

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016

A vulnerability revisit inspection of Humberside Police



March 2018

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ISBN: 978-1-78655-617-2

www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs

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Introduction

This report sets out the findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)¹ following our revisit inspection of Humberside Police on 22 and 23 May 2017. The revisit inspection assessed the force's progress against the one cause of concern and the one area for improvement in our 2016 effectiveness report, which we published in March 2017.²

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016

In autumn 2016, as part of our annual inspections into police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL), HMICFRS' effectiveness programme inspected how well forces keep people safe and reduce crime. To reach a judgment on the extent of each force's effectiveness, our inspection answered the following question:

- How effective is the force at keeping people safe and reducing crime?

To answer this, HMICFRS explored the areas of policing that we consider to be of particular interest and concern to the public, including in relation to the following question:

- How effective is the force at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm, and supporting victims?

Five forces were graded as inadequate in how effective they were at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm, and supporting victims. HMICFRS revisited the following four forces between April and June 2017 to examine progress against the causes of concern set out in our 2016 effectiveness inspection reports: Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Humberside and Nottinghamshire. In respect of the fifth force rated as inadequate (the Metropolitan Police Service), the Home Secretary commissioned HMICFRS to publish quarterly updates on the force's response to our inspection findings.

¹ This inspection was carried out before 19 July 2017, when HMIC also took on responsibility for fire & rescue service inspections and was renamed HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. The methodology underpinning our inspection findings is unaffected by this change. References to HMICFRS in this report may relate to an event that happened before 19 July 2017 when HMICFRS was HMIC. Citations of documents which HMIC published before 19 July 2017 will still cite HMIC as the publisher.

² *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016 – An inspection of Humberside Police*, HMIC, 2017. Available from: www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2016-humberside/

What we found in Humberside Police in 2016

Humberside Police was inadequate in how it protected those who are vulnerable from harm, and supported victims. HMICFRS found that it routinely failed to identify vulnerable people when they contacted the force, and that the level of service given to them was inadequate. The force's procedures to assess the risk to victims were weak and were not subject to effective supervision. Therefore, evidence was sometimes lost and opportunities to protect victims from further harm were missed.

The force commissioned a peer review of domestic abuse that led to a number of changes. These include improvements in how often preventative powers are used to protect victims and prohibit perpetrators from intimidating or causing further harm to victims.

However, inconsistencies identified by HMICFRS in 2015 in the quality of the force's investigations, and in its capacity to respond promptly to people who need help, had not been adequately addressed. This was a cause of concern.

More positively, the force worked well with partner organisations to safeguard victims during the course of investigations. At a number of venues, officers and staff worked alongside other service providers. This meant that a broad range of expertise and facilities were brought together to give practical support to victims.

Revisit findings: progress against the recommendations and area for improvement from the 2016 effectiveness inspection

In this section, we set out the cause of concern, recommendations, and area for improvement from our 2016 effectiveness inspection, and our findings from this revisit inspection in 2017.

Cause of concern from 2016 effectiveness inspection report

Cause of concern

The force's ability to assess vulnerability when victims first make contact, and the timeliness of the response they receive, were causes of concern. First, there needed to be an assured method of identifying the threat and risks faced by callers. Then, Humberside Police needed to be certain that there are officers available to respond to their needs. These topics were included in HMICFRS' observations about the force in 2015, and they now needed to be addressed urgently.

Recommendations

- The force should improve its initial assessment and response to vulnerable people by ensuring that control room staff apply the THRIVE principles effectively.
- In order to keep victims safe, the force's response to incidents must be determined by the initial assessment of risk rather than the availability of response officers.
- Any decision to delay a response to domestic abuse must be fully justified and subject to objective supervision.
- Steps need to be taken to ensure that investigations of domestic abuse allegations are in line with the force's published standards, irrespective of the risk categorisation of the victim.

Revisit findings

The THRIVE risk assessment model enables call-handlers to make a structured assessment of incoming calls and determine the level of threat, harm, risk, investigative opportunity, vulnerability and engagement options, in order to determine the most appropriate response. At the time of our 2016 inspection, the force used its own criteria to define vulnerability. It has since adopted the following College of Policing definition of vulnerability:

"if as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of or protect themselves, or others, from harm or exploitation".

