

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Cheshire Constabulary



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

Calls for assistance per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2015

Cheshire Constabulary

349

England and Wales

350

Domestic abuse calls for assistance per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2015

Cheshire Constabulary

15.9

England and Wales

15.8



Crime

Crimes recorded per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2015

Cheshire Constabulary

51.2

England and Wales

61.6

Change in recorded crimes (excluding fraud) 12 months to 31 March 2015 against 12 months to 31 March 2014

Cheshire Constabulary

-4.1%

England and Wales

+2.2%

Percentage of total crimes recorded (excluding fraud) as having a vulnerable victim 12 months to 31 March 2015

Cheshire Constabulary

7.8%

England and Wales

10.7%

Percentage of total crimes recorded as domestic abuse 12 months to 31 March 2015

Cheshire Constabulary

11.0%

England and Wales

10.0%

Change in domestic abuse recorded crime 12 months to 31 March 2015 against 12 months to 31 March 2014

Cheshire Constabulary

+22.6%

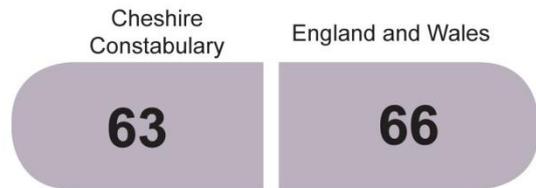
England and Wales

+20.8%



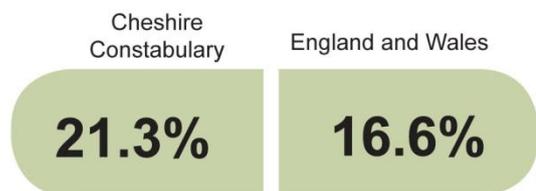
Domestic abuse arrest rate

Number of domestic abuse arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



Charge rate

Charge rate as a percentage of all crimes recorded (excluding fraud) 12 months to 31 March 2015

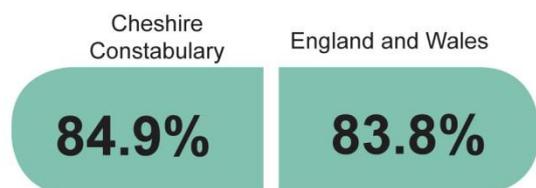


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015



Data: for full details on the data used in this graphic see annex A in the vulnerability national report.

Introduction

The public expects their local police force to support victims of crime by responding to calls for help, putting in place the right support and keeping them informed. It is particularly important that vulnerable people, whether or not they have been a victim of crime, are identified early and receive the support they need.

As part of its annual inspections into police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL), HMIC's effectiveness programme assessed how well forces keep people safe and reduce crime. Within this programme, HMIC's vulnerability inspection examined the overall question, 'How effective are forces at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims?' We have considered in depth how forces respond to and support missing and absent children and victims of domestic abuse, and assessed how well prepared forces are to respond to and safeguard children at risk of sexual exploitation.

We have looked at four areas:

- 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?

At the heart of this inspection is the protection of people who are vulnerable. A force may therefore be judged as requiring improvement by HMIC where it exhibits shortcomings in one of these areas, even if its performance in other areas is strong, and even if there are many elements of its service that HMIC considers to be good.

This inspection follows up our 2014 domestic abuse inspection and reviews forces' progress on implementation of their action plans following that inspection. A national domestic abuse report summarising the findings across 43 forces is being published at the same time as this report.

During our inspection we collected data and plans from forces, conducted a review of case files and observed multi-agency meetings. We heard from victims of domestic abuse through a number of focus groups across England and Wales and conducted an online survey with practitioners, including Independent Domestic Violence Advocates, outreach and refuge workers, to gauge views on what has changed since the 2014 inspection and inform local practitioner focus groups.

During the in-force inspection, we interviewed chief officers in each force and held focus groups with officers, staff and partners, and made unannounced visits to police stations, force control rooms and specialist teams.

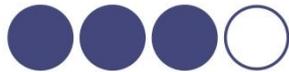
We also worked with the force missing person coordinator (or equivalent) to review cases of missing and absent children, including children considered to be 'repeat absent' and 'repeat missing' and children shown to be at risk of child sexual exploitation.

All forces are subject to significant cost reductions and these issues have been reflected in our efficiency reports published in October 2015. The judgments we are making in this vulnerability report are made understanding the financial challenges forces are facing.

This report sets out the findings from this wide-ranging inspection of Cheshire Constabulary.

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

Summary



Good

Cheshire Constabulary's chief officer team provides strong leadership and clear direction to officers and staff across the constabulary. The police and crime plan for Cheshire establishes the protection of vulnerable people and supporting victims and witnesses as key objectives for the constabulary. Cheshire's strategic threat and risk assessment identifies the overarching priorities of protecting people from harm and reducing vulnerability. HMIC judges Cheshire Constabulary as good at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable and supporting victims.

