



Cheshire Constabulary'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.¹ 77 women were killed by their partners or ex-partners in 2012/13.² In the UK, one in four young people aged 10 to 24 reported that they experienced domestic violence and abuse during their childhood.³ 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

¹ Walby, S. (2009). *The cost of domestic violence*. Retrieved from: www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc.../Cost_of_domestic_violence_update.doc

² 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

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

been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

*The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:*⁴

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

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.⁵ We were asked to consider:

- the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic violence and abuse, focusing on the outcomes for victims;

⁴ All definitions are taken from www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence

- 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 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 Cheshire Constabulary 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.⁶ A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

⁶ There is a requirement under section 55(5) and section 55(6) of the 1996 Police Act 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 Cheshire⁷

Calls for assistance



In Cheshire, domestic abuse accounts for 1% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 33% were from repeat victims.

Crime

8%

Domestic abuse accounts for 8% of all recorded crime.

Assault with intent

16%

Cheshire recorded 192 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 30 were domestic abuse related. This is 16% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

⁷ 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.

Assault with injury

28%

The force also recorded 4,649 assaults with injury, of these 1,323 were domestic abuse related. This is 28% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Harassment

58%

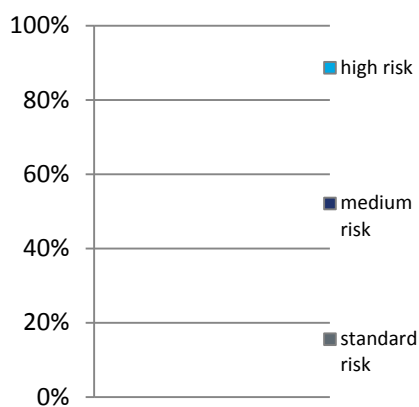
The force recorded 391 harassment offences, of these 227 were domestic abuse related. This is 58% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Sexual offences

24%

The force also recorded 884 sexual offences, of these 212 were domestic abuse related. This is 24% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

Risk levels



Cheshire were unable to provide data relating to the number of active high, medium and standard risk cases they had.

Arrests



Cheshire was unable to provide the number of domestic abuse related arrests. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90 per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker.

Outcomes



Cheshire recorded 4,779 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 22% resulted in a charge, 6% resulted in a caution and, 4% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Executive summary

There is some effective working in Cheshire Constabulary to identify victims of domestic abuse and make them safer.

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the constabulary. Staff throughout the organisation understand this and recognise their role in making victims safer and dealing properly with domestic abuse.

There is good partnership working and the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) is regarded as effective in the county.

There are processes in place to identify serial perpetrators and manage their behaviour. There are mechanisms in place to monitor when perpetrators are released from prison and notify victims that this is happening.

Identifying victims

Most victims of domestic abuse are identified by staff in the police communications centre when a call is received from someone wanting to report an incident. HMIC found the call handlers to be skilled in dealing with callers. They have a good understanding of domestic abuse, assessing risk and a strong focus on identifying repeat victims or those who may be particularly vulnerable. However, we found that staff working at police station enquiry desks have not received sufficient training in identifying and dealing with domestic abuse victims.

Thorough searches are carried out by call handlers of police databases to gather any previous history of police involvement or other relevant information. This helps them to decide on the appropriate police response and the information is relayed to the officers attending so that they have a full picture when they arrive at the scene. Call handlers and supervisors manage resources and incidents well, ensuring that officers attending incidents of domestic abuse were given the relevant information. We found that supervision of call handling, resource deployment and the initial attendance was good.

Keeping victims safe

Domestic abuse is regarded as a priority for the constabulary. There is strong and visible leadership and clear direction to staff as to how they are expected to respond to incidents of domestic abuse. HMIC found that staff understand the importance of minimising the risks to victims. Frontline officers have received domestic abuse risk assessment training and some have had additional training in stalking and harassment.

Formal risk assessments are undertaken at all incidents of domestic abuse and there are clear roles and responsibilities for dealing with victim safety and the investigation dependent upon the risk level. Risk assessments are reviewed to check their accuracy. All high-risk incidents are dealt with by trained specialist domestic abuse officers from the public protection unit (PPU) who also provide support and guidance to those dealing with medium and standard risk cases.