The force has also reviewed its use of the THRIVE assessment model, issuing revised guidance to control room staff working in the command hub.

The force has made several other changes in the command hub, including installing a new senior leadership team, recruiting an experienced call centre manager from the private sector, and establishing its vulnerability intelligence assessment team (VIAT). The VIAT operates between 7.00am and midnight each day. It is made up of experienced police officers, many of whom cannot be deployed on full police duties due to health restrictions. The force defines the VIAT's purposes as 'providing and developing consistency of risk assessment in the hub'. In an effort to achieve this, VIAT staff review the risk assessment of all incident logs where vulnerability has been identified by the control room staff. For incidents involving domestic abuse, the VIAT is responsible for researching police systems to identify any information that may be of value to the officers attending, such as any previous recorded incidents, levels of violence used and the antecedent history of the parties involved. This information is endorsed on the incident log, to inform the officers attending. Since the VIAT does not operate 24 hours per day, any incidents involving vulnerability that arise when the team is not working are reviewed by the VIAT sergeant the following morning, to ensure compliance with procedure or to initiate remedial action.

The force operates a cadre system of silver commanders, under which a designated senior officer is on duty and immediately available to assume command of serious and critical incidents. Each day, the silver commander is required to review a sample of ten incident logs involving vulnerability, including domestic abuse, to ensure that standards are being maintained and to effect swift remedial action in appropriate cases. Commanders are required to record their findings, which the force monitors to identify any emerging themes.

In this revisit inspection, we reviewed a small sample of incident logs created on 14 and 15 May 2017, selecting those that related to domestic abuse, missing people and calls reporting concern for welfare. At the conclusion of our review, we discussed all the reviewed incident logs with the force, and provided detailed feedback.

In all the incident logs we reviewed, it was evident that the THRIVE principles had been applied at the call-taking stage. In most cases this was limited to a brief entry on the log in the format 'THRIVE – assessed risk – rationale'. The assessed risk was expressed as being either low, medium or high; and in most cases, the rationale was limited to a brief sentence summarising the operator's consideration of the circumstances.

We found that all the incident logs relating to domestic abuse that we reviewed had been correctly identified and flagged by the operator as domestic incidents. They all contained evidence that background intelligence checks had been undertaken, predominantly by researching the force's intelligence and crime recording system and the Police National Computer. The command and control system, used to record and manage incidents, automatically searches previous incident records and identifies repeat locations (addresses at which an incident has been recorded previously).

We found that checks undertaken by officers in the VIAT were structured and demonstrated the thoroughness of the research undertaken, often providing additional information of material value to attending officers. In some cases, this additional research revealed information that had the potential to modify the initial THRIVE assessment – for example, the involvement of a high-risk domestic abuse perpetrator or victim, which could increase the urgency of police attendance. In spite of this, however, we saw very little evidence, in any of the logs that we reviewed that the initial risk assessment had been changed because of further information. This was particularly apparent in incident logs relating to people reported missing from home, where the initial risk assessment remained unchanged from the first call through to the missing from home report, regardless of any new information.

We also saw evidence that intelligence and research checks were not always carried out in a timely manner, particularly at times when the VIAT was not on duty. We did not explore the reasons for these delays, although they may indicate that staff within the command hub do not always have the time to undertake these checks. The force should ensure that this is not the case.

At the time of the revisit inspection, the force had plans to change the structure and operating procedures in its command hub in autumn 2017. The restructuring will see the introduction of a new shift system, the formation of two separate teams within the hub (demand management and crime management) and the integration of the VIAT resources into the dispatch desks, to provide immediate and 24-hour access to this important function.

We will assess the progress of these changes with interest in future effectiveness inspections.

During our 2016 effectiveness inspection, we visited the command hub. We found a high number (77) of domestic abuse incidents awaiting allocation. Worryingly, almost half of these (37) were more than 24 hours old and had still not been allocated, due to a lack of resources available to attend. We found that some of these incidents had not been prioritised for immediate action, even though there were clear risks to victims. When these delays were brought to the attention of the force, it implemented immediate changes to risk management within the hub. However, as we said in our inspection report, although the immediate response from the force was encouraging, our advice was that constant oversight by chief officers would be necessary to ensure that improvements in this critical area were sustained.

