



# **Kent Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse**

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ISBN: 978-1-78246-355-9

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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”.*

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<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 experts from over 15 forces and those working with victims of

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<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)

domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

This report details what HMIC found in Kent 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.

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<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 Kent<sup>7</sup>

### Calls for assistance



In Kent, domestic abuse accounts for 4% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 26% were from repeat victims.

### Crime

# 9%

Domestic abuse accounts for 9% of all recorded crime.

### Assault with intent

# 15%

Kent recorded 509 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 75 were domestic abuse related. This is 15% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

### Assault with injury

# 35%

The force also recorded 10,136 assaults with injury, of these 3,550 were domestic abuse related. This is 35% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

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<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.

## Harassment

# 53%

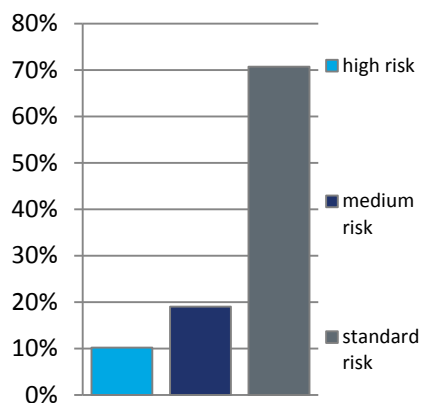
The force recorded 1,043 harassment offences, of these 558 were domestic abuse related. This is 53% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Sexual offences

# 10%

The force also recorded 1,803 sexual offences, of these 188 were domestic abuse related. This is 10% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Risk levels



On 19 March 2014 (after HMIC inspection completed) Kent had 1,470 active domestic abuse cases; 10% were high risk, 19% were medium risk, and 71% were standard risk.

## Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded, there were 89 arrests in Kent. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

## Outcomes



Kent recorded 9,010 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 23% resulted in a charge, 19% resulted in a caution and, 1% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

## Executive Summary

Responding to and preventing incidents of domestic abuse is a priority for Kent Police. This is recognised by staff across the organisation. While there are pockets of good practice, there are some areas which require improvement in order to provide a consistent quality of service and minimise the risks to victims.

The force generally responds well to high risk victims of domestic abuse. However the response to standard and medium risk cases is less well developed and the force also recognises that it could do more to manage serial perpetrators.

There has been a lack of effective training in domestic abuse to some key staff, which means that they do not understand all aspects of domestic abuse.

Partnerships with other agencies to tackle domestic abuse work well, at both a strategic level and at the local policing level.

### Identifying victims

The force has effective systems in place to support identification of domestic abuse and initially assess the risk to victims. There are good systems, within the force control room, to identify repeat callers.

Control room staff have received effective training and use a series of questions to assist them in gathering as much relevant information as possible. They also carry out further checks of police databases to gather as much information and build as full a picture as possible about the perpetrator, the victim and any children who may be present. This helps them establish risk levels and informs the speed of response needed. They also relay the information to the attending officers so that they can make a full risk assessment at the scene.

However, cases involving harassment, including stalking, are initially classified as 'harassment' when the incident log is created by the call taker. Incidents that are classified in this way are given a default grading of 'by appointment'. This creates a risk that domestic abuse incidents of this nature, may not be appropriately prioritised and the victim may not receive the level of police response they need. This is a concern.

There are good quality assurance processes within the force control room for retrospective assessment of the response to domestic abuse calls. Supervision of live incidents in real-time could benefit from being better structured.



## **Keeping victims safe**

Domestic abuse is a high priority for Kent Police and this is recognised by staff. There has been effective strategic engagement with partners and good chief officer oversight of individual high risk cases. The overall effectiveness of the response to domestic abuse is not scrutinised at force level and this means chief officers do not have full oversight on how the force is responding to domestic abuse in its wider context.

Training on domestic abuse has been limited in recent years and knowledge of issues such as coercive control among response officers is mixed. The force is developing plans to provide training for response officers and public protection specialists during 2014. Staff understand their responsibilities to reduce the risk to victims, when they attend domestic abuse incidents, and are aware of the specific risks where children are present.

While investigations are generally well managed, standards of initial investigation could be improved by giving staff better access to digital cameras. Also the force could review the arrangements for victims to have evidential photographs taken of any injuries.

