



Promoting improvements
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PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability)

A revisit inspection of Essex Police



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Introduction

This report sets out Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMIC's) findings following our inspection revisit to Essex Police on 22-23 March 2016. This revisit assessed progress made against the two causes of concern and three areas for improvement in the *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability) – An inspection of Essex Police*, which HMIC published on 15 December 2015. The report is available on HMIC's website: www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/police-effectiveness-vulnerability-2015-essex.pdf

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability)

In summer 2015, as part of our annual inspections into police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL), HMIC's effectiveness programme inspected how well forces keep people safe and reduce crime. This included an assessment of how effectively forces protect vulnerable people from harm, and support victims, based on findings against four questions:

- How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?
- How well does the force respond to vulnerable victims?
- How well does the subsequent police action and work with partners keep victims safe?
- How well does the force respond to and safeguard specific vulnerable groups (missing and absent children & victims of domestic abuse); and how well prepared is it to tackle child sexual exploitation?

What we found in Essex Police in 2015

HMIC had significant concerns about the capability of Essex Police to protect vulnerable people from harm and support victims. There were serious weaknesses in the force's arrangements to safeguard and investigate cases involving vulnerable people.

The force's response to victims of domestic abuse was poor. There was confusion as to roles and responsibilities among officers in medium and standard risk cases resulting in safeguarding opportunities being missed. Not all officers charged with investigating high risk cases were appropriately trained and experienced. These shortcomings were highlighted in HMIC's crime inspection in 2014. The force was not always assessing or responding to the needs of and risk to children from households where there was domestic abuse.

The supervision and quality of investigations into missing people had improved. However, we found confusion among officers, including supervisors, about the use of the categories missing and absent. These weak processes led to inappropriate risk assessments that were leaving vulnerable children at risk. It was clear that officers did not always understand the link between missing children and child sexual exploitation.

The force was unprepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. The force had a poor understanding of the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation and knowledge and awareness among frontline staff was limited which adversely affected their ability to identify and respond to cases.

Revisit findings: progress against the recommendations from the 2015 vulnerability inspection

In this section we set out the causes of concern, areas for improvement and recommendations from our December 2015 vulnerability inspection, as well as our findings from this revisit inspection.

Causes of concern from December 2015 inspection report

Causes of concern

The force's response to victims of domestic abuse was a cause of concern to HMIC because of a lack of effective and reliable force processes to respond to and safeguard victims. The force needed to improve its processes for the identification of and response to children affected by domestic abuse. There was confusion about responsibility for safeguarding those victims assessed as at medium or standard risk, and a lack of properly recorded safety plans. The force needed to improve its investigation of offences, specifically the quality of handover of investigations and ensuring that staff with appropriate professional skills and expertise carry out investigations. There was a lack of a process to monitor outstanding perpetrators of domestic abuse to ensure they are arrested at the earliest opportunity.

Recommendation

To address this cause of concern HMIC recommends that the force should take immediate steps to ensure that:

- staff understand how children can be affected by domestic abuse and there is a process to ensure they take safeguarding actions, and make referrals to other organisations who have a role in safeguarding;
- it clarifies roles and responsibilities of officers and staff for safeguarding victims of domestic abuse who have been assessed as at medium or standard risk, and establishes a process to ensure safety plans are properly recorded on systems;
- officers with the appropriate professional skills and expertise carry out investigations and that processes are established to supervise the handover of cases to ensure they are of the necessary standard; and
- it establishes a process to monitor outstanding perpetrators of domestic abuse to ensure action is taken to arrest them at the earliest opportunity.

Revisit findings

HMIC found that the force had completed substantial work to improve staff understanding of how children can be affected by domestic abuse and to ensure that it completes appropriate safeguarding actions and referrals.

The force has developed a communications strategy called Inform. This strategy encompasses a number of elements including six briefing posters under the 'Think Vulnerability' heading, which includes substantial information on children affected by domestic abuse and the actions officers should take.