Since the 2016 inspection, the force has introduced, and continues to develop, a comprehensive range of performance data, which it uses to monitor and improve both quantitative and qualitative aspects within the command hub. Quantitative data include statistics such as call and incident volumes, the proportion of calls answered promptly, abandoned calls, hub staff availability and sickness levels, and attendance times at incidents. Qualitative data include victim satisfaction and perception surveys and internal quality assurance processes such as the review of domestic abuse logs by silver command cadre.

Although the revisit inspection found a much improved picture from the 2016 inspection, with improving trends in the average attendance time at incidents and no long queue of un-resourced incidents involving vulnerability, there were still some worrying indicators.

Based on the THRIVE assessment, the force assigns incident logs a grade, indicating the appropriate speed of the police response. The force grades the response required as emergency, high, prompt or planned. It uses the grading hub to identify those incidents that are suitable for resolution without a resource being dispatched.

Of the small sample of incident logs that we reviewed, we were generally satisfied that the initial grade allocated to incidents was appropriate and in line with the THRIVE assessment. That said, we found several logs graded as high or prompt, where a resource had not been deployed within the target time for that grade of incident. In several cases the reason for non-deployment was recorded (usually that the necessary resources were committed to other, higher-graded incidents). However, we found some incidents where there was no entry on the incident log to explain why there had been a delay. The force should consider incorporating the monitoring of such incident logs into the comprehensive performance data it collects, so as to identify and remedy the underlying cause of such delays.

As previously mentioned, our 2016 inspection found a high number of domestic abuse incidents that had been delayed without being resourced for unacceptably long periods. The inspection also found that these incidents were poorly supervised,

and that supervisors had failed to identify the risk of victims being harmed further. The supervisors had failed to question previous decisions, which had allowed the response to the victim to be delayed.

We also found several incidents where supervisors had conducted a review of incident logs that had not been attended, and despite endorsing the log, as in the original inspection in 2016, we again found instances where supervisors had not challenged or questioned previous actions and decisions. We did not explore this area fully in the revisit inspection, but this was to be a focus of attention in our effectiveness inspection in autumn 2017. In the meantime, in preparing for the planned changes to the command hub, the force should address the continued failure of supervisors to intervene proactively and then actively manage incidents in order to minimise the threat, risk and harm posed to vulnerable people.

Our 2016 effectiveness inspection found that the standard of investigations undertaken by officers in the force was mixed. Those more serious offences or particularly complex cases, which were investigated by specialist teams, were found to be better supervised, and the investigations were of a good or acceptable standard. Investigations into less serious, less complex allegations were of inconsistent quality.

Our revisit inspection found that, since the 2016 inspection, the force has completed face-to-face training (entitled 'Domestic abuse matters') of all frontline officers. The training reinforced the priority that the force's senior leadership team placed on domestic abuse. It also emphasised the importance of 'getting it right first time' by attending reported incidents promptly and conducting good initial investigations.

As part of the revisit inspection, we reviewed a small sample of domestic abuse-related crime investigations undertaken by staff at the investigation hubs in Hull and Grimsby. Officers in these units are responsible for investigating non-complex, volume crime, including domestic abuse. Force policy dictates that domestic abuse crimes involving high-risk victims or perpetrators should be investigated by specialist officers from the protecting vulnerable people (PVP) unit. However, we found confusion among many frontline investigators regarding the remit of the PVP unit. Indeed, we were told that PVP investigators now only deal with the most complex and serious offences, leaving other high-risk cases to be investigated by staff in the volume crime investigation hubs. The force should ensure that staff in the investigation hubs are suitably experienced and qualified to deal with such cases, and clarify its policy to staff.

All of the investigations we reviewed related to domestic abuse offences assessed as either standard or medium-risk. We found that these investigations were of an acceptable standard, with some evidence of good, effective and regular victim contact. However, in a few cases, although we were told there had been regular and recent contact with the victim, this was not always evident on the file itself. Similarly,

we found that supervisors in the investigation hubs were well aware of the workload and the progress of investigations being conducted by their staff, and we saw supervisors being consulted by and providing direction and guidance to, investigators, both face-to-face and by email exchange. Again, this was not always evident on the file itself.