## **Management of risk**

All cases assessed as medium risk, as well as standard risk cases where children are involved, are reviewed by the force's central referral unit (CRU). This is improving standards of risk assessment, but is very resource-intensive and may not be sustainable. CRU staff have received no recent training in domestic abuse, although the force has plans to address this.

The force works well with local partners, which has helped to secure funding for a countywide independent domestic violence advisory service. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences work well, but their caseload has increased significantly in recent years; the force needs to ensure a sustainable approach in the future. Combined safeguarding teams are generally co-located with reactive investigation teams which help ensure consistent contact with victims.

Witness care arrangements for cases that proceed to court are strong, with a dedicated domestic abuse witness care officer in place for each policing division.

Recommendations for safety plan actions in medium risk cases, as well as some standard risk, are made by the CRU. However there is no effective local management to make sure that these recommended actions are actually carried out. Responsibility for safeguarding, in cases that are handed over from the initial attending officer, is unclear and victims may not be safeguarded as a result of this lack of clarity. This is a concern.

## **Organisational effectiveness at keeping people safe**

It is not clear who is responsible for maintaining contact with the victim when the perpetrator is in prison or on bail. This is a concern.

The force does not have a structured process currently to manage the risks associated with serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.

There is a good process in place to review any learning from domestic homicide reviews and ensure that these are reflected in force policy and procedure. At force level, how it performs in the area of domestic abuse is only considered in the context of violent crime.

Wider scrutiny of the force's response to domestic abuse is only undertaken within the public protection unit. The force uses its own data and that of partners to develop a detailed annual analysis of domestic abuse across the force area. It should seek to make more use of this analysis to help develop its future response to domestic abuse and drive improvements in outcomes for victims.

## Findings

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

The force has effective systems in place to support identification of domestic abuse and initially assess the risk to victims. There are good systems, within the force control room, to identify repeat callers.

Control room staff have received effective training and use a series of questions to assist them in gathering as much relevant information as possible. They also carry out further checks of police databases to gather as much information and build as full a picture as possible about the perpetrator, the victim and any children who may be present. This helps them establish risk levels and informs the speed of response needed. They also relay the information to the attending officers so that they can make a full risk assessment at the scene.

However, cases involving harassment, including stalking, are initially classified as 'harassment' when the incident log is created by the call taker. Incidents that are classified in this way are given a default grading of 'by appointment'. This creates a risk that domestic abuse incidents of this nature, may not be appropriately prioritised and the victim may not receive the level of police response they need. This is a concern.

There are good quality assurance processes within the force control room for retrospective assessment of the response to domestic abuse calls. Live-time supervision of incidents could benefit from a more structured approach.

Most incidents of domestic abuse are received by the police via the force control room. Call handlers in the control room have received effective training in domestic abuse, including the revised definition of domestic abuse.<sup>8</sup>

Call handlers have a good understanding of domestic abuse and their immediate responsibilities to protect the victim. They use a series of questions to help them identify the risk to the victim, including the nature of the abuse, whether the caller is a repeat victim, or is vulnerable. One question relates to whether the abuse is happening more frequently or is escalating. This question has been added relatively recently in response to learning from a domestic homicide review.

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<sup>8</sup> The national definition of domestic abuse developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers was broadened in April 2013 to include any person over the age of 16 years (formerly 18 years) and added coercive controlling behaviour.

Any previous calls to the same location will automatically be flagged to the call handler, as will any markers (which can be placed against either the address or the telephone number) about specific known risks either to the victim or to attending officers. This information is normally passed to attending officers. However, the responsibility for carrying out more detailed background checks is not clear. Officers can carry out these checks using mobile data terminals, but this is not always practicable, particularly if the officer is working alone. In these circumstances, the officer will contact the control room and ask for more detailed checks to be made.

Where the address at which a domestic abuse incident is reported as taking place is shown as being the address of a firearms certificate holder, this information should be passed to the inspector in the force control room for review. However, this information is not always passed to attending officers, unless there is specific mention of firearms in the context of the call. The force has a process in place to review the suitability of any person to continue to hold a firearms certificate if they have been involved in a domestic abuse incident and may revoke the licence if appropriate.