We found that frontline staff understand the need to assess and report on all children affected by domestic abuse even when the child is not present at the incident. Our review of five domestic abuse cases and five DASH risk assessment forms¹ confirmed that officers are including details of all children who could be affected, and are carrying out and recording safeguarding activity. DASH forms are all subject to a secondary assessment by a sergeant who checks a variety of sources including intelligence, incident and firearms records to assure the quality of the initial risk assessment.

On 21 January 2016, the force introduced a new single child abuse referral form with the full agreement of partner organisations. This form is designed to provide an effective and efficient means by which officers make referrals to children's social care. At the time of our inspection, the force had made 901 such referrals, with partners reporting positive improvements in referrals as a consequence of the new form.

The force is in the process of amending its policy and procedure on dealing with domestic abuse to clarify responsibilities across all levels of risk. In summary, the specialist domestic abuse investigators (in units known as Juno teams) investigate high and medium risk cases with support from detectives based in the local policing areas. Local policing area officers handle all standard risk cases. All domestic abuse cases involving allegations of serious sexual offences are investigated by the sexual offences investigation team (SOIT) in conjunction with a Juno team member.

Our review of five domestic abuse cases and reality testing with Juno (investigative officers) and frontline officers, revealed that overall they have a good understanding of their responsibilities and of the safeguarding options available, and recognise the importance of keeping victims updated on progress. However, some frontline officers we spoke to were still confused as to their safeguarding responsibilities and the role

¹ DASH (domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and so-called honour-based violence) 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 frontline practitioners identify high-risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking and so-called honour-based violence.

of the central referral unit in this.² However, from the cases we reviewed, and from speaking to officers it was apparent officers are undertaking all necessary safeguarding action and seeking advice from the Juno team if required.

HMIC found evidence of safety plans in all the domestic abuse cases reviewed. The depth and detail of these plans was appropriate to the level of risk and subject to review and sign off by supervisors.

The force has increased the number of its detectives accredited under the Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP) and a large number of its officers are working towards PIP accreditations.³ Some 76 percent of officers within the force's Juno teams have begun working towards PIP accreditation. HMIC found that the force had removed two officers from the Juno teams who had failed the national investigation exam. Officers must pass this exam to enter the PIP. Officers told us that this had sent a strong message to the workforce about standards. The force has also introduced investigation coaches in each local policing area, who provide investigative support and guidance to officers thereby improving the quality of investigations.

The force has scrutinised closely the quality of handovers, providing training to officers about the standard required. Some supervisors we spoke to, including some in Juno teams, felt that recently frontline officers' handovers had greatly improved. Frontline officers' increased use of body-worn video cameras has contributed to this improvement. The force identified the introduction of the case action plan form – investigation minimum standards (PP60) – as being central to supporting better handover packages. This form contains a number of prompts in relation to four areas: safeguarding, investigation, victim considerations and suspect management. Our review of a number of these forms found them to be useful and informative.

² The central referral unit has responsibility for supporting the victim and drawing together timely and appropriate additional support from partner agencies.

³ The aim of the Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP) is to ensure that officers are trained, skilled and accredited to conduct the highest quality investigations. The PIP structure involves a series of levels:

- PIP level 1 – priority and volume crime investigations
- PIP level 2 – serious and complex investigations
- PIP level 3 – major investigations
- PIP level 4 – strategic management of highly complex investigations.

PIP identifies key learning and development for investigators in new or specialised roles, and standards of competences in investigation and interviewing. These are now established within a suite of national occupational standards.

The force now understands clearly the number of outstanding perpetrators at all risk levels and has put in place a governance process to enable it to assure that its activity to arrest offenders is ongoing and managed. At the time of our inspection, there were 376 outstanding domestic abuse perpetrators across the force, of which 84 were high risk, 201 were medium risk and 91 were standard risk. Each day the force circulates details of all outstanding suspects across the force, and has introduced a weekly outstanding domestic abuse perpetrators meeting.

The daily force Pacesetter meeting includes the management of new high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators, and our observation of these meetings provided evidence of the allocation of resources to locate and arrest these individuals. The force holds so-called days of action, focused on the arrest of outstanding domestic abuse perpetrators, across all its local policing commands. These have resulted in up to ten arrests on individual actions days and are seen as a successful tactic by staff and partner agencies.

