



Inspecting policing  
in the public interest

# West Mercia Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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 West Mercia 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 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 West Mercia<sup>7</sup>

### Calls for assistance



In West Mercia, domestic abuse accounts for 5% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 20% were from repeat victims.

### Crime

**8%**

Domestic abuse accounts for 8% of all recorded crime.

### Assault with intent

**18%**

West Mercia recorded 269 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 49 were domestic abuse related. This is 18% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

### Assault with injury

**31%**

The force also recorded 5,774 assaults with injury, of these 1,786 were domestic abuse related. This is 31% 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

# 56%

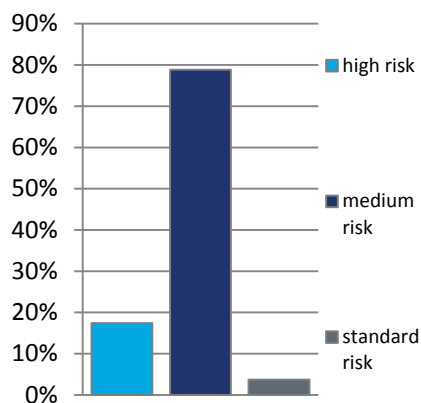
The force recorded 1,380 harassment offences, of these 772 were domestic abuse related. This is 56% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Sexual offences

# 12%

The force also recorded 1,221 sexual offences, of these 143 were domestic abuse related. This is 12% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Risk levels



On 23 October 2013 West Mercia had 402 active domestic abuse cases; 17% were high risk, 79% were medium risk, and 4% were standard risk.

## Arrests



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

## Outcomes



West Mercia recorded 4,859 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 41% resulted in a charge, 13% resulted in a caution and, 6% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

## Executive summary

HMIC found some effective work by West Mercia Police to tackle domestic abuse; however there are several areas for improvement which the force needs to address before there can be confidence that victims of domestic abuse are provided with a consistent standard of service and that the risk to them is minimised. The alliance with Warwickshire and ongoing work should provide greater clarity to staff about what is required of them and what their role is in protecting the victims of domestic abuse from harm.

### Identifying victims

Victims of domestic abuse generally are identified by the force through calls to the force operations and communication centre (OCC). The force has systems in the OCC to help identify victims who have previously reported domestic abuse. Staff are trained to question callers to understand the likely threat, harm and risk to the victim or anyone else who may be present. They can access the force intelligence systems and provide information to the attending officer, preparing them for the situation they will find themselves managing. The databases the operators can access are not completely integrated, so they need to access two different systems to find the relevant information. The control room operators usually send a uniformed officer immediately or within an hour, dependent on the circumstances reported.

The force defines a domestic abuse repeat victim as a victim where there is a second incident in a twelve-month period. There is no definition for a vulnerable victim, however all staff recognise that any previous report of domestic abuse or vulnerability will influence the service provided. Information from previous calls is used to ensure that the most appropriate response is sent. The initial quality of service provided to victims from the control room is not subject to any formal review. Supervisors and specialist staff review the victim risk assessment forms for all high and medium risk assessed incidents. Force policy states that the incidents where victims have been assessed as standard risk should be subject of a 10 percent dip sample, but this is not consistently applied across the force. There is an expectation that frontline supervisors will attend all serious and repeat incidents of domestic abuse, but this expectation is not consistently adhered to across the force area.

### Keeping victims safe

The force treats domestic abuse as a priority and has recently reviewed the policies and practices for officers and staff involved in responding to domestic abuse incidents. A joint policy is being developed relating to West Mercia and Warwickshire Police as the two forces are delivering their services in a formal



alliance. They are doing this to improve efficiency and meet current funding challenges. The forces are making the best use of economies of scale but still delivering their services locally. The protective services assistant chief constable (ACC) maintains a regular oversight of the activities of both forces to ensure that the quality of service to victims of domestic abuse is maintained and improved.