Officers are sent to deal with domestic abuse incidents in line with the force's grading criteria, which are based on risk. There is no specific prioritisation of domestic abuse incidents within the policy, cases involving harassment, including stalking, are initially classified as 'harassment' when the incident log is created by the call taker. Incidents that are classified in this way are given a default grading of 'by appointment'. Call takers have the option to override this grading, but in practice this is rarely done. This creates a risk that domestic abuse incidents of this nature may not be appropriately prioritised, and the victim may not receive the level of initial response they need. This is a concern.

Supervisors in the force control room monitor incoming incidents and oversee any incidents of domestic abuse that appear to be high risk. However, the live-time monitoring of domestic abuse incidents within the control room could benefit from a more structured approach. Currently, it is dependent on individual supervisors having the time available to identify and oversee these cases. If supervisors are busy, there are no specific criteria whereby domestic abuse incidents are automatically brought to their attention.

Retrospectively, supervisors carry out quality assurance checks on both call takers and dispatchers (those who send officers to incidents). Compliance with policy is assessed, along with softer skills such as questioning techniques and empathy. The results of these quality assurance checks are used both for individual development and to help assess departmental training needs. A different theme forms the basis of the checks each month, and domestic abuse has featured as one of these themes.

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

Domestic abuse is a high priority for Kent Police and this is recognised by staff. There has been effective strategic engagement with partners and good chief officer oversight of individual high risk cases. The overall effectiveness of the response to domestic abuse is not scrutinised at force level and this means chief officers do not have full oversight on how the force is responding to domestic abuse in its wider context.

Training on domestic abuse has been limited in recent years and knowledge of issues such as coercive control among response officers is mixed. The force is developing plans to provide training for response officers and public protection specialists during 2014. Staff understand their responsibilities to reduce the risk to victims, when they attend domestic abuse incidents, and are aware of the specific risks where children are present.

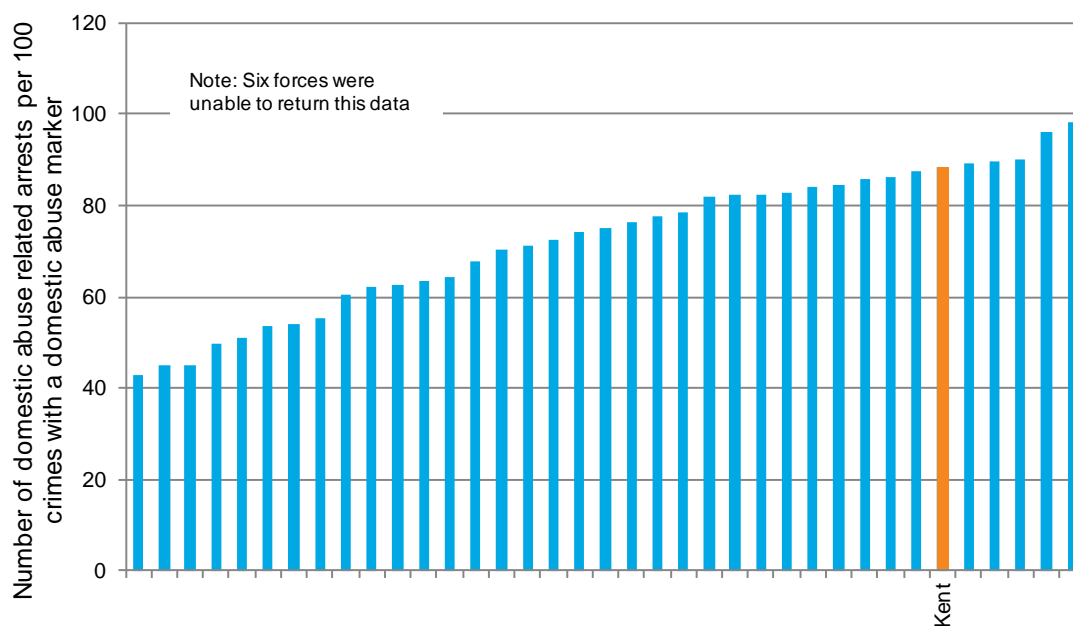
While investigations are generally well managed, standards of initial investigation could be improved by giving staff better access to digital cameras. Also the force could review the arrangements for victims to have evidential photographs taken of any injuries.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 89 arrests in Kent<sup>9</sup>. For most forces this number is between 45 and 90.