Local officers manage low-risk perpetrators, circulating the individual on the Police National Computer (PNC) if they cannot be found on the day the case is reported. The officer will circulate the perpetrator before he or she completes that day's shift and his or her sergeant will review and confirm the circulation. Thereafter the force includes the outstanding perpetrator in staff briefings and allocates to officers the responsibility for securing his or her arrest. Perpetrators remain the responsibility of the local officers supported by their sergeants. Our observation found that officers and sergeants had a good understanding of these processes.

Causes of concern from December 2015 inspection report

Causes of concern

The force's response to child sexual exploitation was a cause of concern to HMIC. The force had a poor understanding of the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation, as the problem profiles it used to assess this were under-developed. Knowledge and awareness among frontline staff were limited which adversely affected their ability to recognise, assess and respond to cases with tailored support, including making links between persistent missing children and the risk of being exploited. Some staff were conducting online investigations into paedophile offences without the necessary skills or experience. Workload was excessive within the police online investigation team, resulting in delays. The force did not make sufficient use of video interviews for vulnerable victims and overall HMIC was concerned that its safeguarding arrangements for children at risk were not robust enough.

Recommendation

To address this cause of concern the force should immediately take steps to ensure that:

- it understands the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation by re-assessing available information, including that of partners;
- it improves frontline staff knowledge and understanding of the factors to identify child sexual exploitation, and how to respond to cases;
- officers with the appropriate professional skills carry out investigations involving children as victims, specifically in relation to cases of online paedophilia cases and their workloads are supervised to ensure they can do so effectively; and
- its safeguarding arrangements are robust in relation to children who are victims of child sexual exploitation.

Revisit findings

Essex Police has further developed its ability to understand the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation (CSE), although has more work to do before it can produce a comprehensive problem profile.⁴

⁴ A problem profile is intended to provide the force with greater understanding of established and emerging crime or incident series, priority locations or other identified high-risk issues. It should be based on the research and analysis of a wide range of information sources, including information from partner organisations. It should contain recommendations for making decisions and options for action.

The force has introduced a rigorous programme to flag incidents, intelligence reports and reported crime, which has enabled it to understand demand better. The force control room has recently established a set of filters to enable clear identification of the 13 different types of vulnerability the force recognises⁵ including CSE.

The child sexual exploitation triage team (CSETT) is the central point within the force for the analysis of all CSE incidents, crimes and intelligence and partner referrals. Over recent months, there has been a significant increase in the number of cases reported to the CSETT; between 1 January and 21 March 2016 the number of incidents tagged for CSETT's attention was 549. In the same period last year the figure was 148. The introduction of the form PP57 has brought 901 cases across the range of child abuse concerns, including CSE into the team for assessment. High-risk cases are subject to immediate action by local policing teams and information from all referrals are collated into an intelligence package for each local policing area to inform its fortnightly allocation of tasks. It was evident that the police online investigation team (POLIT) does not always appropriately flag its investigations into CSE. This undermines the accuracy of the force's problem profile, albeit with a small number of cases.

HMIC found that the force is working hard to increase access to and the use of partner information to develop its CSE problem profile. The force now receives information from all three authorities in Essex⁶ from interviews they hold with missing children once found. This is helping to improve the force's understanding of the extent of risk to children of being sexually exploited.

The chief officer team has been instrumental in ensuring that the focus of improving knowledge and understanding of child sexual exploitation across the force has been given the highest priority since the July 2015 HMIC vulnerability inspection.

The force has used a wide range of communications designed to increase knowledge and understanding including a bespoke poster campaign called 'I didn't know' and a bulletin-type publication called 'Inform' that gives information across a range of CSE issues. The force has also produced a video that uses child actors to emphasise main points and the impact upon victims. The video is available to all staff on the intranet. Many staff cited the Officers guide to vulnerability pocket guide as an excellent product that offers appropriate advice and important contact details.

