

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Nottinghamshire Police



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Nottinghamshire
Police

287

England and Wales

350

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

Nottinghamshire
Police

27.3

England and Wales

15.8



Crime

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

Nottinghamshire
Police

64.9

England and Wales

61.6

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

Nottinghamshire
Police

+5.7%

England and Wales

+2.2%

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

Nottinghamshire
Police

—

England and Wales

10.7%

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

Nottinghamshire
Police

11.2%

England and Wales

10.0%

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

Nottinghamshire
Police

+8%

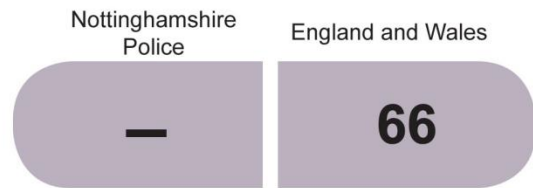
England and Wales

+20.8%



Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

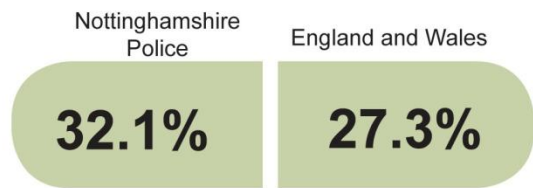


Charge rate

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

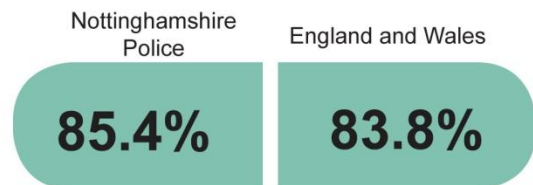


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015



***Nottinghamshire Police was not able to provide data for percentage of total crimes recorded as having a vulnerable victim.**

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 Nottinghamshire Police.

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

Summary



Requires improvement

Protecting vulnerable people is a high priority for Nottinghamshire Police and is reinforced by senior leaders and the police and crime commissioner. The force works well in partnership with other organisations to protect and support many victims. However, HMIC found some areas where improvement is needed to ensure that the force has the necessary capacity and is sufficiently well-prepared to provide the best possible service to keep safe vulnerable people, particularly children. HMIC judges that overall, Nottinghamshire Police requires improvement in the way it protects from harm some of the most vulnerable members of its community.

The force has good processes in place to identify repeat and vulnerable victims and generally responds well to them. Officers have a good understanding of vulnerability and the need to provide enhanced levels of service to protect the most vulnerable. Assessments of risk effectively lead police safeguarding activity particularly in the case of missing persons. However, the force has recently changed its approach to completing risk assessments and making referrals to other agencies about children present when a domestic abuse incident takes place. Despite guidance being available to officers, HMIC found confusion among frontline officers about when an assessment or referral form should be completed which leads to an inconsistent response.

The force is working to understand better the scale and nature of crimes involving vulnerable people such as domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation, but it needs to do more to include all relevant information in its analysis to ensure it plans its services based on the full picture. This inspection only considered how well-prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation. The force was subject to a child protection inspection and subsequent re-visit by HMIC to establish if progress had been made. The report following this re-visit in 2015 has yet to be published.

Following a recent review the force is planning to increase the number of staff in specialist units, including public protection, to ensure investigators provide tailored support to victims who are most at risk or are assessed as vulnerable. Although many staff within the specialist units are accredited detectives there remain gaps in accreditation for temporary detectives and constables. This issue was highlighted in HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014 and it means that crimes relating to domestic abuse victims and other vulnerable groups are still not investigated as

effectively as possible by staff with the appropriate skills and levels of understanding. In addition, the force provides training to student officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) on vulnerability issues, such as child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse. Control room and front office staff have also received domestic abuse training. However, we found limited recent training to all other staff in frontline roles that protect vulnerable people from harm, although computer-based training and guidance is on the force intranet system while the force develops new training programmes.

Nottinghamshire Police has generally good arrangements with partner agencies to keep victims safe and the force is continually seeking to improve working practices. For example, a monthly survey is carried out with victims of domestic abuse and the results used to improve the service provided.

However, the force has decided not to refer all domestic abuse cases assessed as high risk to multi-agency risk assessment conferences, as happens in other forces, and there are different criteria between the county and city areas for those cases that will and will not be considered.

Overall, the force responds well to missing and absent children, however it is not yet sufficiently prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation and although progress has been made since HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014, the force still has more work to do to tackle domestic abuse.

