



Inspecting policing  
in the public interest

# Devon and Cornwall Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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## Introduction

The extent and nature of domestic abuse remains shocking. A core part of the policing mission is to prevent crime and disorder. Domestic abuse causes both serious harm and constitutes a considerable proportion of overall crime. It costs society an estimated £15.7 billion a year.<sup>1</sup> 77 women were killed by their partners or ex-partners in 2012/13.<sup>2</sup> In the UK, one in four young people aged 10 to 24 reported that they experienced domestic violence and abuse during their childhood.<sup>3</sup> Forces told us that crime relating to domestic abuse constitutes some 8 percent of all recorded crime in their area, and one third of their recorded assaults with injury. On average the police receive an emergency call relating to domestic abuse every 30 seconds.

People may experience domestic abuse regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class, age or disability. Domestic abuse may also occur in a range of different relationships including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender, as well as within families.

While both men and women can be victims of domestic abuse, women are much more likely to be victims than men.

The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

*“any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:<sup>4</sup>*

- *psychological*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial*
- *emotional”.*

<sup>1</sup> Walby, S. (2009). *The cost of domestic violence*. Retrieved from: [www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc.../Cost\\_of\\_domestic\\_violence\\_update.doc](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc.../Cost_of_domestic_violence_update.doc)

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (2013). *Focus on violent crime and sexual offences 2012/13* – Chapter 4: Intimate Personal Violence and Partner Abuse. Retrieved from: [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_352362.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Radford L, Corral S, Bradley C et al (2011) *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*. London: NSPCC.

<sup>4</sup> All definitions are taken from [www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse](http://www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse)

*Controlling behaviour* is defined as a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

*Coercive behaviour* is defined as: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. This definition includes so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

Tackling domestic abuse and keeping its victims safe is both vitally important, and incredibly complicated. The police service needs to have the right tools, resources, training and partnerships in place to help it identify victims and keep them safe. It also needs to investigate and bring to justice offenders, when no two domestic abuse environments are the same, and some victims have suffered in silence for years or even decades.

In September 2013, the Home Secretary commissioned HMIC to conduct an inspection.<sup>5</sup> We were asked to consider:

- the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic violence and abuse, focusing on the outcomes for victims;
- whether risks to victims of domestic violence and abuse are adequately managed;
- identifying lessons learnt from how the police approach domestic violence and abuse; and
- making any necessary recommendations in relation to these findings when considered alongside current practice.

To answer these questions, HMIC collected data and reviewed files from the 43 Home Office funded forces. We spoke to 70 victims of domestic abuse in focus groups throughout England and Wales and surveyed over 100 victims online. We also surveyed 200 professionals working with victims of domestic abuse.

We inspected all police forces in England and Wales, interviewing senior and operational leads in forces, holding focus groups with frontline staff and partners, and carrying out visits to police stations (which were unannounced) to test the reality of each force's approach with frontline officers. Our inspection teams were supplemented by expert peers, which included public protection

<sup>5</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence)

experts from over 15 forces and those working with victims of domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

This report details what HMIC found in Devon and Cornwall Police and at the end of the report we set out some recommendations. These recommendations should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for all forces made in the national report.<sup>6</sup> A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

<sup>6</sup> There is a requirement under section 55(5) and section 55(6) of the Police Act 1996 for the police and crime commissioner to publish a copy of their comments on this report and the recommendations for all forces in the national report and forward these to the Home Secretary.

# Domestic abuse in Devon and Cornwall<sup>7</sup>

## Calls for assistance



In Devon and Cornwall, domestic abuse accounts for 3% of calls to the police for assistance<sup>8</sup>. Of these calls, 46% were from repeat victims.

## Crime

# 11%

Domestic abuse accounts for 11% of all recorded crime.

## Assault with intent

# 25%

Devon and Cornwall recorded 643 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 160 were domestic abuse related. This is 25% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Assault with injury

# 34%

The force also recorded 10,158 assaults with injury, of these 3,411 were domestic abuse related. This is 34% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Data in this section is based upon forces' own definition of calls for assistance and domestic abuse, and forces' use of domestic abuse markers on IT systems.

Source: HMIC data collection. Crime figures are taken from police-recorded crime submitted to the Home Office.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that not all of the calls to assistance the force receive will generate an incident or crime.

## Harassment

# 59%

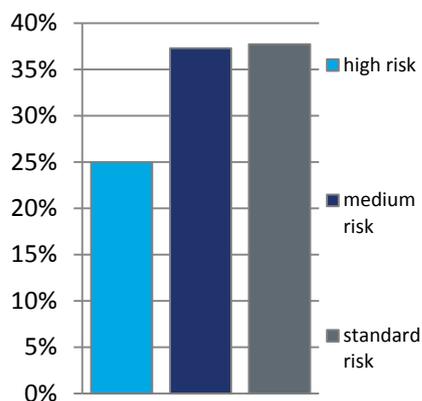
The force recorded 1,201 harassment offences, of these 704 were domestic abuse related. This is 59% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Sexual offences

# 13%

The force also recorded 2,061 sexual offences, of these 269 were domestic abuse related. This is 13% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Risk levels



On 31 August 2013 Devon and Cornwall had 1,161 active domestic abuse cases; 25% were high risk, 37% were medium risk, and 38% were standard risk.

## Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded, there were 51 arrests in Devon and Cornwall. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

## Outcomes



Devon and Cornwall recorded 9,212 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 20% resulted in a charge, 13% resulted in a caution and, 2% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

## Executive summary

HMIC found that there are some significant risks in the way that Devon and Cornwall Police tackle domestic abuse. While it is a clear priority for the force and the police and crime commissioner (PCC), and there are strong relationships with partners across the two counties providing services to victims of domestic abuse, the force does not yet provide a consistent service in all cases of domestic abuse. There is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities of all staff particularly in relation to safeguarding victims. Ongoing workforce reorganisation provides an opportunity to achieve this.

While there are pockets of good work taking place across the force, and those working with victims are committed to improving the service the victims receive, this report identifies areas for further development and improvement.