## **Management of risk**

The force provides an enhanced service to victims of domestic abuse who are assessed as being at the greatest risk of harm. Specialist protecting vulnerable people (PVP) teams and domestic abuse officers are in each of the local policing areas (LPAs) to provide oversight and support safety planning and investigations relating to victims assessed as high and medium risk. However, there is confusion with some of the local police supervisors regarding the overall responsibility for managing the safety plans for the high-risk victims. The force needs to clarify the roles and remit of the specialist staff to alleviate the confusion and safeguard victims of domestic abuse properly. There are generally good relationships between the police and partner agencies. The force is actively engaged in the local multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs), where multi-agency support for victims assessed as high-risk is provided. There is a concern that the inconsistent ratio of support of the independent domestic advisers (IDVAs) to victims provides different services, dependant on the area in which they live. The force should consider addressing this with partner agencies.

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

The force is continually seeking to improve the service to domestic abuse victims and the new head of public protection is reviewing current practices and effectiveness of PVP teams. However, the force does not assess the nature and scope of domestic abuse which would improve their understanding of the impact in their communities. The force recognises the need to focus on those perpetrators who cause repeated harm and are looking at ways to identify 'serial perpetrators' and to manage them in a similar way to persistent offenders of other types of crime. This is currently being piloted in one area of the force and if successful should be rolled out across the force. The force has also piloted the use of domestic violence protection notices (DVPNs) in one LPA and this has now been implemented across the force. It demonstrates the force's appetite to support victims and place the responsibility on the perpetrators to move from a household where domestic abuse has taken place. However, staff outside the pilot LPA do not appear to have much knowledge of DVPN notices and their usefulness. This means victims may not be receiving the best service when a prosecution does not take place.

## Findings

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

Victims of domestic abuse generally are identified by the force through calls to the force operations and communication centre (OCC). The force has systems in the OCC to help identify victims who have previously reported domestic abuse. Staff are trained to question callers to understand the likely threat, harm and risk to the victim or anyone else who may be present. They can access the force intelligence systems and provide information to the attending officer, preparing them for the situation they will find themselves managing. The databases the operators can access are not completely integrated, so they need to access two different systems to find the relevant information. The control room operators usually send a uniformed officer immediately or within an hour, dependent on the circumstances reported.

The force defines a domestic abuse repeat victim as a victim where there is a second incident in a twelve-month period. There is no definition for a vulnerable victim, however all staff recognise that any previous report of domestic abuse or vulnerability will influence the service provided. Information from previous calls is used to ensure that the most appropriate response is sent. The initial quality of service provided to victims from the control room is not subject to any formal review. Supervisors and specialist staff review the victim risk assessment forms for all high and medium risk assessed incidents. Force policy states that the incidents where victims have been assessed as standard risk should be subject of a 10 percent dip sample, but this is not consistently applied across the force. There is an expectation that frontline supervisors will attend all serious and repeat incidents of domestic abuse, but this expectation is not consistently adhered to across the force area.

Victims of domestic abuse are identified by West Mercia Police through calls to their police operations and communications centre (OCC); by attendance at stations; or when identified by other agencies, such as health and children services, at a MARAC. The majority of incidents and crimes are reported through the OCC. Within the OCC there are 'call handlers' and 'controllers'. Initial assessments from the circumstances reported are made by the call handler against a generic risk assessment based on the likely threat, harm and risk to a victim. The force generally sends a response to every report of domestic abuse immediately or within one hour. There are occasions when an appointment will be made. This is usually at the victim's request and when there is no perceived immediate risk to the victim.

The force has a procedure checklist that call handlers should follow when responding to reports of domestic abuse. This includes, the location and identity of the caller, the location of the incident, the location of the suspect, victim and children, whether parties are injured, the severity of any injury and whether medical assistance is required, and whether any children are present and if they are safe. Extensive guidance and question sets are available to call takers for domestic abuse, stalking and harassment. However, it is not mandatory to use the checklist and it is used inconsistently.

There is an agreed force definition of 'repeat' victim domestic abuse, which is a second incident in a twelve-month period. A 'vulnerable' victim is not specifically defined, but staff in the OCC ask the caller questions to assess their needs and identify whether they are vulnerable. All staff understand the force's definition of a repeat victim and identified that when responding to a repeat or vulnerable victim, it influenced the way they responded and the service they provided. They recognised the need to attend quickly and deal with the victim in a way appropriate to their needs.