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

Nottinghamshire Police provides a strong leadership focus on improving the identification and response to vulnerable people. Protecting and supporting vulnerable people are clear priorities in the police and crime plan. HMIC found that the force is working hard to ensure people who are vulnerable are consistently identified at the earliest opportunity, so they can be provided with the most appropriate service to meet their needs, particularly in enhancing safeguarding arrangements for women and children. The police and crime commissioner and his deputy have commissioned work to identify effective practice and co-ordinate activity across local authority partners and statutory organisations. Staff show a positive attitude towards protecting those who are vulnerable from harm and supporting victims.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

Nottinghamshire Police is good at identifying repeat and vulnerable victims at the first point of contact. In the control room there are effective and consistent ways where people, including victims, who have been involved in a previous crime or incident, are identified. A set of questions specific to the type of incident being reported is also used to help assess vulnerable victims and there is a facility to 'flag' them on the incident record so that an enhanced response is provided. The nature of the victim's vulnerability will be highlighted to the police by the flag on the IT system if they call again in the future.

Call takers use professional judgment, questioning skills and their training in the national decision model¹ to assess whether a victim is vulnerable and investigate the incident, while providing reassurance and support. HMIC found that supervisory oversight is strong which ensures that the speed at which incidents are responded to is based on risk and the assessment of vulnerability.

¹ National decision model (NDM) is specific to policing. It provides a consistent framework in which decisions can be examined and challenged, both at the time and afterwards. It is composed of six key elements: the police code of ethics being central to the decision; gather information; assess threat and risk; consider powers and force policy; identify options; and, take action and review what happened.

Forces define vulnerability in different ways. The majority of forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime² or that referred to in ACPO guidance.³ Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

Nottinghamshire uses its own force definition and defines vulnerability as:

“Can include a person able to be easily physically, emotionally or mentally hurt, influenced or attacked. Examples might include age, mental disorder, mental impairment or intelligence or social functioning, physical disability or physical disorder.”

The proportion of crime recorded which involves a vulnerable victim varies considerably between forces, from 0.03 percent to 34.3 percent. There is no standard way in which forces are required to record on crime recording systems whether a victim is vulnerable and forces do this differently. Nottinghamshire Police was one of eight forces that were unable to quantify the number of recorded crimes with a vulnerable victim for the time period of the data collection. The force has now introduced a process on its crime recording system designed to capture this information.

Assessing levels of risk and need

The force has generally a good understanding of crime trends and patterns, although its last problem profile on domestic abuse is over a year old and the refreshed problem profile⁴ is in draft format. It is developing its knowledge on specific vulnerable groups such as children at risk of sexual exploitation and missing and absent children. There are well-structured meetings to assess and to identify potential victims. These occur daily, weekly and monthly and enable officers to take immediate action as well as assess longer term trends to allocate resources on the basis of risk.

The force has focused on understanding the issues affecting vulnerable people better. It commissioned a peer review from the College of Policing into its capability

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

³ The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is now the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). *ACPO Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults*, NPIA, 2012, is available from www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/

⁴ A problem profile is intended to provide the force with greater understanding of established and emerging crime or incident series, priority locations or other identified high-risk issues. It should be based on the research and analysis of a wide range of information sources, including information from partner organisation. It should contain recommendations and options for action

and capacity to deal with the threat of child sexual exploitation and the recommendations have been used to develop a longer term plan. This plan, which mirrors the national strategy, is not yet published but it prioritises the most important actions, for example, disrupting, arresting and prosecuting offenders involved in child sexual exploitation and ensures a victim centred approach. The force has recently analysed domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation cases to improve its understanding but the data used is only limited police data. It did not include all police information nor did it include partner organisations' data. The force recognises this gap, however with different information held on different databases and in different formats, this will be challenging to collate and assess.

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

To ensure that officers and staff attending an incident have full information to assess the risks properly and make informed decisions, call takers in the control room are supported by a 'real time intelligence' officer who also assists with gathering relevant information so that response officers have the full picture prior to attendance at an incident. Information is held on a number of different systems which can be a barrier because it takes time and expertise to search across them all but we found that in general the information provided to response officers does ensure an appropriate response.

For example, when dealing with missing and absent children, the information provided to the officer enables the risks to be assessed improving the likelihood that the right actions will be taken.