### Identifying victims

Upon receipt of a call about domestic abuse, control room staff identify victims and allocate an appropriate resource to deal with the case, grading the response according to threat, risk and harm. HMIC found that there are some weaknesses in training: call handlers lacked a clear understanding of the full definition of domestic abuse; there was a lack of clarity about what constituted a repeat victim and how to identify if a victim is vulnerable. This means that the force cannot be confident that it is consistently identifying victims of domestic abuse and providing an appropriate response in all cases.

There is a good level of supervision of domestic abuse incidents in the control room to ensure priority is given to victims at first point of contact, although supervisors' comments are not frequently recorded on the incident log.

### Keeping victims safe

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the PCC and senior officers. The force has policies and procedures to support staff in dealing with domestic abuse although these are not consistently applied.

HMIC found weaknesses and inconsistencies in the oversight and supervision of the risk assessment process during initial attendance and there has been limited training for officers in undertaking risk assessments. However staff joining the force have induction training which includes domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment training. Therefore the force cannot be confident that it is consistently assessing risk effectively and taking appropriate action to minimise risk to victims in all cases.

High-risk cases of domestic abuse are generally dealt with well, but there is less consistency with medium and standard risk cases and the responsibility for the management of risk to these victims needs to be clearer. A greater victim focus is needed across the force with tighter supervision of risk assessments to improve service to all victims.

## **Management of risk**

The force employs specialist domestic abuse staff, who we found to be knowledgeable and experienced. They provide a comprehensive service to high-risk victims. There are strong working relationships between the force and partner agencies dealing with domestic abuse in Devon and Cornwall, both at a county and local level. Multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) and multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangements are working well to make victims of domestic abuse safer.

HMIC found that there is a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities for all staff dealing with domestic abuse, particularly around who is responsible for safeguarding and maintaining contact with victims in medium and standard risk cases. This lack of clarity is leading to confusion among staff and inconsistencies in services across the force which means that the risks to victims may not be adequately managed by the force and victims may not receive the service they need to keep them safe.

## **Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe**

The force has reviewed its operation and processes for delivery of public protection services including domestic abuse. A new team is planned to be introduced, the sexual offences and domestic abuse investigation team (SODAIT) and a new way of working will be piloted from April 2014. The proposals provide much higher staffing levels in the team. However, while anticipating the change, local public protection teams have adapted their working arrangements and practices in different ways during this transition period, and are providing an inconsistent level of service to victims.

The recent introduction of a process to identify and manage serial perpetrators of domestic abuse is a positive step. It provides a focus to target perpetrators and exploit opportunities to intervene early to prevent future offending. The procedure to identify the most serious offenders needs further refinement, for example taking into account the threat, harm and risk they pose to victims.

The force is keen to learn lessons and improve services and has established a number of force-wide meetings to ensure learning can be shared from a wide range of reviews.

## Findings

### **How does the force identify victims of domestic abuse, and in particular repeat and vulnerable victims?**

Upon receipt of a call about domestic abuse, control room staff identify victims and allocate an appropriate resource to deal with the case, grading the response according to threat, risk and harm. HMIC found that there are some weaknesses in training: call handlers lacked a clear understanding of the full definition of domestic abuse; there was a lack of clarity about what constituted a repeat victim and how to identify if a victim is vulnerable. This means that the force cannot be confident that it is consistently identifying victims of domestic abuse and providing an appropriate response in all cases.

There is a good level of supervision of domestic abuse incidents in the control room to ensure priority is given to victims at first point of contact, although supervisors' comments are not frequently recorded on the incident log.

Victims of domestic abuse are identified through calls received in the force control room, reports at police stations and through referrals from other agencies to a MARAC. Calls received by Devon and Cornwall Police into its control room are recorded on an electronic incident log managed by their command and control system, 'STORM'. Staff use an electronic check list to assess the level of risk faced by the victim at this first point of contact.

Domestic abuse calls are assessed in the same way as any other call for assistance received in the police control room, to allocate an 'immediate, prompt or standard' response. There is also a 'vulnerable' category that takes priority over a standard response. This is used where the call handler assesses that the caller or people present at an incident, for example children, are vulnerable.

In making this initial risk assessment, the call handler conducts immediate research on the address and any people who are linked to the location including repeat callers, high risk offenders and children at risk. These issues are identified by 'flags' or 'markers' attached to an incident location following previous police involvement. However there is no specific warning flag for domestic abuse. Call handlers have access to a separate dedicated research department attached to the control room that can conduct more in-depth research in priority cases, for example where it is immediately apparent that it is a high-risk situation. It is then a matter of professional judgement by the call handler to determine the appropriate response categorisation. It is important that as much information as possible is relayed to the attending officer so that they are prepared when they arrive at the scene and can make an informed

assessment of the situation. HMIC found that in many cases, information and intelligence from police systems is not routinely being passed to the attending officers until they specifically ask for it.

Officers are allocated to deal with the incident in a timely way according to the call handlers' assessment of the risk and the urgency for a police response. In high-risk incidents of domestic abuse an immediate or prompt response is generally applied accompanied by a force direction to attending staff to take positive action to make people safe. In medium and standard risk incidents, a standard response may apply which can include attendance through an appointment system. This is generally on occasions where it best suits the needs of the victim.

Training received by police call handlers in relation to domestic abuse was found to be inconsistent. New staff have received some awareness training in domestic abuse but longer-serving staff could not recall any relevant training to assist their risk assessment of calls. They do have access to guidance and briefing notes about domestic abuse on the force intranet system ('PIRATES'), but were not aware of the breadth of the definition of domestic abuse, or that the applicable ages had been reduced from 18 to 16. This is a concern as they may fail to recognise incidents of domestic abuse. This means that the force cannot be confident that it is consistently identifying all victims of domestic abuse when they call the police and therefore not providing an appropriate police and partner response.

Victims who have been subject to previous incidents of domestic abuse are likely to be at a higher risk and it is important that the police are able to spot a pattern of escalating abuse and deal with it accordingly. There is no clear definition of what constitutes a repeat victim in relation to domestic abuse, and therefore repeat victims cannot be easily identified, afforded an appropriate service or properly understood. There is a varied response to repeat victimisation across the force with a variety of definitions being applied.

