

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Northamptonshire Police



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Vulnerability in numbers



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



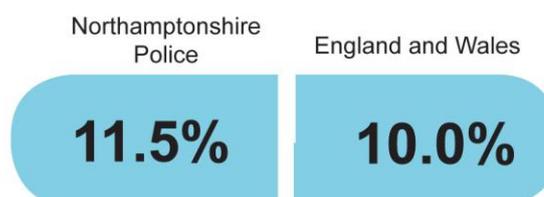
Change in recorded crimes (excluding fraud) 12 months to 31 March 2015 against 12 months to 31 March 2014



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



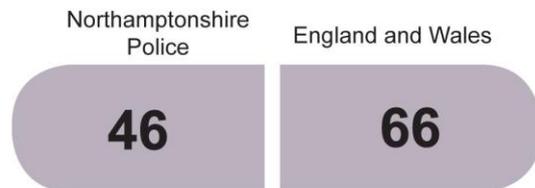
Change in domestic abuse recorded crime 12 months to 31 March 2015 against 12 months to 31 March 2014





Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

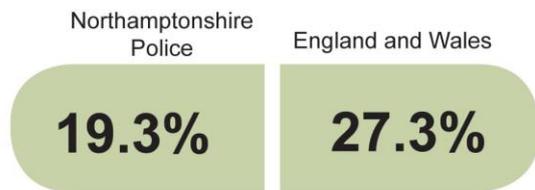


Charge rate

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

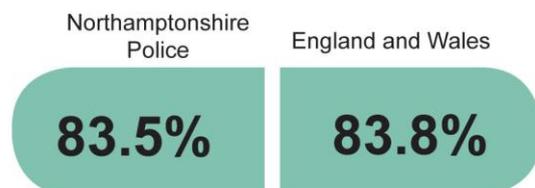


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015



***Northamptonshire 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 Northamptonshire Police.

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

Summary



Requires improvement

Northamptonshire Police is trying to improve the service it provides in identifying vulnerable people and responding to them, so that the public can be confident that victims are well supported. However, there are still several areas where more improvement is needed to ensure the service is consistent and vulnerable people, particularly children, are kept safe. Given the scale of the challenge in this area and risk that is posed to some of the most vulnerable people overall, HMIC judges that the force requires improvement.

The force has good systems and processes in place to deal with the identification of vulnerable people and risk at the initial point of contact. However, the force needs to improve its call-handlers' awareness of the nature of victims' vulnerability and empathy for victims, to ensure that victims feel fully engaged from the outset of their contact with police. The use of the THRIVE¹ approach to assess threat, risk and harm and the associated training the force has provided to its staff is designed to improve this situation but the benefits have yet to be seen.

While the force has effective processes to support the identification of vulnerable victims through a standardised risk assessment, officers often do not secure vital evidence. The force has invested in vulnerability training for frontline officers and staff but needs to improve its training for domestic abuse.

The limited capacity and relative inexperience of investigative staff in the specialist domestic abuse investigation unit mean that the force is not safeguarding some high-risk victims of domestic abuse. Equally, investigations for standard and medium-risk cases are often below standard. Investigations of missing and absent people and child sexual exploitation are of a good standard.

¹ A decision model known as THRIVE (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerable and engagement), which helps staff to assess threat and risk and decide how best to resolve a call.

The force has developed strong MARAC² and MASH³ models with good information-sharing and joint safeguarding activity.

The absence of recent or fully-developed multi-agency problem profiles⁴ hinders the force's ability to respond to and safeguard vulnerable groups that are missing or absent, or subject to domestic abuse. This also affects the force's preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation. This inspection only considered how well-prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation.

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

HMIC found a strong commitment by Northamptonshire Police to protecting the most vulnerable within the county, which this is understood and supported by officers and staff at all levels in the force. The police and crime commissioner's (PCC) Police and Crime Plan 2014-2017 aims to make Northamptonshire the safest place in the country. The plan emphasises strongly a new approach to tackling domestic abuse and other forms of inter-personal violence based on prevention. The force works closely with the police and crime commissioner and other agencies to support this major change to its management of risk and vulnerability.