Call handlers and controllers have access to the various force databases, intelligence systems, incident logs, previous domestic abuse records and crime investigations. This information is used to help them assess the risk to a caller at the first point of contact. They inform the attending officers so they can effectively manage the incident they are responding to. Officers feel they are generally provided with good quality intelligence when attending incidents, though there are occasions that they do have to ask for more information. Some OCC staff were not clear whose responsibility it was to carry out intelligence checks – the handler or the controller – if checks are not carried out the victim may not receive the most appropriate service and officers could be exposed to unnecessary risk. The call handlers and controllers also have access to a dedicated intelligence team within the OCC which is available at any time. The intelligence staff can gain intelligence from the databases that have restricted access and conduct more in depth research.

The knowledge and training of staff that have contact with victims of domestic abuse is inconsistent. The OCC staff informed HMIC that they had not received domestic abuse training. Officers and staff have received some training regarding domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessments but indicated that there had not been any force-wide training for some considerable time. The force's definition of domestic abuse changed in April 2013 but HMIC found that this was not widely known by staff. The changes appear to have been circulated by force-wide emails and no evidence was found to show that the new information is being reinforced by supervisors to check the standard of knowledge. Therefore the force is reliant on individuals taking personal responsibility to read and adopt the revised process. One of the

important changes to the definition is the recognition of coercive and controlling behaviour as domestic abuse. If staff are unaware of this they may not recognise it as domestic abuse should a victim call the police to report an incident.

Supervision takes place in the OCC, but it is the responsibility of the individual call handlers and controllers to highlight more serious incidents to both their supervisor and the uniform response supervisor. The information relating to a report is detailed on an incident log, which is not checked by a supervisor before they are closed. The force does not have a robust process for assessing the quality of service to the caller or the initial action taken in the control room. Supervisors are expected to retrospectively review the work of call takers, but there is no standard way of recording results or set number of calls to review. As a result, the force does not know whether they are dealing with victims empathetically and consistently, or correctly assessing their risk and delivering an appropriate service.

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

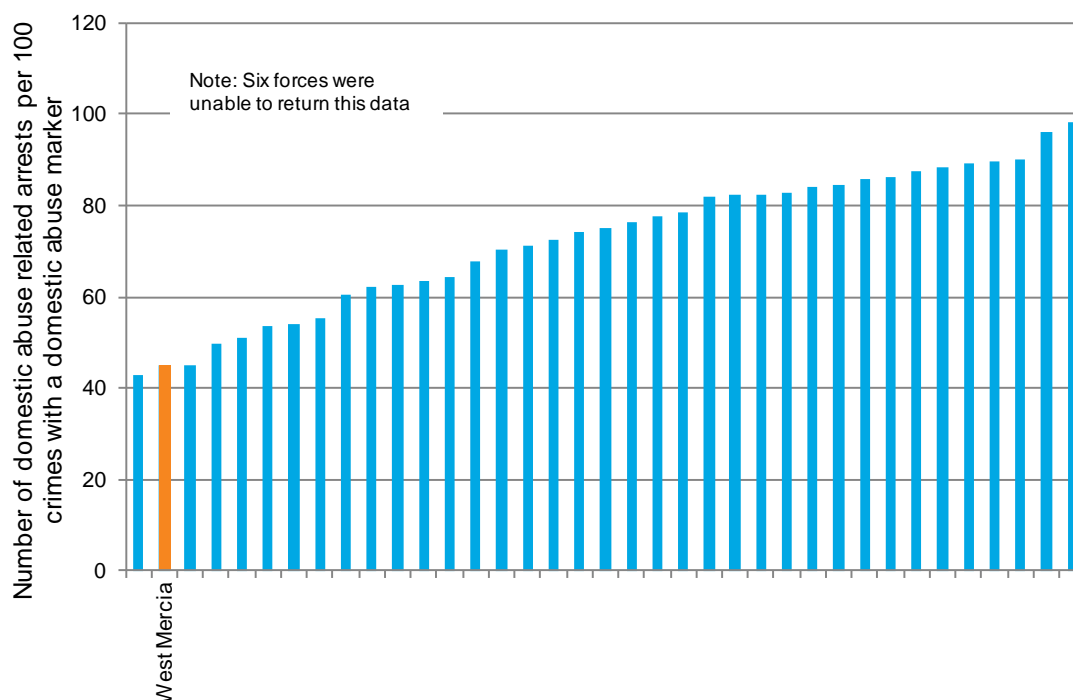
The force treats domestic abuse as a priority and has recently reviewed the policies and practices for officers and staff involved in responding to domestic abuse incidents. A joint policy is being developed relating to West Mercia and Warwickshire Police as the two forces are delivering their services in a formal alliance. They are doing this to improve efficiency and meet current funding challenges. The forces are making the best use of economies of scale but still delivering their services locally. The protective services assistant chief constable (ACC) maintains a regular oversight of the activities of both forces to ensure that the quality of service to victims of domestic abuse is maintained and improved.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 45 arrests in West Mercia. For most forces this number is between 45 and 90<sup>8</sup>. The low arrest rate compared to other forces indicates that this is an issue that the force may want to review.