We found some inconsistencies in the quality of investigations across the constabulary and some weakness in the monitoring and quality assurance of investigations.

Management of risk

There is real emphasis on reducing the risk to victims and making them safer. The constabulary has a dedicated team of specialist domestic abuse officers in their PPU. They are trained detectives with domestic abuse expertise. All domestic abuse incidents are reviewed by the PPU referral unit and risk is reassessed and amended as appropriate. There is clarity as to who is dealing with which levels of risk.

All high-risk victims and offenders are dealt with by PPU officers. All standard and medium risk victims and offenders are dealt with by the neighbourhood policing unit (NPU) officers, with support and guidance from the specialists available when needed. All cases are assessed as high or medium risk using the domestic abuse stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool. Risk assessments are reviewed by referral staff to ensure the correct level of risk has been recorded. This process takes account of risks to any children in the

house. If risk level is deemed as high the incident remains open until the risk can be reduced. Staff understand the risk assessment tool and apply their discretion and professional judgement when assessing the risks. However, there is some confusion of the levels of risk that should be recorded on the DASH form. Call handlers and frontline staff displayed a good understanding of how important their role is to make victims safe.

There are good working relationships with partners and the MARAC process is effective and regarded as working well, which means that information is exchanged promptly and risk assessed, and safety plans are put in place to reduce risk. Referrals are also made to independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs), who work with victims to find the root causes, to prevent further incidents. There is a focused approach between police and partner agencies to ensure that protecting victims is the priority, conducting joint visits, which ensures victims are aware of which agency is taking the lead regarding their specific issues.

Organisational effectiveness for keeping victims safe

The constabulary has robust processes in place to maintain contact with victims in cases where a perpetrator is imprisoned, keeping victims informed about release dates. Custody officers also review the safety plans of victims before an offender is released on bail. There is a mechanism to identify and monitor serial domestic abuse perpetrators (SDAPs) who have offended against more than one victim. We found that some work has been done to improve the understanding of local officers and commanders about who the high-risk victims are in their area.

There are established and effective processes in place to ensure that any lessons learned from domestic homicide reviews are shared throughout the constabulary and any improvement in processes and practices can be implemented.

Findings

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

Most victims of domestic abuse are identified by staff in the police communications centre when a call is received from someone wanting to report an incident. HMIC found the call handlers to be skilled in dealing with callers. They have a good understanding of domestic abuse, assessing risk and a strong focus on identifying repeat victims or those who may be particularly vulnerable. However, we found that staff working at police station enquiry desks have not received sufficient training in identifying and dealing with domestic abuse victims.

Thorough searches are carried out by call handlers of police databases to gather any previous history of police involvement or other relevant information. This helps them to decide on the appropriate police response and the information is relayed to the officers attending so that they have a full picture when they arrive at the scene. Call handlers and supervisors manage resources and incidents well, ensuring that officers attending incidents of domestic abuse were given the relevant information. We found that supervision of call handling, resource deployment and the initial attendance was good.

HMIC found that Cheshire Constabulary has good systems in place to identify victims of domestic abuse when calls are received in the constabulary's communications centre. People wanting to report incidents of domestic abuse generally contact Cheshire Constabulary by telephone. Some reports also come in to enquiry counters at police stations or from specialist workers in other organisations providing assistance and support to victims of domestic abuse.

Call handlers in the communications centre have responsibility for identifying the initial risk to the victim and then assessing how the call should be responded to – both in terms of the urgency of response and the most appropriate officers to attend. Call handlers have access to information stored

on the police IT systems which allow them to check for any previous police involvement with the victim, the offender and others who may be vulnerable or at risk of harm including children. The search of police systems provides details of previous incidents, warnings about those involved for example, a history of violence, weapons or drug usage. The responding officers are then provided with this background information which assists them with deciding how best to respond to the incident.

Previous involvement with repeat victims can be identified via the address and a combination of the victim's surname, date of birth and telephone number which then alerts the call handler to the previous history. If a victim is identified as a vulnerable or repeat victim this will increase the level of risk they face and influence the call handler in determining the appropriate initial response.