Similarly, victims of domestic abuse whose circumstances make them vulnerable in some way are at greater risk and may need an appropriate police response. The force has done some work in supporting vulnerable victims generally, including those suffering domestic abuse. Following an Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) review into the force after the death of a vulnerable adult in police custody, a 'vulnerable' category of incident response was introduced, which gives priority to vulnerable victims and alerts the attending officer to their vulnerability. This does not mean, however, that vulnerability is properly understood. Application of the 'vulnerable' category of response is based entirely upon the call handler's judgement based on their conversation with the caller, meaning that those most at risk are not always

afforded the most appropriate service as they are not always identified at the point of first contact. This could be, in part, due to a lack of training.

When domestic abuse is reported and identified as such, the call handler applies a specific domestic abuse code on the electronic incident log. This allows the incident to be tracked and referred as appropriate. The control room has specific risk manager sergeants that are responsible for reviewing all domestic abuse, hate crime and 'vulnerable' incidents records. They are responsible for reviewing whether all relevant information has been captured and the correct risk grading applied in all the circumstances. However, HMIC found no evidence in the calls reviewed of supervision or intervention by a control room supervisor. This may be due to the supervisors not recording their actions on the incident logs.

Using the domestic abuse code as an identifier, every reported incident of domestic abuse is also referred to the on-duty 'critical incident manager' at the rank of inspector for the local area to oversee. As part of their responsibilities, they are required to regularly review domestic abuse incidents. Where the incident is assessed as high risk, the inspector will be contacted to provide supervision 'live-time'. Domestic abuse incidents cannot be finalised until endorsed by the critical incident manager.

## **How does the force respond to victims of domestic abuse? This includes initial action, including risk assessment**

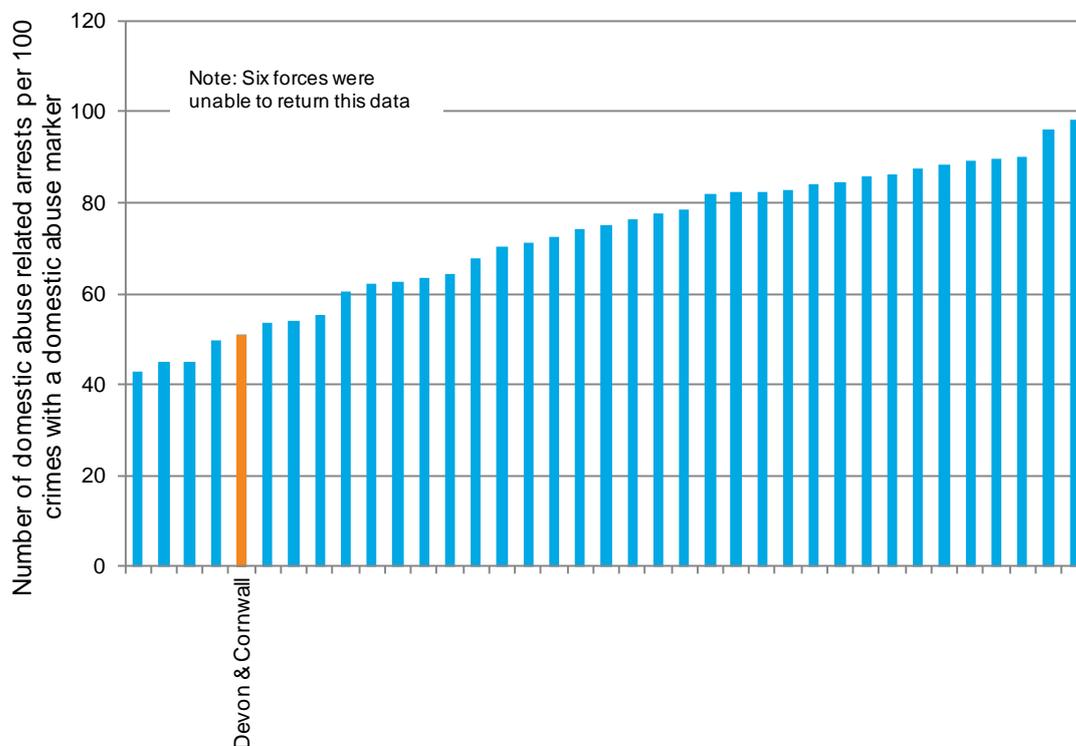
Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the PCC and senior officers. The force has policies and procedures to support staff in dealing with domestic abuse although these are not consistently applied.

HMIC found weaknesses and inconsistencies in the oversight and supervision of the risk assessment process during initial attendance and there has been limited training for officers in undertaking risk assessments. However staff joining the force have induction training which includes domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment training. Therefore the force cannot be confident that it is consistently assessing risk effectively and taking appropriate action to minimise risk to victims in all cases.

High-risk cases of domestic abuse are generally dealt with well, but there is less consistency with medium and standard risk cases and the responsibility for the management of risk to these victims needs to be clearer. A greater victim focus is needed across the force with tighter supervision of risk assessments to improve service to all victims.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 51 arrests in Devon and Cornwall. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90. The low arrest compared to other forces indicates that this is an issue the force may want to review.

**Figure 1: Number of domestic abuse related arrests per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>9</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

Domestic abuse is a clear priority for the PCC and senior police leaders. The PCC’s police and crime plan has five distinct priorities, two of which apply to domestic abuse in ‘reducing crime and bringing offenders to justice’ and ‘giving victims and witnesses a stronger voice’. The draft force strategic assessment makes specific reference to domestic abuse and safeguarding vulnerable people as the biggest threat currently faced by Devon and Cornwall Police.

In support of their strategic assessment, the force has incorporated domestic abuse into the control strategy and developed an action plan to improve its service to victims of domestic abuse in the future. There is recognition that

<sup>9</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

domestic abuse and protecting vulnerable people is the most significant crime facing the force at this time. The force has introduced a number of new policies to provide direction and guidance to staff in dealing with domestic abuse. These documents provide clear direction as to how the force should respond to domestic abuse at all levels of risk categorisation, including specialist teams dealing with high-risk cases and local teams responsible for medium and standard risk cases.