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

**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>10</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

Domestic abuse features prominently within the police and crime commissioner’s police and crime plan, and staff across the organisation understand that domestic abuse is a priority for the force. The force is working effectively with a range of partners at a strategic level which has helped to develop good partnership arrangements. There is also strong chief officer oversight of individual cases that involve significant risk, and chief officer commitment is also evident through the force’s continued funding of the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) process. These are multi-agency meetings where statutory and voluntary agency representatives share information about high risk victims of domestic abuse in order to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase victim safety.

There is a lack of strategic oversight and leadership focus on domestic abuse generally. Although domestic abuse related crimes are included within the ‘all violent crime’ part of force performance management arrangements, chief officer scrutiny of domestic abuse is extremely limited. The scrutiny and

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

governance of domestic abuse may get lost in the competing demands of managing violent crime. Specifically, there is no forum at force level where the effectiveness of the overall response to domestic abuse is scrutinised. There is work undertaken within the public protection unit (PPU) to assess compliance with policy, and there is a range of management information available, however, these are managed within the PPU. Issues are only picked up by chief officers if significant risks are highlighted to them.

There are weaknesses in the effectiveness of training in domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is integrated into a number of existing training programmes. Staff who have recently joined the force, have received training in domestic abuse. In addition, some districts have established dedicated training and development time within the work patterns of their neighbourhood teams. We found some good examples of training on domestic abuse, including sessions from partner agencies, being addressed this way. However, for response officers in particular, recent training has been largely limited to eLearning, cascade briefings and information provided in written briefs. This approach has not been as effective as it could have been in developing a consistent awareness of the nature of domestic abuse, including issues such as coercive control and stalking.

Staff feel that this has not been an effective means of communicating changes in policy, including the revised definition that came into force earlier in 2013.<sup>11</sup> HMIC is recommending that in the future domestic abuse training should be face-to-face rather than online. The lack of understanding among some officers of the definition of domestic abuse has also become evident to staff within the force's investigation management unit (IMU). The IMU has recently assumed responsibility for closing crime-related incidents, including domestic abuse. They have found that officers frequently contact them seeking to close an incident as 'not a domestic' when in fact the circumstances clearly fall within the new definition of domestic abuse. The force has recognised this and is developing plans to provide face-to-face training for both response officers, as well as some specialist staff who have not had dedicated training. This is critically important for the force to progress.

At the time of inspection, the force had just introduced the use of a supplementary set of questions within the domestic abuse, stalking, harassment (and so-called honour-based violence) (DASH) risk assessment tool that it uses. This has not been communicated effectively to staff and the forms that

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<sup>11</sup> The nationally accepted Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) definition of domestic abuse was broadened in April 2013 to include coercive controlling behaviour as a form of abuse; the age range for victims was also extended to include anyone over 16 years of age.

staff are using to record the risk assessment did not include these additional questions. Knowledge of the wider nature of domestic abuse, such as controlling or coercive behaviour, is variable, particularly among response officers.

Where children are present at incidents of domestic abuse, staff have good awareness of the risks involved and the referrals that should be considered. The force's central referral unit (CRU) reviews every case where children are involved, providing an additional level of assurance that their welfare is addressed. The force has developed enhanced notification schemes which help ensure that the local authority is made aware of incidents where children are involved, but which would normally fall below the threshold for formal referral to children's services. The force has also developed a pilot initiative with a number of schools in Medway, where the school is notified of any domestic abuse incident where a pupil at the school was present. This also helps the school to respond appropriately to any changes in the behaviour of the pupil in question.

Staff attending domestic abuse incidents generally have a good understanding of their responsibilities to take immediate action, including making an arrest where a power exists, in order to reduce the risk to the victim.

Some risk assessments are not checked for accuracy. Force policy states that supervisors should review risk assessments for standard risk cases. However, in practice this often does not happen as attending officers telephone the IMU direct. IMU staff then record the answers to the DASH questions and the resulting risk assessment. Staff in the CRU review all risk assessments initially determined to be high or medium, as well as some standard risk cases, for example where children are involved. They also make recommendations for actions to be included in a safety plan.