Looking at other forces for good practice, Northamptonshire has brought together a number of different organisations to extend its reach and focus. It has set a standard for gauging repeat victims and is now deciding on suitable responses when the person is a repeat victim. The force's aim is to risk-assess individuals to decide their level of vulnerability rather than at crime types. The risk assessment cuts across crime categories when looking at repeat victims so as to understand individual vulnerability better.

The force's performance framework used to be very traditional, focusing on serious acquisitive crime. Now the force uses a simple diagnostic or analytical tool, which is more weighted towards domestic abuse, sexual offences and protecting vulnerable

² MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference) – a local meeting where information about high-risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies.

³ A multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) brings together into a single location principal 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.

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.

people. The force is now more focused around risk and vulnerability, and as a result the force's culture is gradually being changed through training.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

Forces define vulnerability in different ways. The majority of forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime⁵ or that referred to in ACPO guidance.⁶ Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

Northamptonshire uses its own force definition and defines vulnerability as:

“There are several different definitions in place dependent on the context. For example, when officers report a vulnerable adult to Northamptonshire County Council they are identifying a person over the age of 18 who is unable to take care of themselves, protect themselves from harm or from being exploited because they have a mental health problem, a disability, a sensory impairment, are old and frail or have some form of illness. The force also has an extensive policy on vulnerable victim and witness interviews which explains several criteria which can apply in defining contextual vulnerability.”

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. Northamptonshire 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 good systems and processes in place to deal with vulnerability and risk at the initial point of contact. The implementation of the THRIVE assessment model in the force control room has resulted in every call being assessed for threat, harm and risk and related factors. This allows the force to tailor its service to the needs of each victim and puts officers and staff where they are needed most.

Staff in the force control room receiving calls grade them as emergency, prompt, scheduled or non-attendance. While the initial call-taker sets the grade, a supervisor can adjust it if appropriate. When a call is immediately obvious as an emergency, THRIVE is omitted and the basic details are sent to despatch, although the call-taker

⁵ *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

⁶ 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/

should keep the caller on the line until police units arrive. In this way the force aims to provide a bespoke level of response to victims and systematic consideration of vulnerability. The system is supported by an effective intelligence system, which allows access to multiple intelligence systems of the police and other agencies. This enables staff to review any further information that may be available to support the initial assessment of risk and if required re-assess the grading of the response.

Assessing levels of risk and need

The move to the THRIVE assessment model has proved challenging for the force. It includes deciding not to deploy resources where previously police would have attended. Equally, at the time of our inspection, approximately 20 percent of staff in the contact centre and force control room were still waiting for THRIVE training. This has the potential for inconsistent decision-making which may affect adversely the service the force provides to vulnerable people.

We listened to a number of calls from victims of domestic abuse. While some call-takers demonstrated an appropriate level of concern for the vulnerability of the victims, others did little to reassure victims. Instead they concentrated on obtaining information, even to the point where they failed to identify a threat to the imminent safety of the caller. Northamptonshire has recently introduced the role of service improvement delivery officer who reviews calls and provides feedback to staff. The force hopes that this will improve the overall quality of its initial contact with victims.

The force identifies repeat domestic abuse victims through system searches and this seems to work well, also providing attending officers with additional information about previous incidents. However, we found that staff were not always certain what is a repeat victim, quoting a variety of definitions to us.

From the cases we reviewed during the inspection, it was apparent that the force deals with calls about missing and absent people⁷ in a timely fashion. The initial action by the force helps to identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk. Force flags and markers on the command and control system are evident at the outset of incident reports. There are markers for child sexual exploitation and other vulnerability indicators. Risk assessments generated on the missing persons database following the first attendance by frontline staff are all signed-off by supervisors. However, the content of information within those assessments is of variable quality. For example, it was notable that, while comments about missing children reflect previous missing occurrences, the language used in some cases was misleading. It suggested that, because the missing person was in company with people of similar age, or was described as being sexually active, there was no risk of them being subject to child sexual exploitation.

⁷ 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.

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

HMIC found that Northamptonshire Police understands the requirements of some vulnerable groups better than others. The force lacks recent or fully-developed multi-agency problem profiles or detailed analysis which would help it to understand what vulnerable people actually need from the police and partners. This hinders the force's ability to respond to and safeguard vulnerable groups that are missing or absent or subject to domestic abuse, and its preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation.