Staff at all levels within Devon and Cornwall Police understand the importance of tackling domestic abuse. This is because there is strong and clear strategic direction from the police and crime plan and staff are aware of the requirement to comply with force procedures when dealing with domestic abuse. However, staff did not associate the priority with a nominated chief officer lead or clear minimum standards. Staff did not recall any specific recent messages or information being directed to them by chief officers. There was an evident lack of consistency in approach across the different areas of the force which is acknowledged by chief officers and partners. The structure and way of dealing with victims is different across the force. This includes the role of specialist teams who have different responsibilities in Cornwall compared to Devon. This means that victims may receive a different quality of service from the force, dependent upon where they live.

Initial attendance at 'immediate' or 'priority' domestic abuse incidents is generally provided by response officers across the force. They deal with the immediate circumstances and undertake the initial assessment of risk, according to the nationally recognised domestic abuse risk assessment tool used by most police forces, and approved by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), known as the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment. The DASH process follows a series of structured questions, asked of the victim, to inform professional judgement on risk, assessing each victim on a case-by-case basis. Officers must fill out the form at every domestic abuse incident they attend. The quality of the DASH risk assessments varied across the force. While completion of the assessment form is mandatory, we found instances of large numbers of DASH forms not being properly completed in one area of the force.

We found that officers attending domestic abuse incidents recognise the importance of identifying any children in the household who may have witnessed or be affected by the abuse. Officers record the details of all children and include them in their risk assessment so that they can be referred to health and social care partner agencies for their attention. The child referrals are submitted to either the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), if there is one in their part of the force or to their child abuse investigation team who will inform children's social services. The MASH has members of the police child

protection teams and other agencies such as children's social care and health all working within the same premises and sharing information to protect children. In a situation where children were within a family where there was a domestic abuse incident and the MASH were made aware, each agency would share information about a child, and decide whether further action needed to be taken to protect the child, and who would be responsible for this. However, this same awareness did not extend to vulnerable adults either present or associated with domestic abuse incidents.

The force has a 'positive action' policy for domestic abuse. Staff understand that they are expected to take positive action to minimise the risk to the victim and generally this means that they will arrest the perpetrator where this is possible and lawful. If they do not arrest, they understand that they should look at alternative actions to try and reduce the immediate risk to the victim.

We found that there was a good understanding of the complexities of domestic abuse and that making people safe was a priority. However, officers' understanding of the purpose of the DASH form and conducting a risk assessment was inconsistent. With limited domestic abuse training provided to the frontline, we recommend that the force includes this in a skills audit.

Supervision of risk assessment and immediate action taken at domestic abuse incidents is inconsistent across the force. It is clear from force policy that supervisors are required to authorise the submission of a DASH form. However, there are some supervisors that are unaware of this policy and there were occasions when this was not robustly followed. High risk cases of domestic abuse attract more supervision, both real-time and in reviewing the paperwork associated with the incident.

High-risk investigations are dealt with by specialist staff in the public protection unit. Medium and standard risk cases are typically dealt with by local investigation teams, although this is not consistent practice across the force with some duplication of roles and responsibilities. Supervision of domestic abuse investigations again varies across the force with strong practice in some areas and some very limited oversight in others. Victims of high-risk cases generally are kept informed of significant events within the investigation into their incidents of domestic abuse. Medium and standard risk cases do not receive the same level of consistent good service and there is some confusion in parts of the force about who is responsible for victim updates and care. This means that some victims may be updated by a number of people and others may not be updated at all.

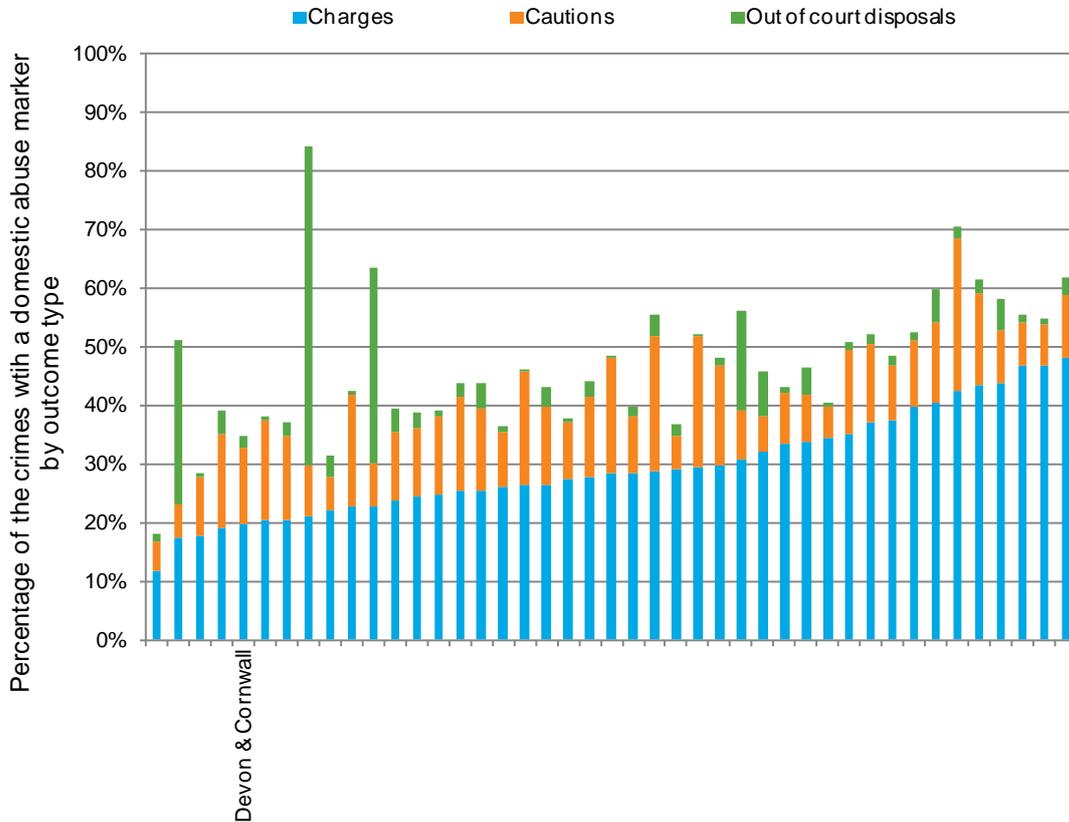
## **How are victims of domestic abuse made safer as a result of the police response and subsequent action?**

The force employs specialist domestic abuse staff, who we found to be knowledgeable and experienced. They provide a comprehensive service to high-risk victims. There are strong working relationships between the force and partner agencies dealing with domestic abuse in Devon and Cornwall, both at a county and local level. Multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) and multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangements are working well to make victims of domestic abuse safer.