There are weaknesses in the provision of training to staff in understanding and dealing with vulnerable victims. Training on vulnerability issues, such as child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse, is provided to student officers and police community support officers (PCSOs). Control room and front office staff have also received domestic abuse training. However, there is limited recent training to all other staff in frontline roles that protect vulnerable people from harm, although there is computer-based training and guidance on the force intranet system while new training programmes are being developed.

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

Nottinghamshire Police generally responds well to vulnerable victims, but officers demonstrate an inconsistent approach to assessing risk and vulnerability. Although safeguarding action is taken promptly there are significant backlogs in assessing the needs of some victims. The force generally manages its investigations well and where vulnerability is identified, deals with it well.

Response officers

HMIC found that the officers attending incidents generally demonstrate a good level of awareness of various risk assessment tools such as the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH)⁶ risk assessment, anti-social behaviour and hate crime risk assessments, and missing and absent reviews. This means that levels of risk are identified and appropriate safeguarding action and referral to partners, such as social services are made. The referral process into other agencies is generally well understood by frontline staff and officers give vulnerable victims up-to-date targeted information and leaflets providing advice and signpost them to other support services.

The force has recently changed its approach to completing DASH risk assessments. Officers may now apply their professional judgment when assessing the level of risk to victims of domestic abuse. In addition, force policy is amended so that child notification forms are submitted (alongside a DASH assessment) in cases of significant risk, assault or injury to a child. In all other cases relevant information relating to the child is recorded on a DASH form. However, the form does not include a prompt or narrative to describe a child's demeanour. HMIC found that response officers did not always know when they should complete a DASH and/or child notification form. This lack of clarity can lead to inconsistent safeguarding being provided to victims.

The force has invested in a multi-agency domestic abuse referral team (DART) which covers the Nottingham city council area and a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) which covers the Nottinghamshire county council area. Within the teams the police work with adult and children social care and health practitioners. All DASH

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

⁶ Most forces use the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence risk identification, assessment and management model (DASH): www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/risk-and-vulnerability/#approaches-to-risk-assessment

forms submitted by police officers and partner agencies are initially assessed by the police in these teams. While all high-risk cases are assessed within 24 hours, medium and standard-risk cases are not. In the DART 710 standard reports of domestic incidents were awaiting action by police, such as the submission of a DASH form to children's social care services. This means that unless a child notification form is submitted (for children at high risk of significant harm) children considered to be a lower risk are not identified at the earliest opportunity and joint safeguarding is delayed or does not take place. Although assessed as standard risk there may be cases among the backlog which require more immediate attention, or where the cumulative risk has increased since previous incidents. The oldest case was six months old. As referrals to other agencies take place after this risk assessment there can be a substantial delay with potential safeguarding opportunities being missed. Of those cases examined there is inconsistency in the application of force policy, insufficient information captured and examples where the child notification form is not always being submitted when it should be.

Safeguarding actions continue throughout the investigation even when the victim refuses to be involved with the police investigation. We found that response officers generally have a good awareness of a wide range of initial safeguarding options, although the lack of a consistent list of available options means that officers rely on experience and knowledge within the team. The force investment since HMIC's domestic abuse in 2014 shows progress towards ensuring the force uses all opportunities to safeguard victims of domestic abuse but it has more work to do.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

The force's supervision, particularly of initial risk assessments, is generally good. Nottinghamshire Police has a number of structured review processes built into its systems to ensure that risk assessments are conducted at the right time and by the right person. Response inspectors demonstrate good leadership on initial safeguarding plans put in place by response staff and are aware of the options available, including emergency accommodation.

HMIC found good-quality supervision of the initial DASH and safeguarding process for victims of domestic abuse but officers explained they did not receive feedback on the quality of the completed assessment from partner organisations which would improve the overall level of information provided.

Ongoing safeguarding for standard risk domestic abuse victims is the responsibility of response officers and their supervisors but this is not always compatible with their current workload or shift pattern. As a consequence activity can be delayed and lacks effective oversight as officers become more focused on current investigations. The independent domestic violence advocate (IDVA) service and neighbourhood teams re-visit those victims who are at medium-risk and this helps to ensure that the appropriate safeguarding is in place.

An audit, carried out by the force, to assess the quality of supervision of missing children cases has raised awareness among supervisors and contributed to improved handover of cases and subsequent investigation and safeguarding activity.