The constabulary has defined what makes a victim of domestic abuse a repeat or a vulnerable victim. Call handlers use these definitions to identify vulnerable and repeat victims at the first point of contact. To assist them, they will ask callers probing questions using a list of prompts to ensure they gather all relevant information about the incident, victim and previous history. They can also check their systems: children and vulnerable adults (CAVA) and the constabulary's IT system (NICHE), for any other intelligence which may be relevant, for example, any children at risk, or firearms licences at the address. This information is relayed to the attending officers so that they arrive at the scene with as full a picture as possible.

The constabulary expects call handlers to use professional judgement in determining how best to resolve a call, by using a 'problem-solving' approach. They make a decision as to the urgency of the police response needed, based on their assessment of risk, and grade each incident using the constabulary's call grading policy. Domestic abuse incidents that are 'happening now' are dealt with as 'grade one' emergency response (attendance within 15 minutes). Otherwise the incident is given a 'grade two', a prompt response by an appropriate resource (attendance as soon as possible and usually within 60 minutes).

The force incident manager in the communication centre monitors the dispatch of resources and assesses the risks posed by the incident. Area incident sergeants within the communication centre monitor the response to incidents of domestic abuse and ensure the appropriate closure code is recorded.

Supervisors within the call handling centre track and monitor domestic abuse incidents to ensure a timely response and to ensure sufficient details are recorded on the incident log. In all cases of incidents involving domestic abuse the duty sergeant (or if not available the inspector) is informed of the incident and this is recorded on the incident log. Sergeants check to ensure officers are taking the appropriate action while at the scene by speaking to them (when they do not attend themselves).

HMIC found that staff in the communications centre have received domestic abuse training and have a good understanding of the various forms of domestic abuse and how to deal with incidents appropriately. There is a strong focus on identifying vulnerable victims, although we did find some confusion among staff regarding the definitions of vulnerable adults and vulnerability. Call handlers and supervisors manage resources and incidents well, ensuring that officers attending incidents of domestic abuse were given the relevant information.

Some reports of domestic abuse are made in person at police stations. Front office enquiry staff who work in police stations may be the first point of contact for victims reporting incidents of domestic abuse. However, we found that these staff had received little or no training about domestic abuse. Currently, they use their individual professional judgement, taking sufficient details to enable the communication centre to create an incident log and send an officer. The constabulary therefore cannot be confident that it is identifying or dealing with all victims of domestic abuse appropriately.

Attending officers and area supervisors are clear about their responsibilities in responding to and overseeing domestic abuse incidents. Additionally, supervisors in the communication centre quality assure domestic abuse incidents, to ensure all necessary actions have been taken prior to finalisation.

We found that in most cases a comprehensive update of the actions taken was recorded on the log before the incident was finalised.

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

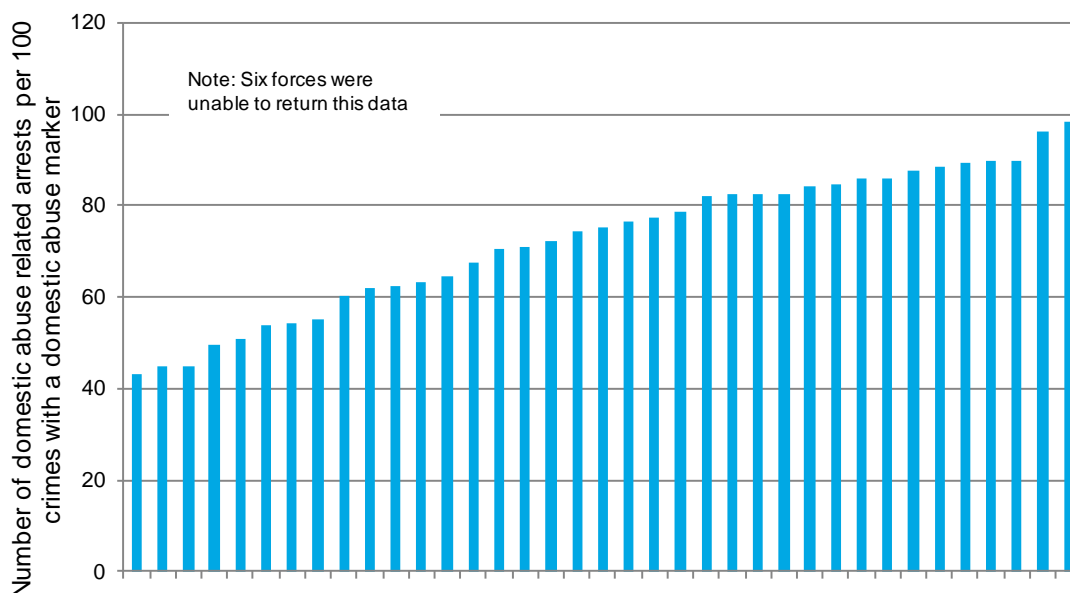
Domestic abuse is regarded as a priority for the constabulary. There is strong and visible leadership and clear direction to staff as to how they are expected to respond to incidents of domestic abuse. HMIC found that staff understand the importance of minimising the risks to victims. Frontline officers have received domestic abuse risk assessment training and some have had additional training in stalking and harassment.