The constabulary has responded well to the recommendations made by HMIC in its inspection reports in 2014 and 2015. It has provided training to frontline staff on the identification of, and response to, vulnerability including domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, and safeguarding and risk assessment. This investment in training was evident when speaking to officers and staff, by their knowledgeable, understanding and caring attitude. Cheshire Constabulary is good at identifying those who are vulnerable at an early stage.

The constabulary investigates well crimes committed against the most vulnerable victims, assigning the right people with the right skills and experience to deal with the complexity of such investigations.

Cheshire Constabulary has clear and structured processes for responding when children are reported missing or absent. Investigations into missing children are well supervised and the constabulary works well with partners to keep these children safe.

The constabulary has made a good start in ensuring it is well prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. Together with the four local safeguarding children boards, the constabulary has agreed a pan-Cheshire child sexual exploitation strategy, supported by a shared multi-agency child sexual exploitation screening tool. The constabulary has developed the 'Know and See' campaign to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and provide information and training to a range of partners including parents and children. In terms of child sexual exploitation, this inspection only considered how well prepared the force is.

Cheshire Constabulary provides a good response to victims of domestic abuse. Police officers who attend these incidents are aware of the immediate options available to keep the victim safe and where to obtain specialist advice.

How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?

Cheshire Constabulary is good at identifying those who are vulnerable and assessing their level of risk and need.

The chief officer team provides strong leadership and clear direction to officers and staff across the constabulary. The police and crime plan for Cheshire establishes the protection of vulnerable people and supporting victims and witnesses as important objectives for the constabulary. The strategic threat and risk assessment undertaken by the constabulary identifies the overarching priorities of protecting people from harm and reducing vulnerability. All of this has been reinforced by the introduction of the 'We're Here' campaign, which sets out four strategic commitments to the public of Cheshire – "We're here; where you need us, when you need us; for justice; for victims; and for communities."¹

The constabulary has provided training to frontline staff on the identification of and response to vulnerability, including domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, and safeguarding and risk assessment. This investment in training was evident when we spoke to officers and staff, by their knowledgeable, understanding and caring approach in dealing with situations involving vulnerable people.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

Forces define vulnerability in different ways. The majority of forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime² or that referred to in ACPO guidance.³ Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

¹ *We're Here*, police and crime commissioner for Cheshire, March 2015. Available from: www.cheshire-pcc.gov.uk/News-and-Events/News/2015/03/CHESHIRECONSTABULARYMAKESCOMMITMENTTOTHEPUBLICTHATWEREHERE.aspx

² *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*, Ministry of Justice, 2013. Available from www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf

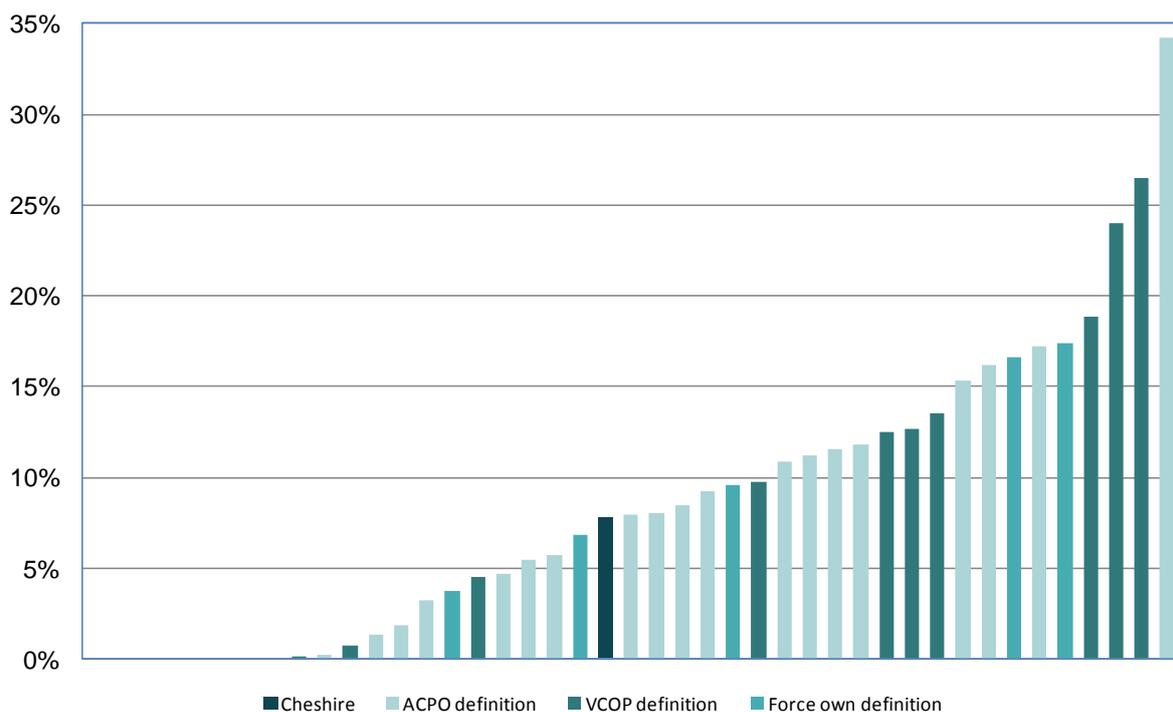
³ The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is now the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). *ACPO Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults*, NPIA, 2012, is available from www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/

Cheshire uses the definition from the ACPO guidance and defines a vulnerable adult as:

“Any person aged 18 years or over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental, physical, or learning disability, age or illness AND is or may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.”