We found a strong emphasis on ensuring cases of children still missing are handed over between response shifts to ensure a consistent and co-ordinated response.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners keep victims safe?⁷

HMIC found investigations to be of a generally good quality and the force does provide officers with specialist skills to investigate crimes committed against vulnerable people. However HMIC found that improvement is needed as the risks associated with a lack of capacity and capability in some specialist teams means vulnerable victims of crime may not get the quality of service they need. The force has plans to increase the capacity and levels of expertise in the public protection teams to address this. Partnership working is good and improving, although backlogs in assessing and referring cases, and the policy not to refer all high-risk domestic assault cases to MARACs requires improvement.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

The force has recently reviewed the way it is structured to ensure that those who are identified as being vulnerable have the right level of support. Towards the end of 2015, the force plans to increase the number of staff in specialist units, including public protection, for example in domestic abuse teams. Many staff within the specialist units are accredited detectives and have received the right level of training however there remain gaps in accreditation for temporary detectives and constables. This issue was highlighted in HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014 and it means that crimes relating to domestic abuse victims and other vulnerable groups are still not investigated as effectively as possible by staff with the appropriate qualifications and levels of understanding. The force also recognises this and has established a training and accreditation plan for these staff. HMIC recognises the progress the force has made, for example by surveying domestic abuse victims to improve its service, but as other force-level training requirements become pressing it is vital the force maintains its focus on achieving well-trained and accredited staff in public protection.

⁷ 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.

HMIC reviewed investigations⁸ involving offences of burglary, violence and rape. We found that the right staff with the right skills had carried out these investigations involving vulnerable victims and they were generally of a good quality and the supervision of cases shows direction to staff and oversight on lines of enquiry with effective links being made to the MASH. Where the offence being investigated requires more specialist skills, in the majority of cases, a suitably skilled and trained officer is deployed. However this is more often based on the type of crime rather than the needs of the victim, which means that a very vulnerable person involved in a less serious crime may not get a specialist officer to assist them. For example, at present incidents involving sexting and the distribution of sexual images by young people are investigated by response officers who have limited knowledge of capturing digital evidence and do not have the required skills to investigate offences involving children.

While there is timely initial investigation with prompt safeguarding actions put in place, there is a risk that heavy workloads in some specialist teams is having an impact on the quality of service. We found an imbalance in workloads across different teams in public protection. In the domestic abuse investigation team workloads are realistic and manageable while in the rape investigation team they are high. An area of concern is the delay in the further investigation of a high number of cases and this means that there may be a delay for the victim in the outcome of the investigation.

For those children who are frequently missing or absent or who may be at risk of child sexual exploitation there are regular strategy meetings with partners to look at ways to support a child. Every person who is found after going missing, or if there is specific concern after being absent, is seen by an officer to check they are safe and well and there are arrangements with partners to ensure each child is also interviewed within 72 hours of their return. However, these 'return home' interviews are commissioned by social services to charitable organisations that are deemed most appropriate to gain information from children. HMIC found that only 75 per cent of interviews had been conducted and the information is not readily available to officers. The force recognises that opportunities are being missed to gather further information and may mean it is arriving at an incomplete intelligence picture. However, where a young person is viewed at risk of sexual exploitation then a joint interview with a police specialist and social worker is conducted to aid the investigative approach.

⁸ HMIC reviewed a sample of rape, burglary, offences of serious violence and actual bodily harm cases. In most forces the review consisted of 10 cases from each crime category but in some larger forces the sample was increased to 15. The file review was designed to provide a broad overview of the identification of vulnerability and the effectiveness of the investigation.

Compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime

All police forces have a statutory duty to comply with the code of practice for victims of crime, which sets out the service victims of crime can expect from all parts of the criminal justice system. Victim needs are reviewed regularly and contact with victims is generally good with updates provided and a focus on the victim and what they want. However, there is inconsistency about when a victim is invited to provide a victim personal statement (VPS)⁹ to support any prosecution case. We found in Nottinghamshire that investigators typically wait to take these until after the suspect has been charged with an offence or when requested by the Crown Prosecution Service. The force should ensure it offers the opportunity to take a victim personal statement at the initial reporting stage, as required by the code of practice, and if necessary offers to take another one at a later stage. HMIC's crime inspection in 2014 found weaknesses in the force's compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime; the force needs to ensure victims consistently get the quality of service they have a right to expect.