Formal risk assessments are undertaken at all incidents of domestic abuse and there are clear roles and responsibilities for dealing with victim safety and the investigation dependent upon the risk level. Risk assessments are reviewed to check their accuracy. All high-risk incidents are dealt with by trained specialist domestic abuse officers from the public protection unit (PPU) who also provide support and guidance to those dealing with medium and standard risk cases.

We found some inconsistencies in the quality of investigations across the constabulary and some weakness in the monitoring and quality assurance of investigations.

Cheshire Constabulary was unable to provide the number of domestic abuse related arrests, and is therefore not included in the following chart.. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90 per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker.⁸

Figure 1: Number of domestic abuse related arrests per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013⁹



Source: HMIC data collection

Tackling domestic abuse is a clear priority for both the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and Cheshire Constabulary. The PCC’s police and crime plan identifies protecting vulnerable people as a key priority which includes tackling domestic abuse. This is also reflected in the constabulary’s police and

⁸ Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

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

crime action plan. The deputy police and crime commissioner and the assistant chief constable (ACC) provide visible leadership for this area of policing. The constabulary is running a specific project known as Operation Guardian, which along with other policing responsibilities, is aimed at reducing violence and protecting vulnerable citizens within Cheshire. The ACC provides leadership and monitors this project and provides updates to the strategic delivery board chaired by the deputy chief constable where domestic abuse is monitored and managed.

HMIC found that staff throughout the constabulary are clear that domestic abuse is a priority; they recognise the high level of leadership and have seen improvements in approaches to tackling it. The constabulary is not complacent and is seeking new ways to deliver better domestic abuse services to the public of Cheshire.

We found that there is clear direction to staff. Comprehensive guidance has been produced for dealing with domestic abuse. Documents have been published outlining what is expected from staff when dealing with victims of domestic abuse. Since 2012, in line with the police and crime action plan, the constabulary has been working on 'tracking and progress' with regard to domestic abuse as part of its efforts in delivering the protecting vulnerable people element of the plan. To deliver the project, ensuring actions are progressed and those responsible for completing them are accountable, a domestic abuse steering group is in place chaired by the ACC.

The constabulary is in the process of launching an initiative known as 'Altogether Better'; aimed at enabling the police and their partners to deliver improved services to victims of domestic abuse. The PCC and the constabulary are looking at ways to develop a pan-Cheshire approach to deliver commissioned services for victims.

The constabulary have run numerous domestic abuse awareness campaigns, including: 'This is Abuse' to publicise the changes in the definition of domestic abuse to include 16–18-year-olds as victims; 'Speak Out, Don't Be Silent', which encouraged victims suffering through coercive and controlling behaviours

to come forward and report their abuse; and 'Know the Law, Use the Law', to raise awareness about stalking and harassment.

Specific domestic abuse training has been provided to a range of staff, including dealing with stalking and harassment. The capacity to provide additional training is built in to shift patterns, and has included domestic abuse updates, stalking and harassment. The training has emphasised the need to focus on protecting the victim, managing risk, and taking positive action in dealing with domestic abuse offenders and victims. Domestic abuse has been part of student officer and detective training for a number of years with the aims, objectives and contents changing over time to reflect legislation and best practice. Officers are also clear that they need to consider others present within the household who may be affected by the abuse, particularly children. The constabulary's Quality Matters programme recently included the 'voice of the child'. Officers attending domestic abuse incidents are intrusive and ask relevant questions when children are present. However, we found that officers are not routinely checking on the welfare of children who may not be present at the time of the incident, for example, asleep or at a neighbour's house.