Investigations are generally well managed but the standard of initial evidence gathering by the attending officer is variable. Staff responding to domestic abuse incidents are limited in what they can do. They do not have access to digital cameras and so cannot obtain photographic evidence of the scene or of the victim's injuries. Typically, victims are offered the option of attending a clinic at a local police station to have their injuries photographed. However, these clinics are generally held between 2.30pm and 3.30pm on weekdays. These very limited times are likely to be inconvenient to many, for example, those victims who work during these times, or who have to collect children from school. It is left entirely to the victim whether they take up this option. This means that important evidential opportunities may be missed; making it more likely that any subsequent criminal proceedings will have to rely more heavily on the victim's own statement and less likely that the police will be able to pursue a prosecution if the victim feels unable to give evidence themselves. This means



that some offenders may not be brought to justice and victims will not be well served.

Responsibility for carrying out investigations into cases of domestic abuse is dependent on the level of risk assessment. In most cases, neighbourhood officers investigate standard and medium risk cases, while detectives from the criminal investigation department (CID) investigate high risk cases. In practice, there is little flexibility in this arrangement, despite the fact that some medium risk cases could involve serious offences. There is some tension between reactive CID and neighbourhood teams who has lead responsibility for investigations and a number of examples were quoted where there had been protracted debate over the risk level. The force also has concerns about the investigative skills of some neighbourhood officers (including sergeants), who investigate serious domestic abuse cases.

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

All cases assessed as medium risk, as well as standard risk cases where children are involved, are reviewed by the force's central referral unit (CRU). This is improving standards of risk assessment, but is very resource-intensive and may not be sustainable. CRU staff have received no recent training in domestic abuse, although the force has plans to address this.

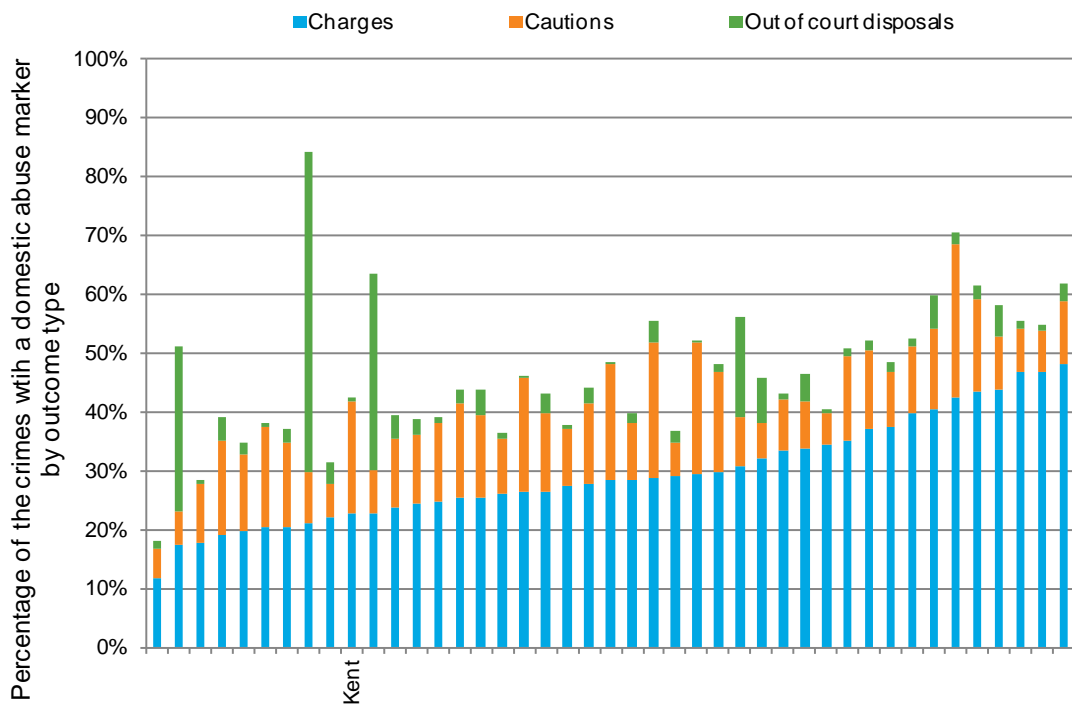
The force works well with local partners, which has helped to secure funding for a countywide independent domestic violence advisory service. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences work well, but their caseload has increased significantly in recent years; the force needs to ensure a sustainable approach in the future. Combined safeguarding teams are generally co-located with reactive investigation teams which help ensure consistent contact with victims.

Witness care arrangements for cases that proceed to court are strong, with a dedicated domestic abuse witness care officer in place for each policing division.