Working with partner organisations

There are good arrangements with partner agencies and the force is continually aiming to improve working practices. For incidents involving anti-social behaviour and hate crime, 'vulnerable/complex person panels' meet monthly and are attended by a wide range of partners to solve problems about issues that involve vulnerable people. There are good and effective examples of police referrals, using the anti-social behaviour risk assessment tool, to reduce and stop incidents involving vulnerable people. Now the organisations are planning to broaden the scope of these meetings to include vulnerable premises or locations.

The force is leading on implementation of a partnership prevention programme designed to tackle the root causes of the demand on services and there are a number of ongoing projects and pilots. One of these projects is the mental health street triage team which deals with mental health issues. The team brings police and mental health professionals together to provide access to mental health support and advice for vulnerable people and is a very positive approach.

There are generally good processes to understand and act on the views of vulnerable victims. Independent domestic violence advocates work closely with officers and staff and formally feedback the views of victims. The domestic abuse survey and work to find out the views of victims are very positive, and are informing how and what services are provided to victims.

⁹ The victim personal statement (VPS) gives victims an opportunity to describe the wider effects of the crime upon them, express their concerns and indicate whether or not they require support. Provisions relating to the making of a VPS and its use in criminal proceedings are included in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims Code), which was published on 29 October 2013 and came into force on 10 December 2013.

Domestic abuse cases are referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). These meetings are well-run by the police, with good partnership engagement, and attendees were held to account for previously-agreed actions. However, not all high-risk domestic abuse cases are considered at the meetings and this means that although immediate safeguarding issues are dealt with, some information sharing and long-term problem-solving opportunities, involving all partners, may be lost.

Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)¹⁰

A multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) serving the county council area has good representation from partner organisations including children's and adults' social services, health, probation and education. The force has invested in this unit which has resulted in closer joint working, risk assessment and safeguarding for vulnerable people. There is no corresponding MASH covering the Nottingham city council area but instead there is a domestic abuse referral team (DART). As previously highlighted there are significant backlogs of standard-risk DASH forms waiting to be assessed and referrals made to other agencies. In addition, although information-sharing is good for domestic abuse victims through the DART, there is a gap in information about wider vulnerability issues, including non-domestic abuse incidents involving children and vulnerable adults. The force continues to explore how the benefits from a comprehensive MASH approach can be applied across the whole force area.

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 Nottinghamshire Police identifies those that are vulnerable, the response that is provided to them and what action the force takes to investigate crimes and to work with partners to keep them safe. This question looks specifically at how Nottinghamshire Police deals with three specific areas of vulnerability: domestic abuse, missing and absent children and its preparedness to deal with child sexual exploitation.

¹⁰ A multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) brings together into a single location key safeguarding agencies to better identify risks to children (and in some areas, vulnerable adults), and improve decision-making, interventions, and outcomes. The MASH enables the multi-agency team to share all appropriate information in a secure environment, and ensure that the most appropriate response is provided to effectively safeguard and protect the individual.

Missing and absent children

A good response is provided to those people who go missing or absent from home.¹¹ There is a specialist missing person's team which is making progress and takes a pro-active approach to tackling missing children and young people. The team ensures that it liaises with partner agencies to ensure all opportunities to provide safeguarding for those reported missing are taken. Partners and frontline staff view the work of the team positively. The team holds meetings with partners from social services, education and health services for those children who are reported as missing. This means co-ordinated problem-solving takes place to reduce the incidence of those children who go missing from home frequently or who may be at risk from sexual exploitation.

Nottinghamshire Police has adopted the national guidelines for dealing with missing and absent children. It has chosen to go beyond the guidelines and elects to never categorise children under the age of 13 as absent but rather always categorises them as missing which means a full investigation will take place in all cases. The force carried out an audit, to ensure that the guidelines are followed, which identified strengths and some areas for improvement. This has raised awareness among supervisors to ensure there are better handovers between shifts so that risk is re-assessed and investigations make progress.

We found good levels of supervision with clear direction given and thoughtful risk assessments carried out. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring cases of children still missing are handed over between shifts to ensure a consistent and co-ordinated response. However it is less clear that the force uses information from previous missing episodes to develop a comprehensive immediate response, sometimes called a 'trigger plan'. This means opportunities may be missed to find children and young people more quickly using, for example, information on places they have been known to go to previously.

In common with many other forces the force has a separate database to record investigations into missing persons. However, it is often difficult to quickly retrieve information from it and frontline staff report that there is a lack of easily available information on progress being made by police and partners to reduce missing persons' incidents. It is also difficult for staff to see where intelligence from 'return home' interviews, commissioned by social services, is used to direct police and partner activity.