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<sup>8</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>9</sup>**



Source: HMIC data collection

The force uses the DASH when considering the risk of harm to domestic abuse victims. The force mandates officers to complete a DASH risk assessment form for every victim of domestic abuse, but as this is not recorded electronically there can be a delay in the information being shared with partner agencies. When a crime has been committed, officers are required to gather the available evidence at the earliest opportunity. However, they are hampered by having limited access to visual recording devices, in particular, body-worn cameras. The attending officer is not always the officer that investigates the crime, but the process for crime allocation is not consistent across the force and some investigations are not conducted by staff with the best skills and knowledge.

Domestic abuse is detailed in the police and crime plan and a new domestic abuse strategy has been prepared and is due to be published. The ACC is the chief officer lead for domestic abuse and has led on the new strategy that

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

focuses on four strands: prevention; provision of service; partnership working; and criminal justice outcomes.

All staff we spoke to placed importance on providing a good quality service to victims of domestic abuse. They were not able to identify it as a specific force priority through any performance reporting mechanism as with other areas of business, but through the daily tasking and briefing process it was clear it was important.

The majority of domestic abuse incidents reported to the police are attended by uniformed patrol officers in the first instance. The patrol officers cover a 24/7 shift pattern and are the core officers who respond to calls that require immediate service from the police. The officers are expected to talk with the person who made the call, and to the victims of domestic abuse on their own, if they were not the caller, to establish the facts. West Mercia Police has a policy of taking positive action in all domestic abuse incidents. HMIC found that most officers understood this to mean arresting the perpetrator where a crime has occurred.

It is the responsibility of the attending officer to gather evidence for the investigation. This includes taking a written statement from the victim, noting any injuries or signs of a disturbance, having them photographed and preserving forensic evidence. Officers would like to use body-worn cameras when responding to reports of domestic abuse but reported that most of those available were not working properly. This presents a missed opportunity to gather evidence and safeguard victims through building a criminal case against perpetrators.

The attending officers are also required to assess the risk of harm to the victim and use a domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment that is used by most police forces and approved by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). The officers have all been trained in the use of the DASH risk assessment. However officers and staff have received different levels of general domestic abuse training. In particular, those conducting most of the domestic abuse criminal investigations had not received recent training. This is a concern as they may be unaware of specific types of abusive behaviour such as coercive and controlling behaviour and would therefore not recognise it as domestic abuse.

The officers complete the DASH questions on a template after a discussion with the victim. The answers provided, along with the officers' professional judgements are the basis for the risk level that is applied to victims. This relates to the likely level of risk of harm and will be defined as high, medium or standard. There is a requirement for the grade to be put on the OCC incident

log and the completed DASH risk assessment must be forwarded to the officers' sergeant before they go off duty. The sergeants review all completed DASH risk assessments. They can alter the grade and provide further safeguarding guidance to reduce the risk of harm. The fact the booklet is not electronic means that it cannot be emailed directly to the PVP team. This increases the time it takes for the specialist team to receive the information and share information with partner agencies.