Recommendations for safety plan actions in medium risk cases, as well as some standard risk, are made by the CRU. However there is no effective local management to make sure that these recommended actions are actually carried out. Responsibility for safeguarding, in cases that are handed over from the initial attending officer, is unclear and victims may not be safeguarded as a result of this lack of clarity. This is a concern.

Kent recorded 9,010 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 23 percent resulted in a charge, 19 percent a caution and 1 percent had an out-of-court disposal.

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

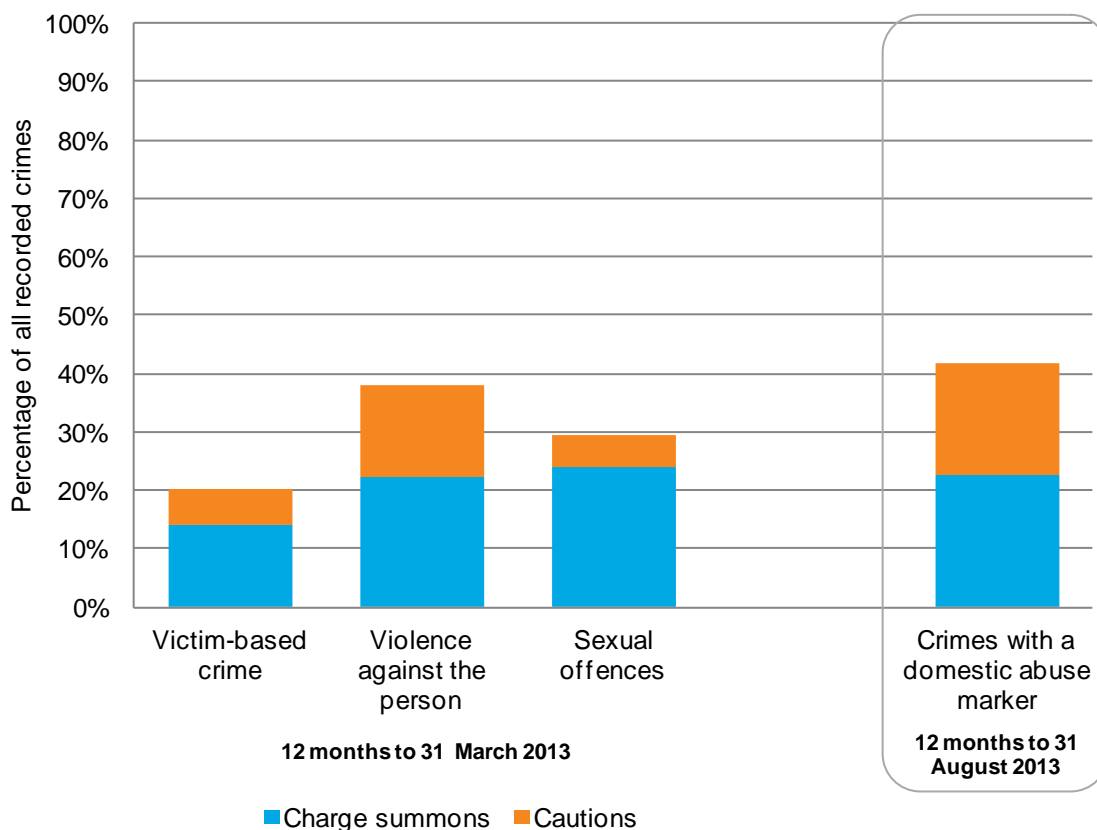


Source: HMIC data collection

Kent 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>12</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>13</sup>**



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

Safety plans for high risk cases are managed by the combined safeguarding teams (CSTs), who have wider responsibilities for safeguarding beyond domestic abuse. In medium risk cases, staff in the CRU review the risk assessment level and make recommendations in relation to the safety plans. They also review standard risk cases where children are involved. This approach is helping to ensure more accurate and consistent risk assessment across the force. However, reviewing cases in this way is very resource-intensive and the force recognises that it may not be sustainable in the longer-term.

<sup>13</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

CRU staff who undertake a specialist role have not received any recent face-to-face training in domestic abuse, including issues such as stalking, harassment and coercive control. The force has provided some computer-based self-learning training, but staff do not feel that this has been effective. At the time of the inspection, plans were being developed for a new training course aimed at those with a specialist role in relation to domestic abuse.