Protecting vulnerable people training has significantly improved officer awareness and identification of child vulnerability. The force has recently introduced a new process where officers and staff can raise concerns regarding children by submitting a 'children coming to notice' form. This allows the concerns to be referred to the appropriate unit. The high-level of such referrals demonstrates that officers are more conscious of the importance of referrals and liaison with other agencies to support children at risk. In particular, the force has recognised more fully the importance of support needs for children in domestic abuse incidents.

The force has an information-sharing agreement with partners in the MASH in relation to sharing concerns about child safeguarding. This includes those affected by domestic abuse incidents. Any child who has been affected by a high-risk domestic abuse incident will be treated as a priority within the MASH process.

The force is also in the process of setting up a new system where domestic violence information will be shared with school nurses and education safeguarding leads, if a child has been affected by domestic violence.

In order to provide the most appropriate support to vulnerable victims, the force has invested more resource in the parts of its organisation which works to keep them safe. The force has set up a protecting vulnerable people department which provides specialist skills and investigation in relation to protecting vulnerable people and responds specifically to safety issues associated with the individual, the family and perpetrators. The department includes a child protection team and domestic abuse investigation, dangerous person management, missing persons, MASH and referral units.

In addition, Northamptonshire Police has created several teams to focus specifically on responding to domestic abuse, including a specialist domestic abuse investigation unit, a domestic abuse response team, a violence reduction team, and officers trained as domestic abuse advisers in each safer neighbourhood team.

The force has set up a multi-agency co-located unit to respond to those children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation and begun to set up a vulnerability desk within its intelligence bureau. This may help the force to analyse the issues for key areas of vulnerability including female genital mutilation and human trafficking and then to develop effective problem profiles.

This support has been underpinned by a large investment in training to make sure that its staff can identify those at most risk of harm. Between August 2013 and September 2014 approximately 1,425 officers and staff from the force attended a two-day training course about protecting vulnerable people. Training was provided by specialist departments covering topics including domestic abuse, child protection, child sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁸

The force has effective processes in place to support the identification of vulnerable victims, however the processes are not always consistently used.

Response officers

Officers attending domestic abuse incidents are required to complete a structured risk assessment form (DASH)⁹ which aims to identify an individual's level of vulnerability. However the DASH form is often treated by officers merely as a tick-box exercise. This means that they do not use professional judgement to determine accurately the actual level of risk. While the recent vulnerability training was well-received by staff, it only included a 45-minute session on domestic abuse which covered stalking, harassment and so-called honour-based violence. The force needs to explain better to officers the concept of the DASH form so that they understand it is not merely a list of questions.

The force uses the DASH risk assessment as its starting point to ensure that it provides victims with an appropriate level of support and where necessary refers them to other agencies. A partnership-funded service hosted by the force provides county-wide independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) services to high risk domestic abuse victims. Between April 2014 and March 2015, the force reported it

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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/#risk-identification-and-assessment

made 1,550 referrals to the IDVA service. The advisers are positive about the increased number of referrals made directly by response officers rather than specialist units. This allows for earlier safeguarding intervention and is an indication that frontline force staff are increasingly aware of vulnerability issues.

The force expects officers to conduct an effective initial investigation with vulnerable victims of domestic abuse. This should include taking statements, conducting house-to-house enquiries and seizing vital evidence such as phones. However, we found that this often does not occur. Shortages of officers and volume of work have been cited by officers as the major cause of this situation. We found a recent example where an officer was dealing with a high-risk victim of domestic abuse and was constantly being requested by the control room to make himself available for other incidents. The officer's supervisor had to intervene to prevent this, but this pressure may result in officers not always dealing with victims or incidents properly.