HMIC found that there is a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities for all staff dealing with domestic abuse, particularly around who is responsible for safeguarding and maintaining contact with victims in medium and standard risk cases. This lack of clarity is leading to confusion among staff and inconsistencies in services across the force which means that the risks to victims may not be adequately managed by the force and victims may not receive the service they need to keep them safe.

Devon and Cornwall recorded 9,212<sup>10</sup> domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 20 percent resulted in a charge, 13 percent resulted in a caution and 2 percent had an out-of-court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

**Figure 2: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>11</sup>**



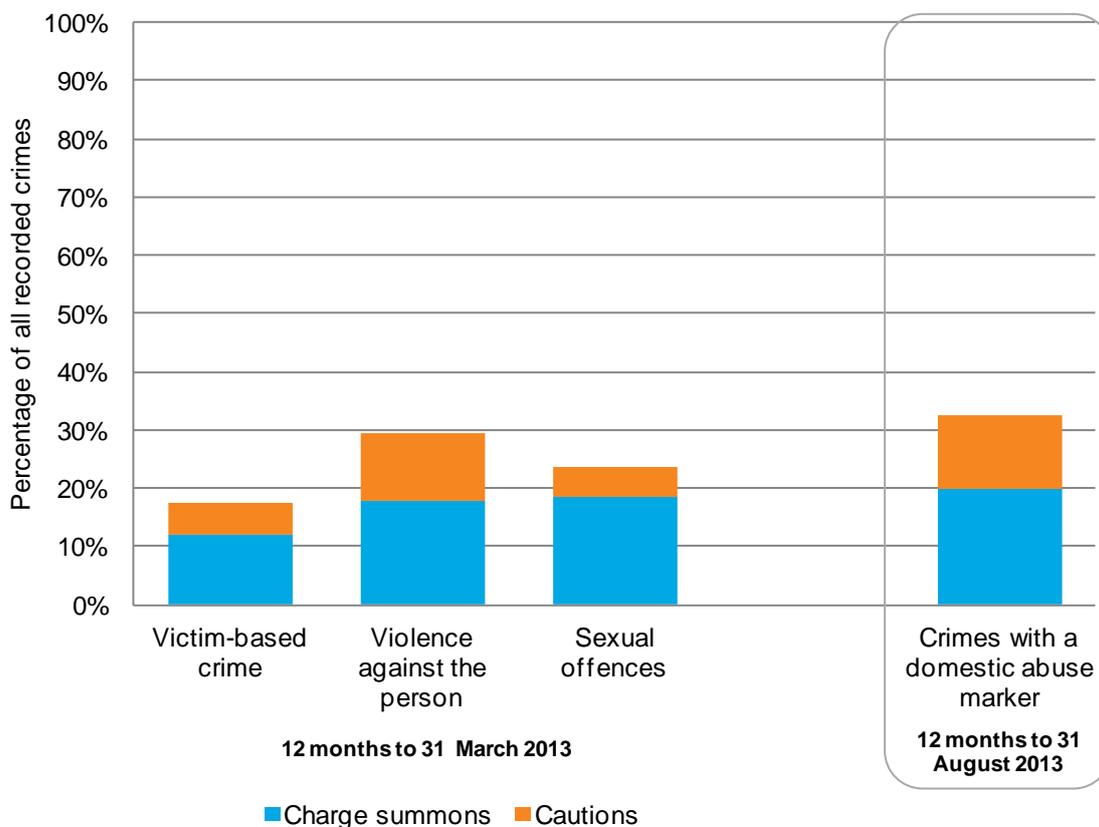
Source: HMIC data collection

Devon and Cornwall Police charge a higher proportion of crimes with a domestic abuse marker than recorded victim-based crime. This may indicate that the force has a different approach to domestic abuse outcomes than other crimes.

<sup>10</sup> Based on forces own definition of domestic abuse and the use of a domestic abuse marker on the IT recording systems

<sup>11</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

**Figure 3: Percentage of charge summons and cautions used for victim-based crime, violence against the person, sexual offences and all crimes with a domestic abuse marker<sup>12</sup>**



Sources: HMIC data collection, Home Office Crimes detected in England and Wales, ONS Crime in England and Wales

Specialist staff in Devon and Cornwall Police are responsible for dealing with high-risk cases of domestic abuse. These domestic abuse teams also review DASH risk assessments for all high and medium risk cases to ensure the appropriate level of care is applied, to make people suffering domestic abuse safer. This same scrutiny does not apply to standard-risk cases and during periods of greater demand, specialist teams may not have the capacity to review all medium-risk victims. This means that some victims whose circumstances change or whose risk level may have been incorrectly assessed at the initial attendance may not receive an appropriate level of safeguarding or support.

<sup>12</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

Safety plans are the responsibility of the attending officer and are reviewed by their immediate supervisor. Specialist staff in the public protection units take responsibility for high-risk plans and where resources allow, have some additional oversight of medium-risk cases. Standard-risk cases are generally managed by the local policing areas.

HMIC found that delineation of responsibility is not clear and supervision of medium and standard risk safety plans is not consistent. This needs clarification so each officer understands their role in the investigation process and ensures victims are kept updated and that their risk is regularly reassessed and safety plans reviewed. We found that local neighbourhood staff including police community support officers (PCSOs) had limited involvement in contributing to safety plans and providing reassurance to victims.