The force held a series of vulnerability conferences, which included partner agency representations and covered elements on CSE and in particular the link to missing

⁵ Essex Police identifies 13 different types of vulnerability incident, these being: child abuse, child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, missing persons, rape and serious sexual offences, prostitution, domestic abuse, honour-based violence, forced marriage, stalking and harassment, human trafficking and modern slavery, adults at risk of harm and abuse and hate crime.

⁶ Essex comprises Essex County Council, Thurrock Unitary Authority and Southend Unitary Authority.

children. HMIC staff attended the first of these conferences and found the content to be informative and have a positive impact, while our discussions with attendees found that the conferences are universally well-received.

The force has designed and is delivering a three-day face-to-face public protection training package, which 600 officers and staff have completed. The force has attempted to prioritise key groups of staff including command teams, response officers and call handlers. We observed that officers were aware of the course, with many officers and staff either having attended or been given a date for their training. The force intends that 1,750 of its staff will be trained by November 2016 and all other staff within two years.

Partner organisations reported “really positive” improvements in Essex Police’s understanding, engagement with them and referrals, which in turn they felt had generated “a sea change in trust” between the partners and the force.

The force still has work to do before its detective capacity is sufficient for its needs. In the interim it is working to reduce the risk of poor investigations in these difficult cases. The force has provided training on the role of the police and local authorities to safeguard children at risk of harm to many officers in the public protection command, and has scheduled many officers’ participation in the specialist child abuse investigation development programme (SCAIDP).⁷

In relation to online paedophilia cases, the demand is such that the POLIT cannot investigate all cases. This is despite the force deploying additional officers into the unit. The workload in the unit at the time of our inspection was 272 cases, an average of around 20 cases per detective. We found that the POLIT supervisors are very active in reviewing cases and backlogs, and seeking to identify risk and prioritise action. HMIC found that the oldest investigation held by the unit is two years old and had been subject to regular review.

Due to demand, the force is assigning cases of child grooming and incitement, and image cases where checks have revealed the suspect does not have access to children, to detectives based on the local policing areas. All such cases are first assessed by the POLIT who provide a package to the local detective allocated the investigation. The package includes an investigation plan, initial advice, and a direction to contact the POLIT for additional and ongoing advice. HMIC found those cases already allocated to local detectives had included the initial POLIT overview and advice.

The force has made considerable efforts to improve its safeguarding of children who are victims of sexual exploitation. The introduction of the single child abuse referral

⁷ SCAIDP is a training programme for officers working within the child protection arena that includes inter-agency training such as social care, and taking part in training on how to achieve best evidence when interviewing children or young people.

form required that the force negotiate with its local authority partners before it could be introduced. Partners are reporting improvements in the force's referrals to children's social services as a consequence of the introduction of the form.

Our file review of five child abuse and five domestic abuse cases found that the force recorded strategy discussions held over the phone, on the crime record. However, these records did not always include who officers spoke to, who officers spoke about (especially if more than one child was involved) and the result of the conversation.

Our file review of five child abuse cases found that officers are taking appropriate actions and recognise their safeguarding responsibilities. Our observation of briefing and deployment meetings showed that the force considers management of safeguarding for victims and potential CSE victims. We witnessed discussions on tactical options including the use of child abduction notices, discussions on the links between organised crime groups and vulnerable children, and activity to safeguard the children involved.

The link between missing children and the risk of child sexual exploitation is now soundly understood across the force and frontline officers are making efforts to improve safeguarding for these children. Information from return interviews conducted by the three local authorities in Essex is now shared with the force; however there is a difference in approach across these authorities. In Southend and Thurrock unitary authorities, all missing children are offered an interview, while in Essex County Council only looked after children⁸ are offered return interviews. The information from these interviews is shared with the missing person's liaison officers and CSETT, however the information made available to them varies between local authorities leaving the possibility of intelligence shortcomings in some areas.

Areas for improvement from December 2015 inspection report

Areas for improvement

- Essex Police should improve its initial response to reports of incidents, specifically in relation to cases where police have been unable to attend, to ensure it reassesses risks and takes appropriate safeguarding action. This was evident in relation to reported cases of domestic abuse but may apply to other cases.