Of particular concern to HMIC is the use of body-worn video cameras. These are not always used at domestic abuse incidents meaning vital evidence which supports an investigation may be lost. On some occasions where officers had used body-worn video cameras and supervisors had subsequently reviewed the footage, supervisors identified a poor attitude or, of greater concern, events at odds with the crime report. This is worrying and the force needs to respond in order to ensure that it improves the service its officers provide to victims.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

Outside of the control room, the force uses its system of daily management meetings to highlight risk and vulnerability and to ensure accountability and the appropriate allocation of officers. HMIC observed daily management meetings for both Northampton town and the rest of the county. Both are managed well with attendance from all relevant departments within the organisation. We found an appropriate focus on high-risk domestic abuse victims and missing people with a good degree of scrutiny by the chairperson on actions undertaken and the allocation of further actions.

While staff attitude and awareness towards vulnerability has improved, frontline supervisors are still aware of the difficulty many staff have in assessing the specific threat to an individual. This is especially in relation to such offences as child sexual exploitation or so-called honour-based violence. Pressure placed on officers to move on to the next call and inadequate supervision may lead to missed opportunities for safeguarding and leave vulnerable victims open to further threat, risk or harm.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?¹⁰

In setting up a department dedicated to protecting vulnerable people, the force has shown its commitment to safeguarding those who are at most risk of harm. Several units within this department consist of multi-agency staff co-located to ensure that a range of enforcement and prevention activity can be considered. Equally, investigators within these units are expected to be specialists who offer support and advice to response and neighbourhood officers and who can take on investigative and safeguarding activity for the more serious and specialist offences. However, while the force has invested in new approaches, new teams and in training, HMIC found that force actions are inconsistent, often meaning that the service it offers to victims is inconsistent.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

HMIC reviewed the case files of a sample of investigations,¹¹ in which some vulnerable victims were identified. The file review demonstrated that the force was generally carrying out effective investigations. It is clear that the force is now giving greater consideration of vulnerability and safeguarding to more traditional areas such as rape, domestic abuse and child protection. The force's investigation into some minor crimes could have been better, particularly supervised better. There were examples where the force was not proactive when it came to dealing with difficult-to-engage victims; this was of concern during a rape investigation which caused an urgent safeguarding issue to be raised directly with the force during our review.

We also examined a number of standard-risk cases which are investigated by response officers or the prisoner investigation unit once a suspect is arrested. We found examples of poor initial investigations, the absence of effective investigation plans and potential missed opportunities where further evidence to support taking a case to court was either not considered or not developed properly. As a result, vulnerable victims may have lost the security that court action against an offender could have provided.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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

The force clearly promotes the importance of the code of practice for victims of crime. Officers know the code well, are able to discuss what is required for a bespoke package of victim care and emphasise clearly the importance of keeping the victim informed and updated and being realistic and honest. Officers have a dedicated smartphone through which a victim can contact them directly. This makes it easier for the victim to make contact but it also places a responsibility on the officer to ensure they are available for this contact in their tour of duty.

The force has clearly spent time and effort highlighting the code of practice for victims of crime but this has not yet reached all staff. We found that officers offer some of the services that the victim support service can provide. If met with apparent refusal of assistance, officers will discuss this further with victims to query why and to ensure they know assistance is available at any time. They offer a victim personal statement¹² where they consider it applicable, but do not push if the victim chooses not to provide one. Posters to raise staff awareness are visible in police stations, but unless officers are fully aware what services they can offer to victims, it is possible that victims do not receive the bespoke package of assistance to which they are entitled.

HMIC found that the force has an effective process in place to ensure its compliance with the code of practice. The force intelligence system provides automated weekly reminders to supervisors to monitor and check that victims are being kept updated on the progress of their case. Supervisors also check to ensure the victim's preferences for contact were initially recorded and subsequently complied with. The process provides the opportunity for victims to receive timely updates on the progression of their case and to be reassured that the police are dealing effectively with their case.

Working with partners

The force uses the MARAC process to ensure that those at serious risk through domestic abuse are correctly identified and that all aspects of safeguarding activity are considered and employed. MARACs have been extended to all districts and now take cases below the standard high-risk threshold based upon professional judgement and as circumstances become more serious. Partner attendance and information-sharing is good. However, recent non-attendance by representatives of children's services has been raised with the local authority. HMIC observed MARAC meetings for different areas of the force, and saw that all agencies knew about the

¹² 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.

cases ahead of the meeting and that extensive activity and communication had already occurred. Northamptonshire Police does not make referrals to other voluntary organisations because these organisations do not have the capacity to take on such work. Instead it gives victims information about the relevant services so the victim can use the service as they wish. Officers carry supplies of leaflets and documentation which outline all the available local support services.