The force benefits from having many specialist staff with years of experience in tackling domestic abuse. They are knowledgeable and have a broad understanding of the issues surrounding domestic abuse and how perpetrator behaviour may influence how victims respond to the police and other agencies. Staff have attended multi-agency training but have not been specifically trained in their role.

There is a strong ethos of partnership working around domestic abuse across Devon and Cornwall, and domestic abuse is identified as a priority at county level under the community safety partnerships. This high-level focus looks at support for victims, access to services for families, working with perpetrators and understanding the experience of abuse in minority groups. The force and partners are well represented at this level and committed to improving the life of victims suffering domestic abuse.

There is also good and constructive partnership working at an operational level. High-risk domestic abuse victims are referred to the MARAC and provided with specialist support from an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA). The MARAC structure operates effectively across the two counties involving police and statutory partners, including the local authority adult and children's services, health, probation, housing and IDVAs. The meeting also includes the voluntary sector, for example Women's Aid and Refuge. Each agency can refer high-risk cases for discussion. The regular conferences provide an opportunity for police and partners to share information, discuss how best to safeguard the victims and their children and agree a co-ordinated set of actions to minimise the risk and support the victims. MARAC arrangements were recently reviewed by Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) which reported that relationships between partners were making victims safer.

Through information sharing, the MARAC process enables a much broader assessment of risk and support for high risk victims. Risk-management plans are developed through the MARAC process with actions assigned to agencies to support victims. However, because of the force's large geographical area and differing local authority areas, IDVA provision is stretched, and not consistent in more rural areas. This may result in some victims not receiving the support they may need.

Devon operates a MASH which has the force and health and children's social care organisations working together and co-located. A similar structure also operates in Cornwall, where domestic abuse cases are discussed on a day-to-day basis, allowing for a more holistic review of all information held by partners to be taken, to ensure that appropriate support can be put in place immediately. However, these teams are not able to cover 24 hours a day and at weekends. These arrangements help to make the MARAC run more efficiently where cases have already been reviewed, reducing the need for in-depth discussion and allowing greater focus on assessment and safety planning for other cases.

The force has piloted a scheme known as Encompass in a number of areas across the force. Encompass provides a focus on safeguarding children from families suffering domestic abuse. It enables the police to share information quickly with partners and enables the children's schools to be informed in confidence that the children have been affected by domestic abuse at home. This means that the staff at the school are more aware of some of the issues children may be facing and can deal appropriately with them, making any necessary contact with other agencies such as children's social care, if further referral is necessary. The scheme also encourages more discussion generally between families and agencies about issues in the home.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) does not have dedicated lawyers for domestic abuse cases but there is a shared sense of responsibility to support victims with robust bail conditions and remands in custody where circumstances allow. Specialist officers and IDVAs regularly meet with the CPS to discuss issues that arise.

## **Does the force have appropriate systems, processes and understanding to manage domestic abuse and risk to victims in the future?**

The force has reviewed its operation and processes for delivery of public protection services including domestic abuse. A new team is planned to be introduced, the sexual offences and domestic abuse investigation team (SODAIT) and a new way of working will be piloted from April 2014. The proposals provide much higher staffing levels in the team. However, while anticipating the change, local public protection teams have adapted their working arrangements and practices in different ways during this transition period, and are providing an inconsistent level of service to victims.

The recent introduction of a process to identify and manage serial perpetrators of domestic abuse is a positive step. It provides a focus to target perpetrators and exploit opportunities to intervene early to prevent future offending. The procedure to identify the most serious offenders needs further refinement, for example taking into account the threat, harm and risk they pose to victims.

The force is keen to learn lessons and improve services and has established a number of force-wide meetings to ensure learning can be shared from a wide range of reviews.

The force has recently undertaken a review of public protection which includes domestic abuse. The review has examined current structures, staffing, systems and processes. Chief officers have been presented with options for a new structure, one of which would see the number of staff dealing with this area of work significantly increase from 50 to 110 officers and staff. This would mean that all areas of the force would have specialist domestic abuse investigators, and cover over evenings and weekends, sexual offences and domestic abuse investigation teams (SODAITs). The new structure and working practices are being piloted in one area of the force from April 2014. The delay in the start of the pilot is due to information technology difficulties which could not be resolved until then. However, currently, each area in the force is designing its own model in an effort to improve. In order to deal with current issues about inconsistent service for victims of domestic abuse, it is essential that the force has a clear corporate model for the new units, and that these are consistently staffed and adhered to. If adopted across the force, this is a significant investment in resources to tackle domestic abuse.

Where perpetrators are released from prison having served their sentence, their victims are not always informed, and risk levels are not re-assessed, nor are safety plans reviewed to address the increased risk the release presents. This is in part due to there being no system in place to track perpetrators once they

have been committed to prison. This is often a critical time for victims and if they are unaware of the release, their safety could be in jeopardy, and police and other agencies could be unaware of the risk to victims. In high-risk cases where IDVAs or the MARAC are involved, there is more likely to be contact with victims to re-assess their risk and alert them as to a perpetrator's release.

Domestic abuse is embedded in performance management processes in Devon and Cornwall and the force has a good understanding of domestic abuse at a strategic and local level. The focus at these meetings is primarily on quantitative information, for example, volume of domestic abuse crimes and outcomes. A good deal of similar information is available on the force performance pages on the force intranet so staff in all areas can understand their levels of domestic abuse and if, and how they have been resolved.

Domestic abuse is discussed at daily management meetings and actions are allocated where necessary in cases of high-risk victims, particularly those where a perpetrator has not been arrested.

Again, we found that the focus is on the offenders and the crimes and not on the victim or the quality of their safeguarding. The force has identified a gap around qualitative information being discussed at a force or local level which would assist the force in better assessing the quality of service to domestic abuse victims. The public protection department is aware of this issue and is developing a monitoring framework to include quality measures around investigation management and victim experience.

Local tasking structures operate effectively to manage high-risk victims and perpetrators. Local officers have a good knowledge of families at greatest risk on their area and are sometimes tasked with reassurance visits and 'signposting' to support services. This is again, not a consistent practice across the force area. On a day-to-day basis, high-risk cases are discussed to give direction to the investigation and quality assure that safety planning is in place for victims and families. High-risk perpetrators that need to be arrested are prioritised, with clear oversight from the duty inspector.