There is a strong oversight process to review missing and absent reports. Identification in the control room is consistently good and there is active supervision of the case from start to finish. The force carries out checks that they are safe and

¹¹ 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.

well once the missing person has returned home on every occasion. We found that responsibility is clear for daily management meetings to discuss cases. Where the person is assessed as being high risk, a detective chief inspector will review the investigation and actions taken. The sexual exploitation investigation unit (SEIU) also reviews all reports of missing and absent children to ensure that any risk of sexual exploitation is identified and prevented.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

The force is still developing its understanding of child sexual exploitation but considers it a high priority. This inspection has focused on actions and activities the force has taken to understand and identify the extent to which children are at risk of child sexual exploitation and the policies, practices and procedures it is putting in place to tackle this. It did not test the quality of how the force conducts these complex investigations with other agencies such as children's services as these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.¹²

The improving knowledge among frontline officers about the risks and warning signs of child sexual exploitation means that earlier links are starting to be made to reports of missing and absent children. The control room has a list of children and young people who may be being sexually exploited and this is used to prioritise and direct the police response. However, neighbourhood officers have little opportunity to develop longer term links with children who are frequently missing and PCSOs are not trained in the use of the system that records missing and absent incidents. Neighbourhood teams are also provided the list of those children at risk of sexual exploitation but any longer term problem solving activity undertaken by neighbourhood teams is not monitored by this unit. This means there is an uncoordinated approach to prevention activity. The force recognises it needs to engage more with neighbourhood teams to improve their understanding and capability to tackle child sexual exploitation.

Nottinghamshire Police is developing a long term plan to improve its response to child sexual exploitation following the force initiated peer review by the College of Policing. There are arrangements in place for the provision of support to vulnerable children who have suffered sexual abuse. The force has set up the 'concerns network' which aims to raise the awareness of principal partners of child sexual exploitation and gather intelligence on children at risk and possible perpetrators. It operates across the force area using two officers to educate staff in care homes and foster carers about signs and symptoms and the importance of early intervention to protect children.

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

On a daily basis staff in the SEIU risk-assess referrals and this includes scanning police and partner information systems. The force has identified a gap in health service information which it is addressing through a pilot scheme with health and this will be used to better prioritise cases. The SEIU has not benefited from any analysis of trends or patterns to better inform preventive activity.

To further develop its understanding, the force prepared a detailed analysis of the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation across Nottinghamshire, but it does not draw on all available police data and nor does it use data from partners, for example children's services or education. HMIC acknowledges that this is a developing area for all organisations but there is an urgent need to expand the knowledge of the threat, harm and risk posed by child sexual exploitation in Nottinghamshire, so that the police and partners can respond effectively.

Domestic abuse

The force has improved the service it provides to victims of domestic abuse since HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014. Recommendations made in HMIC's previous reports have either been addressed or progress is being made. The assistant chief constable is responsible for carrying out an action plan and the force has acted on feedback. This specifically includes the domestic abuse survey and work to find out the views of victims which has been very positive and this is having an effect on how and what services to victims are provided. In addition, within the next four months, as part of the force's 'delivering the future' change programme, a triage and safeguarding team will be put in place to deal with all sexual and domestic abuse offences with associated safeguarding. However, despite the force having a higher charge rate for domestic abuse compared to the rate for England and Wales, HMIC is still concerned with the limited progress the force is making in having the right level of expertise in its public protection and (particularly) in domestic abuse investigation teams. While HMIC recognises it takes time to train detectives, a high proportion within teams who still are not accredited.

As previously highlighted, domestic abuse cases are referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) but not all high-risk cases are considered at the meetings and there are different criteria between the county and city areas for those cases that will and will not be heard. The force has a triaging process that involves some, but not all, partner organisations. However, this approach is not consistent with other forces and is contrary to recognised guidance. This means that although immediate safeguarding issues are dealt with, some information-sharing and long-term problem-solving opportunities, involving all partners, might be lost. It is clear there is not enough capacity provided by the currently scheduled bi-weekly meetings which are structured around available resource rather than the protection of those victims assessed at high risk. This means victims may not always be getting the appropriate safeguarding they need.