Northamptonshire has an information-sharing agreement with partners in the MASH in relation to concerns about child safeguarding. Any child who has been affected by a high-risk domestic violence incident will be treated as a priority within the MASH process and consideration will be given to a section 47 investigation.¹³ The force is also setting up a system where domestic violence information will be shared with school nurses and education safeguarding leads if a child has been affected by domestic violence. Northamptonshire Police is currently testing the process in one area of the county. Staff within the force use a child protection referral form for children coming to the notice of police. The increase in the number and quality of these forms is indicative of a heightened awareness and understanding of child safeguarding by frontline officers and staff.

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

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

Missing and absent children

In the initial stages of an incident, the force investigates missing people effectively. Officers are expected to risk assess the nature of the disappearance and complete a number of basic actions based on an aide-memoire. These include a thorough search, seeking authorisation for publicity and a search of the immediate area. The report will subsequently be reviewed by a supervisor and actions for further activity put on the missing persons case management system.

¹³ Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to investigate and make inquiries into the circumstances of children considered to be at risk of 'significant harm' and, where these inquiries indicate the need, to decide what action, if any, it may need to take to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

The force works in partnership with other agencies on a daily basis when children and young people are reported missing or absent. Details of all cases are shared regularly with professionals in education, health and other local authority teams. However, the missing persons unit (MPU) is struggling to support this process due to staff shortages. The MPU is required to supply details of 'safe and well checks' conducted by officers in relation to missing children who have returned, but is often failing to do so in a timely manner. These details are required by the initial response team (IRT) to support return interviews carried out by their staff. Generally these interviews are carried out within 72 hours of return and IRT staff report they often conduct return interviews with little or no advance knowledge of the circumstances of the absence. Once these interviews are completed updates are sent back to the missing persons' unit for further dissemination. Further delays often occur within the MPU before these reports are examined and recorded onto the force intelligence system to aid enquiries if further missing incidents occur. The force needs to review the resilience of its MPU to enable it to support this vital intelligence function.

However, overall, the force's ability to deal with missing and absent children is impeded by the absence of an overarching problem profile or strategic analysis. This is of particular concern in relation to children identified as repeatedly missing or locations that frequently come to notice, such as children's residential care homes. The force does not address these as problems to be solved, but as a series of consecutive isolated events that receive a tactical response and with limited development or linking of intelligence after each occurrence. The force may miss effective safeguarding opportunities if a consideration of all the factors and circumstances behind each child's absence is not available to be shared and developed with partner agencies.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

Northamptonshire Police is developing its approach to ensuring that it is well-prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. HMIC's 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 conducted these complex investigations with other agencies such as children's services as these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.

The force has shown great innovation in setting up a multi-agency co-located unit with Northamptonshire County Council and others to respond to those children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation. The 'reducing incidents of sexual exploitation' (RISE) team is an evolving unit which investigates allegations of child sexual exploitation, targets offenders proactively, manages and develops intelligence and engages with vulnerable children and young people. The unit is supported by an IRT staffed by partner agencies. The IRT aims to capture and develop all intelligence

concerning missing and absent children and young people to support the RISE team in its activities, as well as ensuring appropriate intervention by social services.

Currently the force does not have access to a child sexual exploitation problem profile that captures analysis from all partners to help it to identify the scale of the child sexual exploitation problem in the county and to focus its resources accordingly. The RISE team is focused on investigative, preventive and engagement work. While health services are also at the forefront of child sexual exploitation safeguarding, it would be beneficial for other key agencies such as education to be engaged more at a strategic level. This would assist in developing the child sexual exploitation multi-agency action plan to deliver the child sexual exploitation strategy.