There is a clear partnership strategy in relation to domestic abuse, overseen by the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group (KMDASG). Membership of this group includes Kent Police, Kent County Council, Medway Unitary Authority and a large number of other organisations such as Kent Probation, the Crown Prosecution Service and several voluntary and community organisations involved in supporting domestic abuse victims. The group is chaired by the head of the Kent Fire and Rescue Service. An operational group reports to KMDASG and is responsible for the implementation of a delivery plan. This partnership arrangement has, for example, helped to secure funding for the countywide independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) service.

There are local examples of the police working with partners to help tackle domestic abuse. These include a schools initiative where educational inputs are provided on issues such as teenage relationship abuse; good links between neighbourhood policing teams in Medway, housing authorities and local victim support charities; and the willow centre in Ashford, where a number of organisations work at the same location to provide a one-stop advice centre for those affected by domestic abuse. Similar arrangements exist in other parts of the force area.

Multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) arrangements across the force are well-managed and the force has received positive external endorsement of the approach from Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) – a national charity which operates a MARAC development programme, funded by the Home Office. Actions from MARACs are identified and followed up and relevant information is shared with neighbourhood teams. However, the MARACs within Kent have, in recent years, experienced a significant increase in the number of cases being referred and the sustainability of the current arrangements is in doubt. This is a concern.

High risk domestic abuse cases are investigated by trained investigators from locally-based reactive investigation teams. Victim safety in these cases is the responsibility of CSTs which are generally co-located with the reactive investigation teams. We found that communication between CST staff and investigators was good, helping to ensure consistency of contact with victims.

The force no longer has dedicated domestic abuse teams or officers. However, in a number of cases, officers who had previously held roles as domestic abuse specialists continue to be used as a valuable source of specialist advice to local officers and partners.

Witness care arrangements for domestic abuse victims, particularly those assessed as high risk, are strong. Staff from the witness care team have received training in domestic abuse, including input from the National Centre for Domestic Violence. Three specialist witness care staff – one per division – deal with the majority of domestic abuse cases and act as a single point of contact for internal and external queries. This helps them build up a level of expertise to help them to better identify and support the needs of domestic abuse victims. They meet regularly with providers of the IDVA service across the force area and have developed good relationships with the IDVA practitioners who work in their local courts. They have also had familiarisation sessions at the specialist domestic violence courts (SDVCs) and represent the witness care unit at local SDVC steering groups.

Although the CRU play a positive role in reviewing risk gradings and helping identify relevant safety plan measures, the management of these plans for standard and medium risk cases within neighbourhood teams is not consistently effective. We reviewed a number of case files and found several examples where it was unclear if safety plan actions proposed by the CRU had actually been implemented. There was often no record in the file of the actions having been carried out, and no evidence of the safety plan being actively supervised. This is a concern.

There is often a gap between the time when an officer (in most cases a response officer) attends a report of domestic abuse, and when the investigating officer (either from a neighbourhood crime team, or a reactive investigation team) takes ownership of the case. During this handover period, responsibility for safeguarding the victim is unclear. Furthermore, where neighbourhood officers are dealing with domestic abuse cases, they see their safeguarding responsibilities as ending once the suspect has been charged. They do not routinely, for example, get any information in cases where a suspect who was kept in custody following charge is subsequently released on bail and it is not clear who is ensuring that the victim is safeguarded.

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

It is not clear who is responsible for maintaining contact with the victim when the perpetrator is in prison or on bail. This is a concern.

The force does not have a structured process currently to manage the risks associated with serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.

There is a good process in place to review any learning from domestic homicide reviews and ensure that these are reflected in force policy and procedure. At force level, how it performs in the area of domestic abuse is only considered in the context of violent crime.

Wider scrutiny of the force's response to domestic abuse is only undertaken within the public protection unit. The force uses its own data and that of partners to develop a detailed annual analysis of domestic abuse across the force area. It should seek to make more use of this analysis to help develop its future response to domestic abuse and drive improvements in outcomes for victims.

In cases where domestic abuse perpetrators are imprisoned, responsibility for maintaining contact with the victim, and specifically for ensuring that the victim is notified when the perpetrator is released, is unclear. A number of staff quoted examples of cases where the victim had not been updated when the perpetrator was released from prison. This is a concern. Where a high risk suspect is on bail, officers are normally made aware of any bail conditions to which they may be subject. However, there is no process whereby the risk posed to the victim is formally re-assessed and any safety measures updated, should those bail conditions be varied, or when suspects are released from bail.