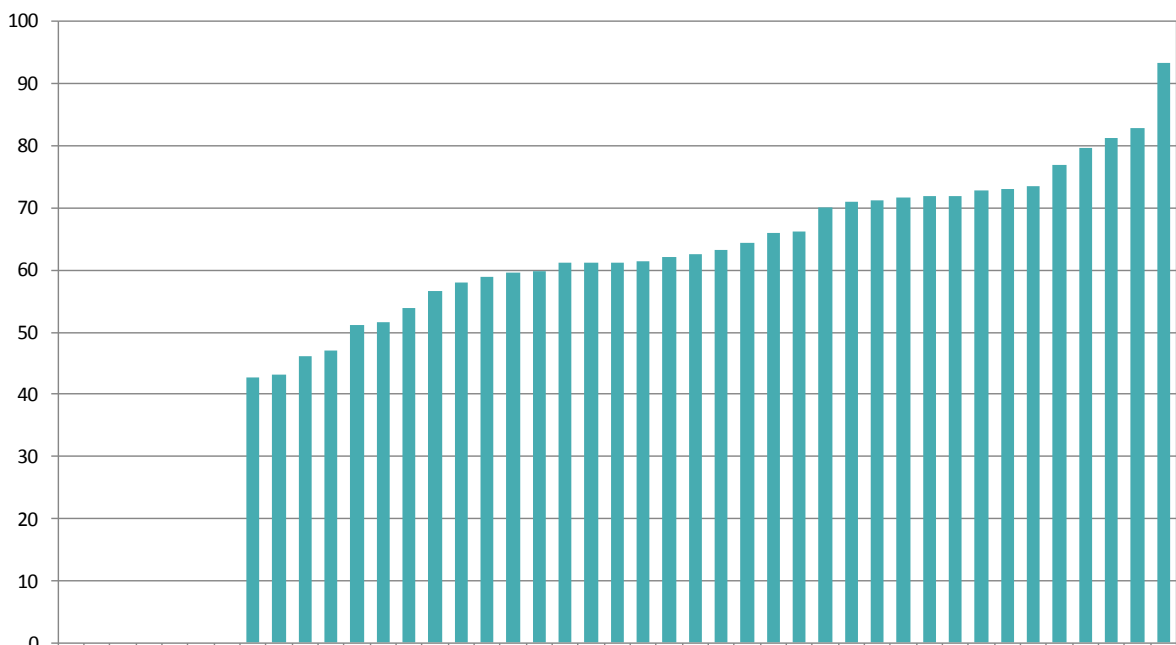
An offender management programme for domestic abusers has been piloted and although this is currently stalled the programme is still predominately focused on offenders who commit serious and acquisitive crime. A shared database with partner organisations tracks domestic abuse perpetrators and identifies the top ten repeat perpetrators to put in place early interventions with victims.

The force has made investment to ensure that all opportunities to safeguard high-risk victims of domestic abuse are taken. Also, it uses proactively the full range of police powers and its supervisory management of domestic abuse investigations is positive.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 8 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.

The way Nottinghamshire Police records data on its crime and custody systems does not allow the force to provide data on arrest rates for domestic abuse offences. Nottinghamshire Police was one of seven forces which could not provide this data, so this is not shown below in figure 1.