The force's efforts in liaison with partners from the Northamptonshire safeguarding children board (NSCB)¹⁴ to involve other agencies and the wider public in identifying and responding to child sexual exploitation issues is worthy of particular mention. The child sexual exploitation awareness-raising campaign which took place between March and June 2015 promoted awareness to over 3.8million people via social media, billboard advertising and digital audio advertising. There were also 3,874 unique hits to the new NSCB website during the campaign period. As part of the campaign a conference was held where 600 of the county's frontline staff from various agencies were presented with a new on-line toolkit to help them identify, tackle and refer potential cases of child sexual exploitation. As a result of the campaign, the RISE team has seen a 50 percent increase in referrals. The force would benefit from a similar internal campaign to reinforce and develop existing knowledge of child sexual exploitation issues among officers and staff.

Domestic abuse

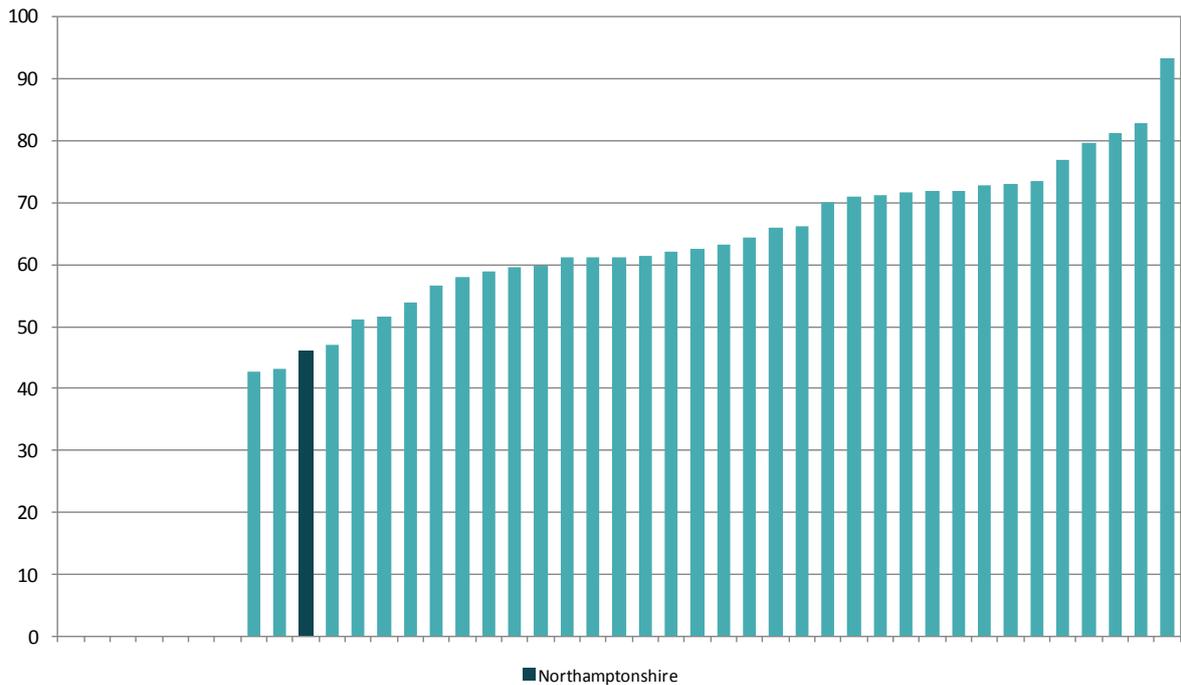
A number of areas were highlighted for improvement during HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014. The force responded to the recommendations with an action plan which was assessed and commented upon by HMIC in January 2015. The force has clearly attempted to address the recommendations, although some require more work before we consider them fulfilled.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 44 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 12 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.

¹⁴ Safeguarding Children boards have a statutory duty to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

As shown in figure 1, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Northamptonshire made 46 arrests. This is a slight increase since HMIC inspected domestic abuse in 2014. HMIC is aware that the force has since introduced a policy which highlights the requirement to take positive action in all domestic abuse cases. However, this still represents a low arrest rate compared to other forces and this remains an issue the force should review.