Neighbourhood policing units (NPU) in most cases provide the initial police response at an incident. Their initial and immediate action is to protect and reduce the risk to the victim, gather evidence and take positive action against the perpetrator. Officers are required to undertake a formal risk assessment at every domestic abuse incident. The constabulary uses the nationally recognised domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool to aid officers in using their professional judgement. We found that NPU officers have received training and understand the risk assessment process. They are also provided with a reminder card to assist them in completing the DASH risk assessment.

When a DASH risk assessment has been completed a record of it is attached to the address and names of those involved, in order that call handlers will be alerted if there are any further calls. Officers complete the risk assessment and grade the risk to the victim as high, medium or standard. There is some

confusion of the levels of risk that should be recorded onto the DASH, this means that the risk assessments can be initially incorrectly assessed and recorded and potentially leave victims insufficiently safeguarded until the risk assessment is reviewed. There are regular and robust quality assurance processes in place. Referral staff (experienced domestic abuse staff) based within the PPU review all risk assessments and where it is required, revise them, to ensure the risk assessment accurately reflects the level of risk posed to the victim and that appropriate safeguarding can be put in place.

When the risk level is recorded as high, the incident must remain open and will be reviewed until the risk is reduced, for example, once the suspect has been remanded in custody; or the incident is passed to the area public protection unit (PPU) to be dealt with by a domestic abuse specialist officer. The area incident sergeant will authorise the closure of incidents and ensure the domestic incident checklist is completed.

Most cases of domestic abuse (83 percent) are assessed as standard or medium risk and are dealt with by NPUs. They retain the responsibility for completing the victim safety plan and the investigation plan. High-risk cases, which represent 17 percent of all incidents, are dealt with by staff within the PPUs. A high risk victim will also be referred to an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA). IDVAs are trained domestic abuse specialists, who are independent of the police but work alongside them, providing additional safeguarding and support to victims throughout the process, including any court action. They are funded through a variety of partnership arrangements. There are a total of 21 IDVAs working across the Cheshire area.

HMIC found that the quality of investigation planning was inconsistent across the constabulary; there was a lack of clarity regarding investigation plans with policing areas adopting different models. There is limited dip sampling to assess the quality of cases.

PPU staff who deal with high-risk domestic abuse cases are experienced and have good investigative abilities to progress cases to a good standard. They

ensure victims are kept informed by maintaining contact while cases progress through the criminal justice process.

In some investigations for domestic abuse we found the supervision is done by the custody officer where a perpetrator has been arrested. PPU detective sergeants also assist to provide expertise and knowledge to ensure positive action has been taken. We found the use of support from PPU was inconsistent across the policing areas with some taking more direction from PPU than others. Investigations that are completed where no further action is recommended are reviewed by a detective inspector, or if unavailable by an inspector, prior to the final decision being made. This includes cases where the officer is considering notifying the perpetrator that they are no longer required to answer bail (re-attend the police station to continue with the investigation).

We found good use of video links with courts in cases where the victim is frightened to attend court and face their abuser. Without these special measures being available, court cases may not be able to go ahead as the victim would not support the case and the offenders may not be brought to justice. However this could be further developed by officers using body-worn video cameras, when they attend domestic abuse incidents, capturing video evidence at the scene of the perpetrators demeanour, injuries sustained by the victim and any damage to property. This can provide very powerful evidence to a court and may mean that there is no need for a reluctant victim to give evidence.

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

There is real emphasis on reducing the risk to victims and making them safer. The constabulary has a dedicated team of specialist domestic abuse officers in their PPU. They are trained detectives with domestic abuse expertise. All domestic abuse incidents are reviewed by the PPU referral unit and risk is reassessed and amended as appropriate. There is clarity as to who is dealing with which levels of risk.