The force considers the protection of children when responding to reports of domestic abuse and has adopted some good practice to ensure their welfare is considered. The OCC staff ask whether children are present when a domestic abuse incident is reported. The operators support attending officers by making enquiries with the local authority if there are concerns about the welfare of a child. The checking of children who are present when officers respond to reports of domestic abuse is routine practice across the force. The children's details are recorded in the DASH booklet and the information is then available to share with partner agencies. Guidance is provided in the DASH booklet to ensure officers consider the threshold criteria for referring concerns to the local authority's children's services.

The attending officer establishes whether the reported incident is a crime. The most common reports are physical assaults, which are classified as crimes and would initiate a police investigation. Officers are required to collect evidence to establish whether there is sufficient evidence to prosecute the perpetrator. The force process for the management of crime investigations is not clear; as a result different practices take place depending on the local relationships. Local officers informed HMIC that they had good support from some detectives in cases where the injury to the victim was serious or where the offending behaviour of the perpetrator warranted a more skilled investigation. However, in other areas of the force, officers were not getting the same support. Some response officers were dealing with crimes involving serious assaults and investigations with serial perpetrators of domestic abuse. This means that victims receive a different quality of investigative service depending on the locality of the offence.

While investigating crimes the police have a key role guiding a victim through the prosecution process and providing them with information and support to keep them safe from harm. Victims who are assessed as the highest risk of harm receive an enhanced service from specialist officers. PVP staff review all high and medium risk cases. The DASH risk assessments for victims who are assessed as standard should be subject of a ten percent dip sample by PVP supervisors. The force could then be confident that both the attending officers and their supervisors are applying consistent thresholds across the force area. However, there are different practices depending on the local policing area and

the force policy is not being adhered to. Some of the PVP supervisors are checking all the standard-risk assessments and others are not checking any of them. Again, this means that victims may receive a different standard of investigation depending on where the offence was committed.

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

The force provides an enhanced service to victims of domestic abuse who are assessed as being at the greatest risk of harm. Specialist protecting vulnerable people (PVP) teams and domestic abuse officers are in each of the local policing areas (LPAs) to provide oversight and support safety planning and investigations relating to victims assessed as high and medium risk. However, there is confusion with some of the local police supervisors regarding the overall responsibility for managing the safety plans for the high-risk victims. The force needs to clarify the roles and remit of the specialist staff to alleviate the confusion and safeguard victims of domestic abuse properly. There are generally good relationships between the police and partner agencies. The force is actively engaged in the local multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs), where multi-agency support for victims assessed as high-risk is provided. There is a concern that the inconsistent ratio of support of the independent domestic advisers (IDVAs) to victims provides different services, dependant on the area in which they live. The force should consider addressing this with partner agencies.