The force has recognised the need to tackle the most serious domestic abuse offenders in the same way that other types of serious offenders are managed. Domestic abuse serial and serious perpetrators (DASSPs) are identified and actively managed by the public protection teams in order to reduce risk to victims in the future. These perpetrators are identified as DASSPs through the use of an assessment matrix which helps show which poses the highest risk to victims. This process is relatively new and has not been evaluated, but if properly implemented and embedded, should help to reduce the risk to victims. Each perpetrator is subject to a management plan, which is communicated to

local teams so they are aware of individuals living in their area. The public protection detective inspector supervises all management plans and there is a clear meeting structure to review DASSPs on a monthly basis. The number of perpetrators being managed in this way is low, but it is positive that the force is trying to prevent future offending by dealing with them in this way.

Limited use of restorative justice and cautioning is used for domestic abuse cases where using these would meet the needs of the victim. The head of public protection dip-samples cases, and examines trend information to ensure these outcomes are properly applied and supervised. There are clear guidelines for officers and good scrutiny at each level.

The force ensures that corporate learning is maintained and embedded following recommendations from domestic homicide reviews and serious case reviews. All recommendations from the reviews firstly go to the quarterly protecting vulnerable people board and then to the force learning lessons board. However, there were staff in important roles who had not heard of any recent changes in practice or lessons learned following these reviews.

The force has completed its own internal review of safeguarding and identified some of the same issues. There is a firm commitment to improve and standardise the service the force provides to domestic abuse victims as part of the wider safeguarding agenda.

## Recommendations

As a result of this inspection, HMIC has developed recommendations which are designed to tackle any risks identified in the service to victims of domestic abuse. These force specific recommendations should be considered in conjunction with recommendations to all forces set out in HMIC's national report on domestic abuse.

1. The force should analyse training needs and develop a training plan for all staff involved with domestic abuse from first report to resolution.
2. The force should publish a single definition for 'repeat' and 'vulnerable' victims, with supporting guidance for staff.
3. The force should promote minimum standards in relation to domestic abuse to include completion of the DASH form in all reported incidents.
4. The force should set and promote minimum standards for supervision of domestic abuse incidents, from initial report in the control room to initial attendance and subsequent investigation.
5. The force should clarify and standardise the role and responsibilities of dedicated public protection staff and local investigation teams in dealing with domestic abuse investigations and keeping victims updated.
6. The force should review the SODAIT pilot structure as soon as possible and ensure a corporate, well-led way of working which delivers consistent service to victims of domestic abuse.
7. The force should ensure that where domestic abuse perpetrators are released from prison, victims are informed of this and a risk assessment is completed, together with a revised safety plan where appropriate.
8. The force should evaluate the DASSP programme to establish whether it is making victims safer and if so extend the programme to include as many high-risk perpetrators, who are suitable, as possible.
9. Qualitative data should be sought to understand whether the service being delivered by the force to domestic abuse victims is making them safer.
10. The force should ensure that corporate learning is disseminated throughout the organisation in order that all staff are aware of any changes and why these changes have been made.

# Glossary

## **Bail conditions**

A court can remand a defendant in custody or grant bail, with or without conditions attached. Before the first court hearing, the police can also retain a defendant in custody or grant bail, with or without conditions attached, but their powers to do so are more limited than the court's. Conditions can only be imposed to ensure that the defendant attends the next court hearing, commits no new offences in the meantime, and does not interfere with any witnesses or obstruct the course of justice.

## **Body worn camera**

A video camera, worn on the helmet or upper body of an officer, which records visual and audio footage of an incident.

## **CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse)**

CAADA is a national charity supporting a strong multi-agency response to domestic abuse. Its work focuses on saving lives and public money.

CAADA provides practical help to support professionals and organisations working with domestic abuse victims. The aim is to protect the highest risk victims and their children – those at risk of murder or serious harm.

## **CCTV**

Evidence from Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) can be used to support police investigations. It is primarily used for corroborating what is already known in investigating incidents and to trigger further opportunities to carry out investigation, such as the identification of witnesses and suspects.

## **Clare's Law**

Clare's Law – the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – is designed to provide victims with information that may protect them from an abusive situation before it ends in tragedy. The scheme allows the police to disclose information about a partner's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts. The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme is named after Clare Wood who was

brutally murdered in 2009 by her former partner George Appleton, who had a record of violence against women.

### **Code of Practice for Victims of Crime**

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (the Victims' Code) places a statutory obligation on criminal justice agencies to provide a standard of service to victims of crime or, where the victim died as a result of the criminal conduct, their relatives. The obligations the Victims' Code places on the agencies concerned include that:

- They provide victims, or their relatives, with information about the crime, including about arrests, prosecutions and court decisions;
- They provide information about eligibility for compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme;
- Victims be told about Victim Support and either be referred on to them or offered their service;
- Bereaved relatives be assigned a family liaison police officer; and
- Victims of an offender who receives a sentence of 12 months or more after being convicted of a sexual or violent offence have the opportunity to make representations about what licence conditions or supervision requirements the offender should be subject to on release from prison.

There are enhanced entitlements for victims of the most serious crime which includes domestic violence.

### **Coercive control**

This is term and concept developed by Evan Stark which seeks to explain the range of tactics used by perpetrators and the impact of those on victims. It highlights the on-going nature of the behaviour and the extent to which the actions of the perpetrator control the victim through isolation, intimidation, degradation and micro-regulation of everyday life. Crucially it sets out such abuse can be psychological as well as physical. Coercive control is explicitly covered by the definition of domestic abuse.

### **Control room**

A police control or communications room manages emergency (999) and non-emergency (101) calls, and sending police officers to these calls.

## **Counter-allegation**

Where someone initially identified as the perpetrator makes an allegation against the victim. If counter-allegations are not identified and resolved agencies may be providing services to the perpetrator and inadvertently helping them isolate and control the victim. The victim may not get access to the services they need because they are labelled 'the perpetrator'.