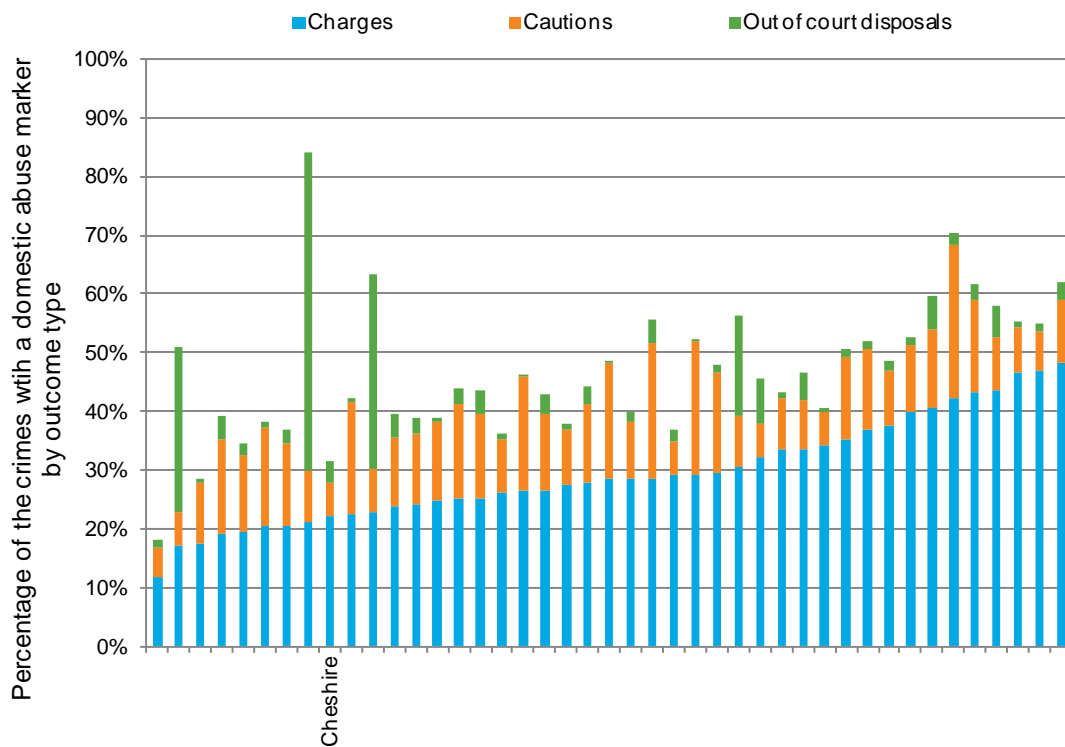
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There are good working relationships with partners and the MARAC process is effective and regarded as working well, which means that information is exchanged promptly and risk assessed, and safety plans are put in place to reduce risk. Referrals are also made to independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs), who work with victims to find the root causes, to prevent further incidents. There is a focused approach between police and partner agencies to ensure that protecting victims is the priority, conducting joint visits, which ensures victims are aware of which agency is taking the lead regarding their specific issues.

Cheshire recorded 4,779 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013.¹⁰ Of these crimes 22 percent resulted in a charge, 6 percent resulted in a caution and, 4 percent had an out of court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

