anti-social behaviour	behaviour by a person which causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as the person (see section 101 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011)
ASB	anti-social behaviour
Code of Practice for Victims of Crime	established under the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004; places obligations on organisations providing services within the criminal justice system (including the police) to provide a minimum level of service to victims of criminal conduct
Crown Prosecution Service	principal prosecuting authority in England and Wales responsible for prosecuting criminal cases investigated by the police and other investigating bodies, for advising the police on cases for possible prosecution, reviewing cases submitted by the police, determining any charges in more serious or complex cases, preparing cases for court, and presenting cases at court
National Police Chiefs' Council	organisation which brings together 43 operationally independent and locally accountable chief constables and their chief officer teams to co-ordinate national operational policing; works closely with the College of Policing, which is responsible for developing professional standards, to develop national approaches on issues such as finance, technology and human resources; replaced the Association of Chief Police Officers on 1 April 2015
partner agencies	public sector entities, such as those concerned with health, education, social services, the criminal justice system and the management of offenders, which work together to attain their common or complementary objectives
partnership	co-operative arrangement between two or more organisations, from any sector, who share responsibility and undertake to use their respective powers and resources to try to achieve a specified common objective
PCC	police and crime commissioner

performance management	actions by managers which are intended to ensure that goals are being met consistently in an effective and efficient manner; it can focus on the performance of an organisation, a department, employee, or the processes to build a service
police and crime commissioner	elected entity for a police area, established under section 1, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, responsible for securing the principal maintenance of the police force for that area and securing that the police force is efficient and effective; holds the relevant chief constable to account for the policing of the area; establishes the budget and police and crime plan for the police force; appoints and may, after due process, remove the chief constable from office
risk assessment	process to assist in decision-making on appropriate levels of intervention based on expected or forecast levels of harm to individuals, the public, offenders, or property
Victim Personal Statement	written record of the impact of the crime on the victim, which the victim can choose to make at the same time as a witness statement, to explain in his or her own words the effect of the crime; may be read aloud at any court hearing and/or considered before sentencing
victim support	services which enable and support victims of crime to participate in the criminal justice system; includes information, advice and care and can be provided by a number of organisations including the police and voluntary organisations
Victims' Code	Code of Practice for Victims of Crime
vulnerable victim	individual eligible for extra support under the Code of Practice for Victims; defined in the Code as an individual who was under the age of 18 at the time of the offence, or whose quality of evidence is likely to be affected because of a mental disorder, another 'significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning', or who has a physical disability or is suffering from a physical disorder
vulnerability	condition of a person who is in need of special care, support or protection because of age, disability or risk of abuse or neglect

Annex A – About the data

The information presented in this report comes from a range of sources, including published data, inspection fieldwork and data collected from all 43 geographic police forces in England and Wales. Where HMIC has collected data directly from police forces, we have taken reasonable steps to agree with forces the design of the data collection, and to verify the data that we have collected.

Data from HMIC-designed data collection

Data	Timings	Provided by
Calls to assistance	12 months to 31 March 2015	All forces
DA calls to assistance	12 months to 31 March 2015	All forces
Recorded crimes with a vulnerable victim	12 months to 31 March 2015	35 forces
DA offences	12 months to 31 March 2015	All forces
DA arrests	12 months to 31 March 2015	36 forces
DA charges and cautions	12 months to 31 March 2015	All forces
DVPOs	From introduction to 31 March 2015	Applied for 40 forces Granted 38 forces Breaches 37 forces
MARAC cases	12 months to 31 March 2015	All forces

The data were verified in the following ways:

- HMIC carried out checks on the data forces submitted, and raised queries with forces where, for example, their figures were significantly different from other forces, or were internally inconsistent; and
- all forces were asked to check the specific final data used to support the analysis, and correct any errors in their figures.

Data from other sources

- Recorded crime data – published by Office for National statistics (ONS).
Title 5 www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-373428
- Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/focus-on-violent-crime-and-sexual-offences--2013-14/index.html
- Population estimates – Mid-year 2014 estimates, published by Office for National Statistics (ONS) www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/pop-estimate/population-estimates-for-uk--england-and-wales--scotland-and-northern-ireland/mid-2014/stb---mid-2014-uk-population-estimates.html
- Victim satisfaction - data provided to the Home Office by forces.

Annex B: HMIC's approach to areas for improvement, causes of concern and recommendations

For PEEL 2015, HMIC changed its approach to making recommendations. We now identify:

- causes of concern; and
- areas for improvement.

Cause of concern

If, during an inspection, we identify a serious or critical shortcoming in practice, policy or performance, it will be reported as a cause of concern and HMIC will recommend that the force(s) (and sometimes other bodies) make changes to alleviate or eradicate it. There will always be one or more recommendation for each cause of concern. Progress that the force (or other bodies) makes in alleviating or eradicating a cause of concern will be reviewed by HMIC because of its critical and/or serious nature. The method and timing of this review will be determined by the precise nature of the cause of concern.

Area for improvement

If, during an inspection, we find an aspect of practice, policy or performance that falls short of the expected standard, but which is not a serious or critical shortcoming, this may be reported as an area for improvement. Areas for improvement will not be accompanied by a recommendation.