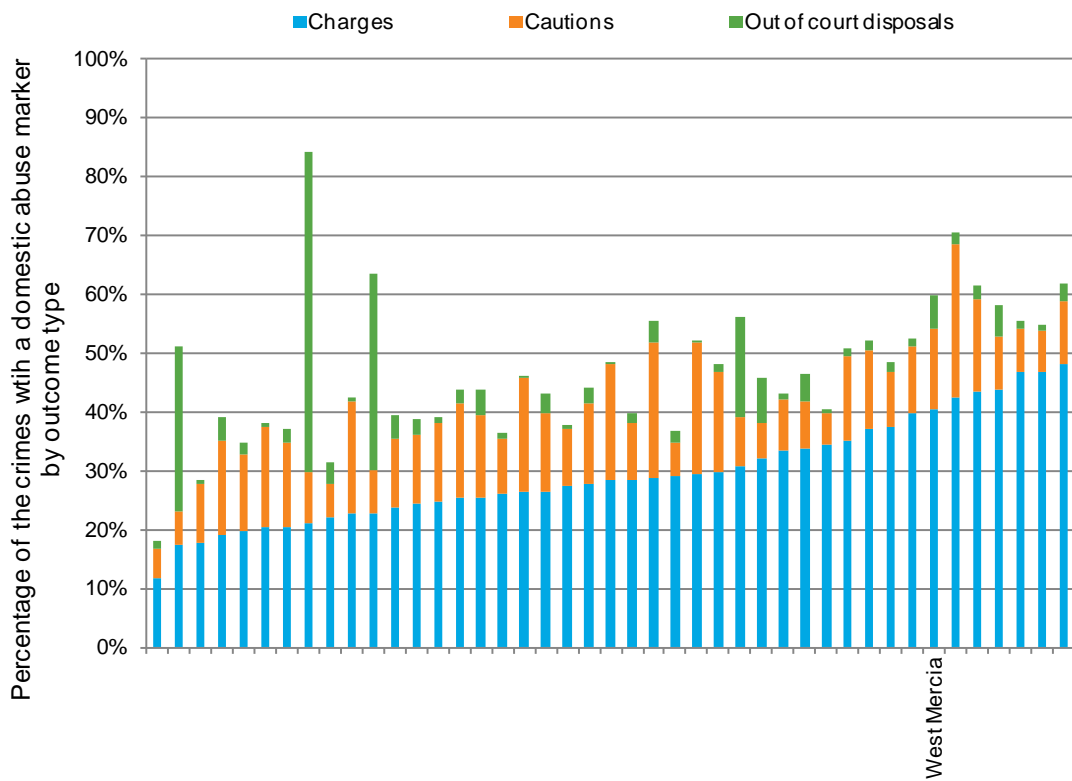
West Mercia recorded 4,859 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013.<sup>10</sup> Of these crimes, 41 percent resulted in a charge, 13 percent a caution and, six percent had an out of court disposal.

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<sup>10</sup> 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 2013<sup>11</sup>**