⁸ The definition of looked-after children (children in care) is set out in the Children Act 1989. A child is looked after by a local authority if a court has granted a care order to place a child in care, or a council's children's services department has cared for the child for more than 24 hours.

Revisit findings

Since our July 2015 inspection, the force has reduced the number of unresolved open incidents. Arrangements are in place to reassess risk and ensure appropriate safeguarding action is taking place for those incidents that prove difficult to close in a reasonable period. At the time of our revisit inspection the force was managing 988 open incidents, of which 113 were domestic abuse cases. Of these, 40 cases were yet to be allocated or were awaiting closure. The force has achieved this reduction in open incidents by the effective use of the THRIVE⁹ system to assess risk and harm, and by stopping appointment-based incident management in favour of seeking to complete 'today's business today' wherever possible so that officers will attend as soon as possible.

Supervisors in the control room demonstrated that those incidents not dealt with in a reasonable period are subject to regular ongoing reassessment using THRIVE. The force has introduced a risk intelligence team (RIT) whose role is to conduct intelligence checks and provide background information on all incoming incidents where it is identified that a child is involved either as a victim, potential victim, as a witness or a third party. The RIT assists in the ongoing assessment of risk for those incidents involving vulnerable victims by continually assessing these incidents until they have been resolved.

The RIT provides an enhanced service to that provided by the domestic abuse intelligence team (DAIT) whose focus is solely domestic abuse cases. The force is aware of the overlap between these two teams; however the RIT had only come into existence two days before our inspection and as such is a pilot which the force will review alongside the DAIT before the force implements its new workforce model in autumn 2016.

Areas for improvement from December 2015 inspection report

Areas for improvement

- Essex Police should improve its initial investigation of cases involving vulnerable victims, particularly ensuring greater officer access to photographic and video recording equipment. This will provide better evidence of injuries and scenes, and ensure compliant storage and retention of images.

⁹ THRIVE stands for threat, harm, risk, investigation opportunities, vulnerability and engagement.

Revisit findings

The force policy on the use of personal phones to record evidence prohibits, in all but exceptional circumstances which are outlined in the policy, the use of personal mobile devices to record evidence. The force has invested in 400 body-worn video cameras, distributed across its five busiest local policing areas and is trialling mobile devices. It is intended that over 2,000 mobile devices will be distributed to officers by the summer of 2016. This will enable officers to better capture evidential images.

HMIC found when speaking to frontline officers that there is a perceived lack of available body-worn video cameras and trained officers. Officers are still on occasion using their own personal mobile phones to record injuries of domestic abuse victims in breach of the force policy. One officer said they had recently asked a victim to photograph their injuries on the victim's own mobile phone and email it to the officer. Supervisors acknowledged they are aware that officers are using their own personal mobile phones to record injuries. They stated that this was due to body-worn video cameras and mobile devices not yet being provided on a wide enough scale.

The force will need to continue to direct officers toward the force policy on the use of personal phones and devices, as its release of further body-worn video and mobile devices extends across the force throughout the year.

Areas for improvement from December 2015 inspection report

Areas for improvement

- Essex Police should improve its response to missing and absent children, specifically in relation to officer and staff understanding and use of the categories missing and absent, and of the factors that escalate the risk of harm to children.

Revisit findings

In response to this area for improvement the force amended its policy and procedure for missing children in December 2015 with the absent¹⁰ category being discontinued for all children, all of whom must now be recorded as missing. HMIC reviewed the absent category on the force systems and found that two children had been categorised as absent since the change in policy, one in December 2015 and one in January 2016. HMIC found when speaking to officers that they understand why the

¹⁰ A person is classified as absent if they are not where they are expected to be but they are not considered at risk. Whereas, if they are classified as missing the police are obliged to take steps to locate them, as the level of perceived risk is higher.

absent category has been removed for children and excluding the two examples above, officers were complying with the policy.