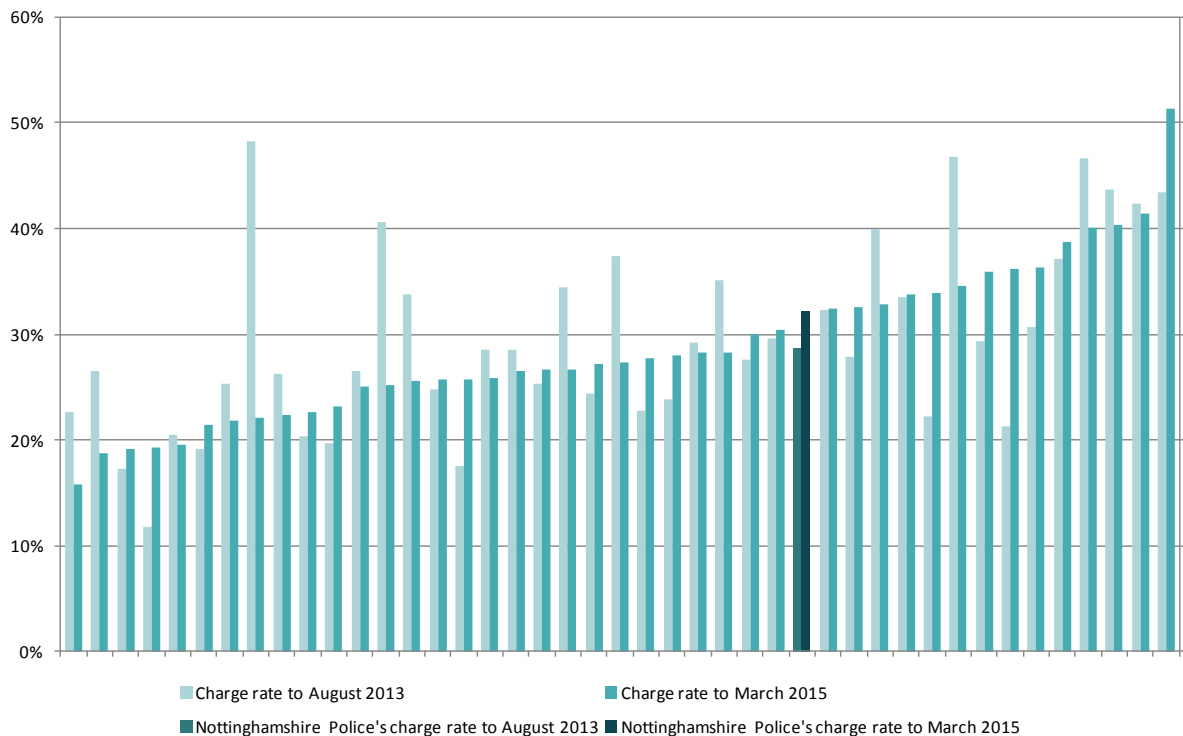
Figure 1: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015



Source: HMIC data return

The force's charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 32 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is an increase since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection in 2014 when the force rate was 29 percent for the 12 months to 31 August 2013, compared with 30 percent for England and Wales.

Figure 2: Domestic abuse charge rate for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 compared to the 12 months to 31 August 2013



Source: HMIC data return

HMIC also examined the 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 June 2014; it made 89 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 81 were granted. Fifteen 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 19 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹³ We found effective use of domestic violence protection notices (DVPNs)¹⁴ and domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) to safeguard victims.

¹³ The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

¹⁴ 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.

Summary of findings



Requires improvement

Nottinghamshire Police generally provides a good service in identifying and assessing the risks to vulnerable people. The force works well in partnership with other organisations. However, we found some areas where improvement is needed to ensure that the force can provide the best possible service to keep safe vulnerable people, particularly children.

When frontline officers identify a victim is vulnerable, they generally provide good safeguarding for the victim, however we sometimes found confusion as to whether a risk assessment or a child referral needs to take place. We also found backlogs in assessments, some involving children, awaiting referral to other organisations.

The force has improved its approach to tackling domestic abuse but still has work to do. In addition, it has decided not to refer all cases assessed as high-risk to multi-agency risk assessment conferences.

The force responds well to missing and absent children, however, it is not yet sufficiently prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. The force is planning to increase the number of staff in public protection team but needs to ensure staff are fully trained and skilled in dealing with vulnerable victims. In addition, the force has only provided limited training to staff in frontline roles on domestic abuse, missing and absent children and child sexual exploitation.

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.

Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its approach to safeguarding victims of domestic abuse who are assessed at high risk. It does not refer all high-risk cases to multi-agency risk assessment conferences and criteria differ between the county and city areas for those cases that will and will not be considered. The triaging process does not involve all partner organisations, is inconsistent with other forces and is contrary to recognised guidance.
- The force should improve its initial response to vulnerable victims by ensuring frontline officers and staff are appropriately trained to investigate and to safeguard vulnerable victims.
- The force should improve its investigation of cases involving vulnerable victims by ensuring officers with appropriate skills and expertise carry out such investigations and it supervises their workloads to ensure they can do so effectively.
- The force should improve the way it works with partners to share information and safeguard vulnerable people, specifically in relation to addressing the backlog in cases that require further assessment and referring to other organisations.
- The force should improve its compliance with the duties under the code of practice for victims of crime, specifically in relation to victim personal statements.
- The force should improve its response to persistent and repeat missing children by ensuring information from previous missing episodes is used to develop a co-ordinated and prioritised response.
- The force should improve its response to child sexual exploitation by developing its understanding of the nature and scale of the issue and ensuring that preventive activity is properly co-ordinated.