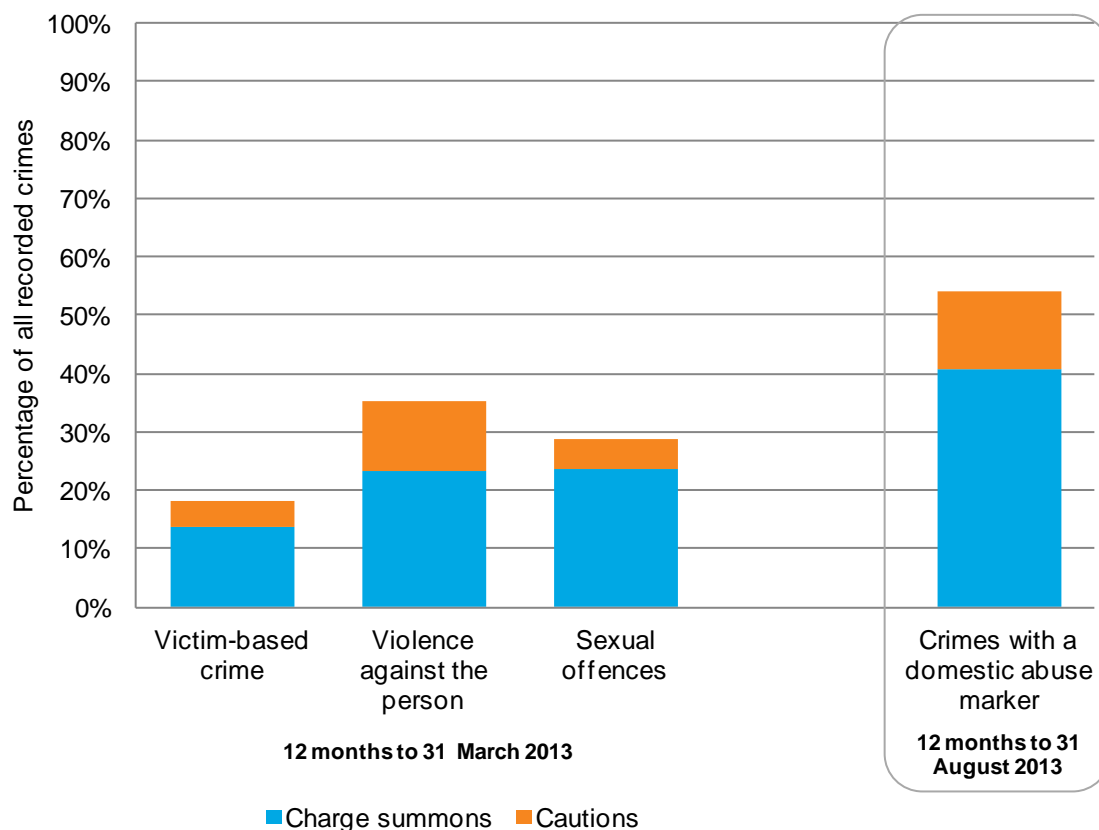


Source: HMIC data collection

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

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



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

The force specialist PVP teams that work in each of the LPAs are dedicated to investigating and protecting vulnerable people. This includes the dedicated domestic abuse (DA) officers who are responsible for the management of all high-risk victims. The DA officers have received enhanced training and have a greater understanding of the complexities of domestic abuse and the impact on victims. Risk management plans (RMPs) are implemented by the DA officers to mitigate the risk of harm and to support the victim. DA officers do not work weekends, so support for DA officers is provided by PVP staff at this time. This does affect the capacity of the PVP staff to fulfil their 'usual' work and the full impact of this has not been assessed.

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

It is the responsibility of staff in the PVP teams to review the medium and high DASH risk assessments, ensuring the correct risk has been identified and refer the high-risk cases to the DA officers to progress the RMP. Specialist resources are identified to support the victim and all high-risk victims are referred to a local MARAC and offered the support of an IDVA. The PVP staff also co-ordinate child protection statutory notifications (for example to local authorities where a child is believed to be at risk of harm) and receive information on non-molestation and restraining orders from solicitors and police forces. They reconcile the information and flag addresses and key information on relevant police databases.

DA officers usually have personal contact with high-risk victims but also task local officers electronically to provide reassurance or collate information to mitigate the risk of harm to the victim. The tasks are remotely monitored by the DA officers with oversight by the DA supervisors. However, the RMPs are not managed consistently across the force area as the supervisors of the DA teams are applying different practices. HMIC found that in one LPA there were stringent reviews and risk levels were re-graded where the risk had been mitigated, resulting in a proportionally lower number of high-risk victims than in other areas. In contrast, in another LPA, reviews were not being scheduled. When they did take place there was no significant reduction in the proportion of high-risk victims, even though action had been taken to mitigate the risk. This inconsistent practice confused some of the local policing supervisors, as they were not clear who is responsible for the oversight of the RMP. This means that the victims at the highest risk of harm are not being consistently managed and reviewed across the force and therefore they may not have an accurate understanding of the number of high risk victims they are supporting. This means that victims will not be receiving the support they need to help keep them safe.

HMIC found that this confusion was replicated with the responsibility for medium-risk victims with some LPA staff unclear on their roles. It is acknowledged that when the new policy is implemented this will clarify the situation.

The force has good working relationships with partner agencies and there are individual strategies and meeting structures aligned to the separate local authorities. There is generally good engagement at the MARACs where representatives from agencies meet and work together to reduce the risk of harm to individual victims. The MARACs are held on a monthly basis and chaired by the detective inspectors that work in the PVP teams in each of the LPAs. Cases are discussed and all agencies exchange information and agree on activities to protect and support them. IDVAs attend the MARACs and are generally the individuals who can provide the best support for the victim. IDVAs

are not employed by the police and the funding streams available differ depending on the local authority area they service. In some areas, the IDVA funding is only secured for one more year, which does not provide assurance for the longer-term support for the victims who need it the most. The ratio of IDVAs to victims is also inconsistent and certain areas are stretched beyond capacity while others report having spare capacity.