¹⁰ Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

Figure 2: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013¹¹

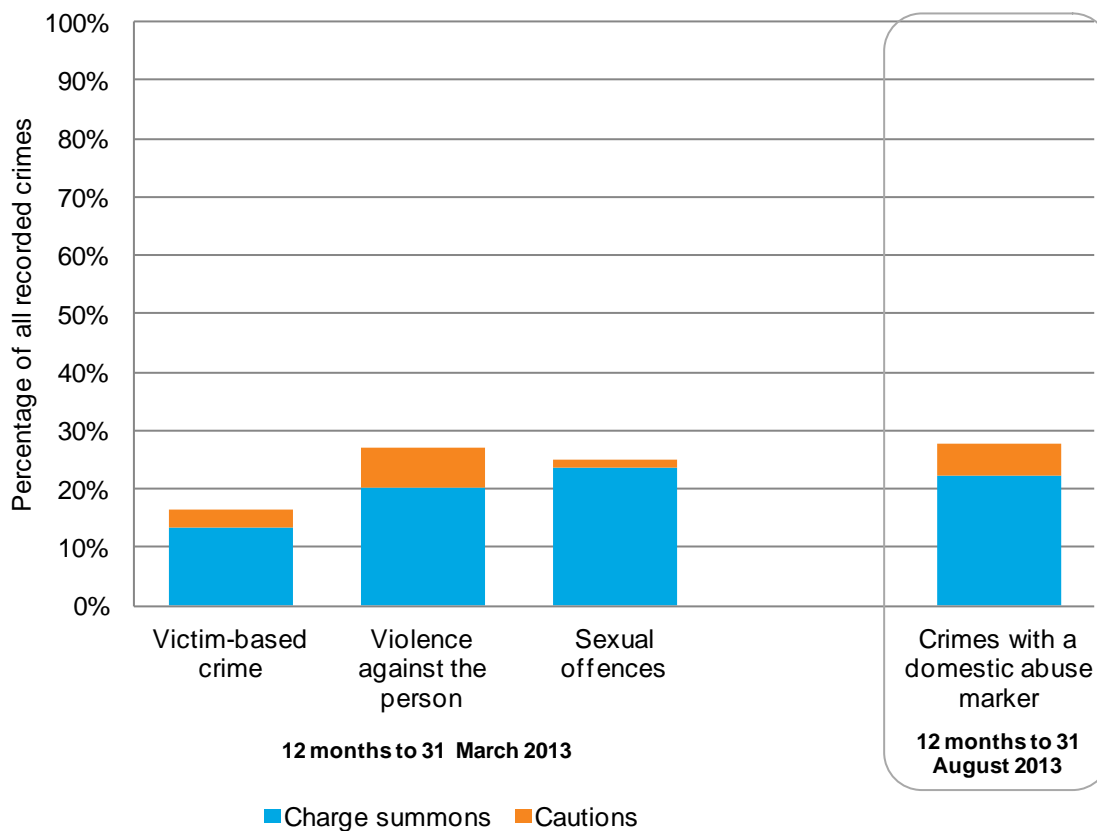


Source: HMIC data collection

Cheshire Constabulary charges a higher proportion of crimes with a domestic abuse marker than recorded victim-based crime. This may indicate that the constabulary has a different approach to domestic abuse outcomes than other crimes.

¹¹ 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 marker¹²



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

The constabulary has specialist domestic abuse investigators in their public protection units (PPUs). They are trained detectives, who have also received specific training for domestic abuse, including stalking and harassment, coercive and controlling behaviour, and identifying serial domestic abuse perpetrators (SDAP's). Training has also been undertaken jointly with specialist staff from partner agencies dealing with the protection and support of victims.

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

New members of staff joining the PPU are also tutored by experienced PPU members of staff. To continue their development they have personal portfolios to develop their skills and awareness.

PPU staff take on the responsibility for high-risk cases, dealing with both the suspect and the victim. All high-risk victims are referred for consideration at a MARAC. The MARAC process brings together police and partners including: children's social services; health services; probation; housing; IDVAs; and other voluntary sector support organisations. It has three objectives:

- To gather detailed and relevant information from victims, that can be shared with other agencies.
- To identify those who will need more intensive support in order to save life and prevent further harm.
- To make agencies aware of the most dangerous offenders.

MARACs are well established and well regarded across Cheshire. They enable effective communication between the agencies. Good relationships and joined-up working between the agencies is supported by robust information sharing protocols. All agencies have provided training to their staff, therefore they understand how to make consistent referrals. The PPU team is regarded as a good point of contact for partner agencies. There is a focused approach between police and partner agencies to ensure that there is a focus on protecting victims.

Police and partners conduct joint visits to victims which avoids confusion and provides clarity on which agency is taking the lead regarding their specific issues. Some serious domestic abuse offenders have been included as part of 'Navigate', which is the constabulary's integrated offender management (IOM) process that manages domestic abuse perpetrators with partner agencies to reduce/stop their re-offending.

Cheshire Constabulary recognises the importance of working with partner agencies to investigate and reduce domestic abuse incidents. We found that the

police work well across a range of partnerships at both strategic and operational levels. Partners were positive about their engagement with the constabulary in dealing with domestic abuse, especially to reduce the risk to victims. However, we found that there were some perceived challenges for staff in dealing with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) helpline to obtain guidance for charging purposes. Officers state that the current process causes a delay in charging, with the police often having to bail perpetrators without conditions attached.

There are clear roles and responsibilities regarding who deals with victims of domestic abuse with PPU dealing with high-risk victims and NPU predominantly dealing with medium and standard risk victims.