## **Crime Scene Investigator**

Police staff who work alongside uniformed and plain clothed police officers during the investigation of a crime to locate, record and recover evidence from crime scenes.

## **DASH – domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH 2009)**

DASH is a risk identification, assessment and management model adopted by UK police forces and partner agencies in 2009. The aim of the DASH assessment is to help front-line practitioners identify high risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking and so-called honour-based violence.

## **Domestic Homicide Review**

Local areas are expected to undertake a multi-agency review following a domestic homicide. The process aims to assist all those involved, to identify the lessons that can be learned from homicides where a person is killed as a result of domestic violence, with a view to preventing future homicides and violence.

## **Domestic Violence Prevention Notices (DVPN)**

A DVPN is the initial notice issued by the police to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence.

This notice, which must be authorised by a police superintendent, contains prohibitions that effectively bar the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim.

A DVPN may be issued to a person aged 18 years and over if the police superintendent has reasonable grounds for believing that:

- the individual has been violent towards, or

- has threatened violence towards an associated person, and
- the DVPN is necessary to protect that person from violence or a threat of violence by the intended recipient of the DVPN

### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**

Female genital mutilation (sometimes referred to as female circumcision) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice is illegal in the UK.

### **Frontline**

These are police officers or police staff who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law. The HMIC publication, *Policing in Austerity: Rising to the Challenge* (2013) sets this out in more detail.

### **Golden hour**

Commonly used to refer to the time after a crime has been committed during which there is maximum potential for recovery of forensic evidence

### **Harassment**

The term harassment is used to cover the 'causing alarm or distress' offences under section 2 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 as amended (PHA), and 'putting people in fear of violence' offences under section 4 of the PHA.

### **House-to- house**

House-to-house enquiries are likely to feature in many investigations to: identify suspects and canvas for witnesses in areas connected to an incident, establish who lives or works in a particular location, and obtain an account of their movements during relevant times.

## **High risk**

Term used when, following a DASH risk assessment, there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious. Risk of serious harm (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006): 'A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible'.

## **IDVA – independent domestic violence adviser**

Independent domestic violence advisers or advocates (IDVAs) are trained specialists who provide a service to victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members, with the aim of securing their safety and the safety of their children. Serving as a victim's primary point of contact, IDVAs normally work with their clients from the point of crisis, to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans.

## **Incident**

When a member of the public calls for police assistance, or a police officer observes or discovers a crime the police usually create an incident record. This is the first step, the police will then decide whether a crime has been committed and, if it is appropriate, create a crime record.

## **Intimate Partner Violence**

This describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy.

## **MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)**

MARACs are regular local meetings where information about high risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies. By bringing all agencies together at a MARAC, and ensuring that whenever possible the voice of the victim is represented by the IDVA, a risk focused, co-ordinated safety plan can be drawn up to support the victim. There are currently over 270 MARACs operating across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland managing more than 64,000 cases a year.

## **MASH – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub**

A Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) brings together staff from police and partner agencies who work from the same location, sharing information and ensuring a timely and joined-up response to protect children and vulnerable adults.

## **Medium risk**

Term used when following a DASH risk assessment there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The offender has the potential to cause serious harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstances, for example, failure to take medication, loss of accommodation, relationship breakdown, drug or alcohol misuse.

## **National Domestic Abuse helpline**

A Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge, is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.

The Helpline can give support, help and information over the telephone, wherever the caller might be in the country. The Helpline is staffed 24 hours a day by fully trained female helpline support workers and volunteers. All calls are completely confidential. Translation facilities for callers whose first language is not English, and a service for callers who are deaf or hard of hearing are available.

## **Partnership**

A term used where collaborative working is established between the police and other public, private or voluntary organisations.

## **Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)**

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the PACE codes of practice provide the core framework of police powers and safeguards around stop and search, arrest, detention, investigation, identification and interviewing detainees. [www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-current-versions](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-current-versions)

## **Positive action**

The term refers to the steps and action taken at all stages of the police response to ensure effective protection of victims and children, while allowing the criminal justice system to hold the offender to account. It is often used in the context of arrest policy, police guidance states that “arrest will normally be ‘necessary’ under the terms of PACE to protect a child or vulnerable person, prevent the suspect causing injury and/or to allow for the prompt and effective investigation of the offence”.

## **Problem-solving**

Problem-solving is a term used in policing where forces systematically identify and analyse crime and disorder problems, develop specific responses to individual problems and subsequently assess whether the response has been successful.

## **Refuge**

A refuge is a safe house where women and children who are experiencing domestic violence can stay free from abuse. Refuge addresses (and sometimes telephone numbers) are confidential. According to Women’s Aid on a typical day, **over 7000 women and children** are resident in refuge accommodation in England

## **Risk assessment**

A risk assessment is based on structured professional judgment. It provides structure and informs decisions that are already being made. It is only a

guide/checklist and should not be seen as a scientific predictive solution. Its completion is intended to assist officers in the decision-making process on appropriate levels of intervention for victims of domestic violence.

## **Safeguarding**

The term safeguarding is applied when protecting children and other vulnerable people. The UK Government has defined the term 'safeguarding children' as: *"The process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care that enables children to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully."*

## **Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)**

SARCs are specialist medical and forensic services for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted.

They aim to be a one-stop service, providing the following under one roof: medical care and forensic examination following assault/rape and, in some locations, sexual health services.

## **Standard Risk**

Term used following a DASH risk assessment where current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm.

## **Victim Personal Statement**

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 any support.

Provisions relating to the making of a VPS and its use in criminal proceedings are included in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code), which was published on 29 October 2013 and came into force on 10 December 2013.

## **Vulnerable**

A term used to describe a person who is in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect.

## **What Works Centre for Crime Reduction**

The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction is hosted by the College of Policing. The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction will: review research on practices and interventions to reduce crime, label the evidence base in terms of quality, cost and impact, and provide police and crime commissioners and other crime reduction partners with the knowledge, tools and guidance to help them target their resources more effectively.

It will be led by a core team from the College of Policing, and supported by a "commissioned partnership programme" which has been jointly funded by the College and the Economic and Social Research Council.