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

The force is continually seeking to improve the service to domestic abuse victims and the new head of public protection is reviewing current practices and effectiveness of PVP teams. However, the force does not assess the nature and scope of domestic abuse which would improve their understanding of the impact in their communities. The force recognises the need to focus on those perpetrators who cause repeated harm and are looking at ways to identify 'serial perpetrators' and to manage them in a similar way to persistent offenders of other types of crime. This is currently being piloted in one area of the force and if successful should be rolled out across the force. The force has also piloted the use of domestic violence protection notices (DVPNs) in one LPA and this has now been implemented across the force. It demonstrates the force's appetite to support victims and place the responsibility on the perpetrators to move from a household where domestic abuse has taken place. However, staff outside the pilot LPA do not appear to have much knowledge of DVPN notices and their usefulness. This means victims may not be receiving the best service when a prosecution does not take place.

Following an arrest, the perpetrator is interviewed and either released from custody or remanded to appear at court. The risk to the victim is reviewed to ensure the safeguarding measures in place are sufficient. It is the responsibility of the investigating officer to inform the victim what is happening to the perpetrator and consider any additional safeguarding measures. The release dates of perpetrators from prison are not always known in advance. The information is sometimes provided from the probation service and both DA and local officers make enquiries when it is on their radar so it can be highlighted at management meetings. Victims are then informed and risk levels reviewed.

Perpetrators who abuse more than one unconnected victim, moving from relationship to relationship are known as serial perpetrators. Forces should understand who their serial perpetrators are so that they can actively try to reduce the harm they cause. The force is running a serial perpetrators pilot in Hereford to examine the extent of the problem and identify ways of reducing

their offending. The learning from the pilot will be disseminated through the force and rolled out in other areas if successful. It is important the force develops in this area. There are some measures in place to manage perpetrators, as domestic abuse perpetrators are part of the cohort of people in the local integrated offender management units.

The force has run a pilot in one of the LPAs implementing, DVPNs. This has now been rolled out across the force, but it is not widely known about, and staff in some areas are unsure of the process to follow.

The force does not have a current profile to understand the extent of the domestic abuse problem across the force. An analytical profile detailing victim, offender and location profiling would assist the force and partners in identifying specific people or areas to focus on and what resources would be the most appropriate.

The force is considering trialling work to look at the demand linked to same victim/multiple perpetrators and same perpetrator/multiple victim combinations to see where the opportunities are for early intervention but this is in the very early stages. The force has commissioned some work to look at the seasonal aspects of domestic abuse and the likely impact of the World Cup next year, which demonstrates that they are trying to gain a greater understanding of the impact of domestic abuse and put some preventative tactics in place.

The force is not driven by performance targets but there is a desire to understand whether the resources and tactics used in the force are making a positive difference and serving the needs of the community. Domestic abuse is featured in the force's strategic assessment but there is no current associated framework or performance measures to help managers focus the activity of their staff. The head of PVP is new in post and is developing a meaningful suite of measures which should be in place by April 2014.

The force has set up a governance and oversight panel which is chaired by the ACC and reviews all domestic homicide reviews and serious case reviews. The intention is that the force learns from these cases and keeps staff informed to improve their effectiveness and change practices if necessary. This appears to be in the early stages of development. We found that staff we spoke with had not received any recent information relating to 'lessons learnt'.

## Recommendations

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

1. The force should implement a robust quality-assurance process that provides systematic audits of domestic abuse calls in the force operations and communication centre.
2. The force should establish what domestic abuse training is required across the force and develop a plan to deliver it.
3. The force should communicate the ACPO definition of domestic abuse and check it is understood by staff.
4. The force should consider options to provide officers with effective mobile equipment to capture early photographic evidence at domestic abuse incidents.
5. The force should communicate the crime allocation policy to local officers and investigative staff and subsequently review the compliance.
6. The force should ensure the ten percent dip sampling of standard risk assessed cases is systematically complied with.
7. The force should clarify the supervision requirement of risk management plans (RMPs) and ensure staff comply with it.
8. The force should review the IDVA service provision across the force and senior managers formally address capacity issues with the relevant partner agencies.
9. The force should commission a comprehensive domestic abuse problem profile at a force level.
10. The force should communicate the DVPN policy and procedures and review the understanding.

## 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.