Command of missing children cases has been strengthened. When a child is reported as missing the duty inspector and Silver Commander¹¹ are notified to ensure that the incident is subject to a suitable risk assessment and that the force puts in place an appropriate response. Children whom the force assesses are at risk of or victims of sexual exploitation receive enhanced attention and upon their return are debriefed by trained staff.

The force has increased the number of its missing person's liaison officers (MPLOs) from three to ten. This increase provides greater capacity to engage with care homes in relevant areas, undertake problem-solving work with frequent missing people and ensure that lessons from investigations are learned to inform future investigative and safeguarding activity. Partners reported that the MPLOs have a "good awareness of the key issues" and that the increase in numbers was positive.

A memorandum of understanding has been agreed with care homes where children frequently go missing. This has improved the force's knowledge of these children and allows for better assessment of risk of harm and the scale of response. In cases where the child is assessed as being high risk the MPLO will generate a response plan that contains the latest information available and outlines what actions the attending officer should consider.

¹¹ All forces maintain a command structure to ensure appropriate command at all times. Generally the roles are defined as Gold (strategic), Silver (tactical) and Bronze (operational). Typically the Gold role is filled by chief officer or chief superintendent level officers, Silver by superintendents and chief inspectors, and Bronze by inspectors or sergeants.

Conclusions and next steps

Conclusions

Essex Police has made significant progress against the two causes of concern and three areas for improvement identified in HMIC's *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability) – An inspection of Essex Police* report. HMIC observed a change of mind set and approach to vulnerability across the force, putting children and vulnerable people at the centre of everything the force does.

The approach taken by the chief officer team and senior managers has been effective in achieving this change. Force communications to the workforce, public and partners have been clear and consistent. We received positive feedback from partners and staff regarding the quality of these messages throughout this revisit.

The force has improved its response to domestic abuse and now has effective and reliable processes in place to respond to and safeguard victims. The confusion we previously found about who was responsible for victims has mostly been resolved. Force policy and procedures apportion responsibility explicitly clearly at all times, and importantly most officers we spoke to had understood this. We found safety plans to be properly recorded in all the case files reviewed and the quality of handovers had improved, helped by the introduction of the PP60 form.

The force continues to develop its detective capacity, but will take time to achieve the desired level. In the meantime, the force has put support in place for officers who find they are either working in a specialist department or allocated the investigation of offences without the preferred qualification, experience or expertise. It is of the utmost importance that the force continues to support and develop those officers and staff involved in the investigation of child protection matters to ensure that all its investigations and interventions are of the highest quality.

The force now has processes in place to properly manage outstanding domestic abuse perpetrators. The force is aware of the numbers of these individuals and the risk each poses. Frontline staff and officers understand the need to make early arrests. The force should continue to monitor levels of outstanding perpetrators and seek to reduce their numbers.

The force has improved its response to child sexual exploitation (CSE). Its understanding of the nature and scale of the problem is developing and its problem profile is now a helpful resource, although it should do more to improve the profile so that it becomes a comprehensive document. Awareness of CSE across all levels of the force has improved markedly. Frontline officers and staff are now better able to recognise, assess and respond to cases appropriately, and understand the link between missing children and CSE.

The workloads within the police online investigation team (POLIT) have improved but are still high. The force's decision to allocate lower-risk cases to officers outside the unit is pragmatic and it has built in appropriate support. Thus while investigating officers outside the POLIT may not have the desirable expertise or experience, they do have guidance and ongoing support from specialist officers who do.

The force has greatly improved its safeguarding arrangements, with strong partnership working and support. The single child abuse referral form PP57 has been a great success and is helping officers to make quick and effective referrals. The cogent links that the CSETT has established with the county's three local authorities has proved central to the force's ability to provide effective care plans for the vulnerable people who most need support.

Next steps

HMIC will continue to monitor Essex Police's progress against the two causes of concern and three areas for improvement set out in our *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (vulnerability) – An inspection of Essex Police* published on 15 December 2015. We look forward to seeing further progress during our effectiveness inspection in autumn 2016, and our forthcoming child protection re-inspection.