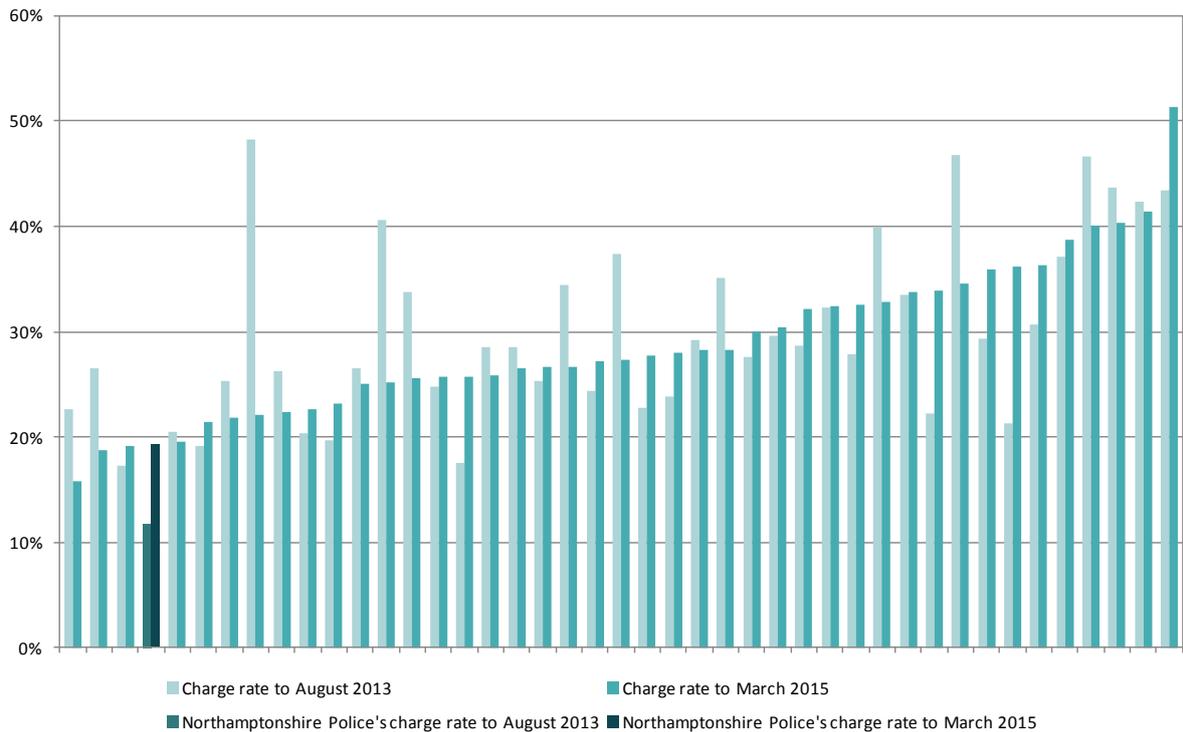
Figure 1: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015



Source: HMIC data return

The force's charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 19 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is an increase since the HMIC domestic abuse inspection in 2014 when the force rate was 12 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

The force has recently rewritten its domestic abuse problem profile with Northamptonshire County Council but it is somewhat limited in its scope. The force recognises that further work is required across partner agencies to collect, analyse and share data to fill current gaps in its knowledge. For instance, the community in Northamptonshire is diverse and we found some local initiatives to build relationships with minority and harder-to-reach groups. Information leaflets have been translated into the languages of those represented in the county. However, the force recognises that it needs to undertake more work with other agencies, especially health services.

The force has invested in resources to create a specialist domestic abuse unit. The team deals with cases which score 17 or more on the DASH risk assessment model and other high-risk cases which are more complicated and score over 3 out of 5 in an additional matrix. Cases which score between 14 and 16 are still high-risk cases, but are investigated by the non-specialist CID department. Other agencies report that this often means that, while the CID investigations are usually of a good standard, the victim care and updates are limited and victims are more likely to withdraw their support of the investigation. While the creation of the unit is a positive step, HMIC identified a shortage of staff, including supervisors, who are fully accredited to the required investigative level.

The domestic abuse unit reviews DASH forms using a unique additional assessment matrix. Victims of domestic abuse initially graded as high risk can be re-scored to a lower risk level by the unit. The response team then has to take the case back, despite the view of the attending officer and the IDVA that it is a high-risk case. In this way, the force may not be providing the best service to some victims of domestic abuse. The force should review whether the matrix is being used to reduce the level of the unit's workload rather than an objective assessment of the true risk.