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

The constabulary has robust processes in place to maintain contact with victims in cases where a perpetrator is imprisoned, keeping victims informed about release dates. Custody officers also review the safety plans of victims before an offender is released on bail. There is a mechanism to identify and monitor serial domestic abuse perpetrators (SDAPs) who have offended against more than one victim. We found that some work has been done to improve the understanding of local officers and commanders about who the high-risk victims are in their area.

There are established and effective processes in place to ensure that any lessons learned from domestic homicide reviews are shared throughout the constabulary and any improvement in processes and practices can be implemented.

The constabulary has processes in place to maintain contact with victims in cases where a perpetrator is imprisoned, keeping victims informed about release dates. Before a perpetrator is released from prison, information is

passed through to the relevant intelligence units which inform the respective beat managers. Some perpetrators are overseen by the MARAC co-ordinators and prison liaison teams prior to them being released. A process to manage perpetrators is in place for some prison releases, particularly where they present a high risk to their victims.

Custody officers review the risk to victims before perpetrators are released from police custody. They seek confirmation with the officer in the case that a suitable safety plan is in place. The prison intelligence function has strong links which help identify accurate risks before perpetrators are released from prison.

SDAPs are identified on the NICHE IT system and the records are updated as intelligence is received and the case progresses. An SDAP is defined as a perpetrator who has offended against two different victims over a three-year period. The SDAP marker stays on the IT system for a period of five years. If a perpetrator develops a relationship or has another partner during the five-year period, the five years (known as a flagging period) starts again.

Repeat victims who have called the police on a number of previous occasions reporting domestic abuse, were not reviewed, where there have been no further calls in the case. The constabulary accepts this and intends to address the issue.

Some work has taken place to enable local officers and commanders to have a better understanding of which families are at greatest risk in their area. Local Detective inspectors attend multi-agency conferences dealing with such issues and their sergeants attend strategy meetings. Two referrals have been made to the integrated offender management (IOM) process, in relation to complex families in one policing area. However, officers and staff state there are resourcing issues, with insufficient people to effectively carry out the interventions required.

The constabulary has an established process to ensure that lessons learned from domestic homicide reviews (DHRs) are fed back throughout the organisation, and plans are put in place to improve processes and practices as

a result of the learning. Partners are involved in this process. DHRs and serious case reviews (SCRs) conducted in other parts of the country are also analysed and communicated through the strategic PPU. This information is also shared with partner agencies through their local PPU.

Performance in tackling domestic abuse is captured within the constabulary's performance management processes. Scrutiny and accountability for performance relating to domestic abuse is evident through Operation Guardian. Performance data in relation to domestic abuse is monitored and reported by the ACC to the strategic delivery board. It is also measured bimonthly and through the strategic public protection unit. The data is analysed to show domestic abuse performance in each policing area. The PCC has governance and oversight of this also.

The criminal justice department also produce performance data including domestic abuse prosecutions which is considered by partner agencies as part of local criminal justice board process.

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 the national report.

The constabulary should:

1. Review the evaluation of training provided to ensure it is fully understood and meets the requirements of staff to ensure that they can carry out their functions, especially with regard to tackling stalking and harassment.
2. Review training provision to include coercive and controlling behaviour.
3. Review frontline supervision of domestic abuse incidents.
4. Review understanding/training for call handlers regarding defining vulnerability and vulnerable adults.
5. Review the use of the common assessment framework (CAF) with other partner agencies to risk assess the children in domestic abuse incidents.
6. Review the use of cell detectives and custody investigation teams to provide a consistent approach for dealing with medium and standard risk perpetrators.
7. Review the process for dip sampling domestic abuse cases to check quality of case files.
8. Review information provided regarding type of cases that are progressed to MARAC for frontline staff.
9. Review domestic abuse training provision for front counter staff.

10. Review use of body-worn cameras to corroborate and support prosecutions where the victim cannot attend court.
11. Review contact with victims regarding medium and standard cases by NPU staff including information provided when perpetrators are released from either police custody or prisons.
12. Review of resources for domestic abuse (the strategic lead does not own all assets) to provide a consistent approach across the constabulary.
13. Review the understanding of frontline staff regarding levels of risk recorded on the DASH.
14. Review the CPS helpline provision for guidance to reduce the delay in charging decisions, resulting in bailing perpetrators without victim protection conditions attached.

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

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.