The force policy is taken from the ACPO definition on domestic abuse which defines a repeat perpetrator as *someone "alleged to have used or threatened violence against two or more victims who are unconnected to each other and who are or have been intimate partners of the perpetrator, over a rolling 3-year period"*.<sup>14</sup> This information may be used in the context of any subsequent risk assessment. However, while the shortage of perpetrator services across the force area is a factor, the force recognises that it needs to do more to manage the risk in relation to serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.

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<sup>14</sup> Definition of repeat perpetrator from 'Tackling Perpetrators of Violence Against Women and Girls' ACPO review for the Home Secretary 2009

Awareness among local officers of repeat perpetrators in their area is limited to their own local knowledge – they do not receive any structured briefing or information on this issue.

There have been a number of domestic homicide reviews (DHRs) following domestic murders in the force area over recent years. The force has developed a robust process, managed by the assistant chief constable, to ensure that any recommendations from DHRs, as well as serious case reviews are highlighted and addressed, and that this learning is reflected in improvements to policy and procedure.

A detailed analysis of the nature of domestic abuse across the force area (termed a 'problem profile') is produced annually and used in discussions with partners to help direct their commissioning arrangements. This profile uses information and intelligence from a range of agencies, and is produced by an analyst dedicated to public protection work, including domestic abuse. A senior analyst from the force is also seconded to Kent County Council which helps provide the force with good access to data from other organisations. However, the force could make better use of the domestic abuse problem profile in helping develop its own response to domestic abuse. Beyond the force problem profile, the analysis of domestic abuse information and intelligence to inform local policing activity, is largely restricted to anything that is commissioned through divisionally-based analysts.

Domestic abuse performance information is only considered within the context of violent crime at force and divisional level performance meetings. However, wider scrutiny of domestic abuse information (for example, including incidents as well as crimes) is only carried out in any structured way within the public protection unit. This means that the senior officers responsible for much of the resource that is tackling domestic abuse are not routinely considering measures of domestic abuse performance or outcomes. Chief officers are not using performance information to drive improvements in domestic abuse outcomes and are reliant on any issues relating to the force's approach to domestic abuse as a whole (rather than just that involving violent crime), being escalated to them.

## 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.

The force should review the default response grading for incidents of harassment to ensure that domestic abuse incidents of this nature are always prioritised appropriately.

1. The force should consider a more structured approach to the live-time supervision of domestic abuse incidents within the force control room.
2. The force should review the arrangements for chief officer oversight of domestic abuse cases.
3. The force needs to ensure that the proposed programme of training on domestic abuse for response officers and specialists is progressed as a matter of urgency.
4. The force should ensure that the use of the supplementary domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) questions, and any subsequent policy changes, are communicated effectively to staff, and that any associated forms are updated accordingly.
5. The force should review the requirement for sergeants to sign off risk assessments in standard risk cases.
6. The force should review the arrangements for officers attending domestic abuse incidents so they can have access to digital cameras.
7. The force should review the times of clinics where victims can have evidential photographs taken of any injuries, in order to make it easier for more victims to attend.
8. The force should review its guidance for the investigation of domestic abuse cases in order to provide more flexibility for detective officers to investigate or assist in the investigation of relevant domestic abuse cases other than solely those assessed as high risk.
9. As standards of risk assessment improve, the force should consider how it could move towards a more sustainable approach on the review of initial risk assessments made by attending officers.



10. The force should, together with relevant partners, review the current arrangements for MARACs to ensure they remain sustainable in the future.
11. The force should review the way in which safety plans for medium and standard risk domestic abuse cases are managed and supervised and ensure that safeguarding responsibilities are made clear in circumstances where cases are handed over between attending and investigating officers.
12. The force should ensure that officers are absolutely clear about to their responsibilities for maintaining contact with the victim and reassessing risk and safety plans in cases where the suspect is either imprisoned or is on bail. Responsibilities post-charge, including those cases where a suspect is kept in custody and placed before a court, should also be clarified.
13. The force should seek to develop a structured approach to ensuring that the risks associated with serial perpetrators of domestic abuse are managed more effectively.
14. The force should review how it could better use the domestic abuse problem profile in order to help develop its future response to domestic abuse.

# 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.