Our review identified several investigations in which the victim had declined to co-operate with or support any police action against the offender. We were pleased to see that, in spite of this, these investigations had been actively pursued and presented to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for charging consideration. In each of these cases, the CPS lawyer had authorised charges to be brought based on the evidence from the attending officers, including video and audio footage recorded on the officers' body-worn video cameras, which often included the first account of the victim and the nature and extent of injuries sustained and damage caused.

Area for improvement from 2016 effectiveness inspection report and revisit findings

Area for improvement

- The force should work with partner organisations to improve its understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability within its local area.

Revisit findings

The revisit inspection found that the force now has an improved understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability that it faces. This insight has been gained through a structured assessment of police and partner agency information and intelligence.

Since our 2016 inspection, the force has undertaken a revised strategic intelligence assessment, using the MoRiLE (management of risk in law enforcement) approach. This assessment highlighted several main threats, the most serious of which were domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, serious sexual offences and violence against the person.

The force has developed action plans for each of these threats, using the 4Ps approach (prevent, protect, pursue and prepare). The force also identified an emerging threat from human trafficking. To understand these threats, it has commissioned, and in most cases completed, detailed problem profiles. These problem profiles draw together intelligence, data and information from the police and partner organisations, with analysis identifying the nature and scale of the problem,

as well as information or intelligence gaps. The threat, harm and risks identified through this process are managed through strategic partnership meetings in each of the four local authority areas and at a local, tactical level through the multi-agency community engagement meetings.

Conclusions and next steps

Conclusions

The members of the force's senior leadership team were rightly concerned at the findings of HMIC's 2016 effectiveness inspection. They moved quickly to reaffirm the identification of and response to vulnerability as their highest priority.

Our revisit inspection in 2017 found some evidence of positive progress. For example:

- all officers and staff to whom we spoke were now aware of the priority placed on vulnerability;
- the identification and assessment of vulnerability at the point of contact by staff in the command hub is more consistent;
- the quality of investigations relating to domestic abuse has improved; and
- the force has a better understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability across the force area, enriched by the involvement of its partner organisations in developing problem profiles and strategic assessments of vulnerability issues such as domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

Many, though not all, of the problems identified in the original inspection centred on the command hub and in particular the force's inability to match available resources to the demand. Although we found an improving picture, we remain concerned about the force's capacity to meet incoming demand routinely.

At the time of our revisit inspection, the force planned to introduce new operating practices and a revised shift system in the command hub in autumn 2017. It has designed the proposed shift system to provide staff with a built-in training and development day, to support and reinforce improvement initiatives.

The new working practices will see the creation of two dedicated teams (the demand resolution and the crime resolution teams) with clearer roles and responsibilities. The implementation of these changes will require careful management to ensure that they achieve significant and sustainable improvements in service. While there is room for optimism, there can be no room for complacency.

As well as identifying and recognising the positive improvements made to date, our revisit inspection has identified several important issues that persist. More remains to be done, through effective assessment and prioritisation, to improve the force's

capacity to match available resource to demand. The importance of supervisors setting standards, challenging actions and actively managing demand cannot be overstated.

Next steps

HMICFRS will continue to monitor Humberside Police's progress against the cause of concern set out in this report and previously in our autumn 2016 effectiveness report,³ published in March 2017. We have also assessed progress during our autumn 2017 effectiveness report, published in March 2018.⁴

³ *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016 – An inspection of Humberside Police*, HMIC, 2017. Available from: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2016-humberside/

⁴ *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2017 – An inspection of Humberside Police*, HMICFRS, 2018. Available from: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2017-humberside/

Annex A – Methodology

The revisit inspection methodology included:

- a presentation by the force on progress since the original inspection;
- a review of supporting documentation provided by the force;
- reality testing in the control room, to review the assessment of vulnerability and the management of incidents involving domestic abuse, missing people and calls reporting concern for welfare; and
- reality testing in investigation hubs, to review the quality of investigations into crimes resulting from domestic abuse incidents.