The force acknowledges that the lack of capacity of the unit means it is unable to support all victims. As a result, it has set up a domestic abuse response team of specialist uniformed officers to support safeguarding and intervention activities within Northampton town. A similar unit, the violence reduction team, serves the rest of the county. This team reviews all cases referred to the IDVA service and, through development of local intelligence and building of rapport with victims, brings deeper insight and understanding of cases. The force has also introduced domestic abuse advisers on each safer neighbourhood team who have undergone extended training on domestic abuse and can offer advice and support to colleagues. These officers should be the first port of call in conducting follow-up visits to victims assessed as standard risk. However, pressure of work often means that visits are carried out by officers and staff with limited experience or training in domestic abuse matters.

In establishing a dedicated domestic abuse unit, the force has demonstrated a commitment to investigate and safeguard victims of domestic abuse, especially those most at risk. On occasions where going to court for a domestic abuse case is not viable, police can consider using a domestic violence prevention order (DVPO).¹⁵ HMIC found that Northamptonshire Police has made limited use of DVPOs. This could be in part due to the force's previous decision to consider their use only in high-risk cases.

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 May 2014; it made 17 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which all were granted. Four 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 24 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹⁶

¹⁵ DVPNs (domestic violence prevention notices) may be issued by an authorised police officer to prevent a suspected perpetrator from returning to a victim's home and/or contacting the victim. Following the issue of the DVPN the police must apply to the magistrates for a domestic violence prevention order (DVPO). The DVPO will be granted for a period of up to 28 days.

¹⁶ The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

We were pleased to note that the force has recently decided to extend the use of DVPOs so that it can now be considered in all domestic abuse cases. It is of note that staff are concerned that when breaches of these orders are brought before the courts there are no additional sanctions being taken against the perpetrators. It is unclear whether this has been discussed with the courts.

Summary of findings



Requires improvement

Northamptonshire Police is trying to improve the service it provides in identifying vulnerable people and responding to them, so that the public can be confident that the force supports victims well. The force has good systems and processes in place to deal with vulnerability and risk at the initial point of contact. However, an improved awareness of vulnerability and empathy for victims by call-handlers is required to ensure that vulnerable victims feel fully engaged from the outset of their contact with police.

The use of the THRIVE approach to assess threat, risk and harm and the associated training the force has provided to its staff is designed to improve this situation but the benefits have yet to be seen and the force needs to improve its training for domestic abuse.

Investigations of missing and absent people and child sexual exploitation are of a good standard and the force has developed strong MARAC and MASH models with good information-sharing and joint safeguarding activity. However, there are still several areas where more improvement is needed to ensure the service is consistent and vulnerable people are kept safe. While the force has effective processes to support the identification of vulnerable victims through a standardised risk assessment, officers often do not secure vital evidence.

The limited capacity and relative inexperience of investigative staff in the specialist domestic abuse investigation unit mean that the force is not safeguarding some high-risk victims of domestic abuse. Equally, the force's investigations for standard and medium-risk cases are often below standard.

The absence of recent or fully developed multi-agency problem profiles hinders the force's ability to respond to and safeguard vulnerable groups that are missing or absent, or subject to domestic abuse. This also affects the force's preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation.

Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its initial assessment of risk to vulnerable people by ensuring its staff who take calls are appropriately-trained.
- The force should improve its investigation of cases involving vulnerable victims, including rape, by ensuring that it carries out investigations to the required standards with proper supervision and recording of plans and actions.
- The force should improve its response to missing and absent children and those at risk of sexual exploitation by ensuring it improves its understanding of the scale and nature of the issue. This understanding should be achieved through analysis and assessment of available information, including that of partners.
- The force should improve its response to persistent and repeat missing children by ensuring it uses information from previous missing episodes to develop a co-ordinated and prioritised response.
- The force should improve its investigation and safeguarding of domestic abuse victims by ensuring that frontline staff carry out risk assessments to the appropriate standards, staff attending incidents of domestic abuse consistently use body-worn video cameras and that the force has sufficient staff with the appropriate professional skills and experience to investigate cases and safeguard victims.