The proportion of crime recorded which involves a vulnerable victim varies considerably between forces, from 0.03 percent to 34.3 percent. For the 12 months to 31 March 2015, 7.8 percent of all recorded crimes in Cheshire Constabulary were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. Eight forces were unable to provide this data at the time of data collection. There is no standard way in which forces are required to record whether a victim is vulnerable on crime recording systems and forces do this differently.

Figure 1: The proportion of police recorded crime with a vulnerable victim identified, by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015.



Source: HMIC data return

Cheshire Constabulary is good at identifying those who are vulnerable at an early stage. Staff in the call handling centre, who receive telephone calls from the public, have been trained on the identification of vulnerability. We found good evidence that staff consistently research computer systems to identify the fullest possible information on vulnerability and risk. Staff then record this information on the incident log and use it to inform the officers attending the incident.

The constabulary works well with local mental health professionals, who have provided training to frontline staff. This training included how to identify signs of mental illness; how to respond to people displaying potential mental health issues; and the support and treatment available to support such vulnerable people.

Under Operation Emblem, the constabulary now operates joint patrols between police officers and mental health nurses. These patrols provide the first response to calls regarding concerns for safety or where someone is at risk of harming themselves. Many people involved in such incidents have already used mental health services so may be known to the nurses. The constabulary initially piloted joint patrols in two of its four local authority areas, and following evaluation has now rolled them out across the constabulary area. The joint evaluation identified a number of benefits, including:

- a reduction in the number of people detained by the police under the powers contained in section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983;
- police custody areas no longer being used as places of safety;
- estimated cost savings of £780 per joint patrol; and
- most importantly, the more timely provision of appropriate professional service and support to particularly vulnerable people.

Assessing levels of risk and need

During the inspection and in the preceding review of a small number of case files, we found good evidence that the levels of risk facing victims and what is needed to keep them safe were identified consistently and at an early stage, often at the time of first reporting. Staff in the call-handling centre and those who work on the public enquiry desks at police stations have received training in the identification of vulnerability and risk assessment. The call handling policy provides clear guidance on the identification of vulnerability and assessment of risk. The policy also explains how vulnerability and risk influence the deployment of resources. Again, we found good evidence that staff understand the policy and apply it consistently. Supervisors in the control room undertake daily dip-sampling of incidents, including listening to incoming calls, to ensure that operators apply correct standards and that callers receive a consistent quality of service.

We also found that the daily management pacesetter meetings focus on threat, risk and harm. Pacesetter meetings held in the eight local policing areas routinely consider information on missing and absent people and domestic abuse incidents.

Cheshire Constabulary has introduced a central operations room to support local policing units, monitor changes in threat, harm and risk and to control specialist resources including roads policing and firearms officers. It also controls a task force of officers available to be deployed dynamically to changing circumstances.

Routinely the task force will be deployed to locate high-risk people missing from home or arrest outstanding suspects wanted for domestic abuse crimes.

Understanding the risk to victims and ensuring they are protected and supported

After a force has identified that a victim is vulnerable, it must then provide services that best meet his or her needs. HMIC found that Cheshire Constabulary is doing a lot of work to understand the requirements of vulnerable groups.

Officers and staff have a good understanding of and are able to identify at an early stage, the vulnerability of victims of domestic abuse and they then work well with partners to ensure that the most appropriate services are provided;

The constabulary has a good understanding of and responds well to the needs of children who are reported missing or absent. Effective systems and processes are in place within both the constabulary and its partners to make sure that the best service is provided.

Cheshire Constabulary has made a good start in terms of being prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. It works closely with partner organisations to increase the awareness of frontline staff to identify early signals and to build a better picture of this complex area of vulnerability.

The constabulary has also invested more resource in the parts of its organisation which work to keep vulnerable people safe. This investment includes:

- as part of its recent restructure, creating a centralised public protection directorate, to provide greater clarity and consistency;
- identifying additional resources through the priority-based budgeting process, to increase the number of officers in the public protection directorate;
- training all its frontline staff on the identification of and response to vulnerability, including domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation and safeguarding and risk assessment; and
- developing a comprehensive victim information pack, which it provides to every victim of crime. The pack includes additional support, information and services available to victims who are vulnerable.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁴

Cheshire Constabulary responds well to vulnerable victims. We found good evidence that appropriately skilled and trained staff were deployed to deal with those who were identified as vulnerable.

The constabulary has recently introduced a new operating model based around eight local policing units, each headed by a chief inspector. At the same time the constabulary created a centralised public protection command, to provide clarity and consistency in the constabulary's response to public protection and associated investigations. The public protection department manages the centralised resources including the paedophile crime investigation team. This brings together the former paedophile and high-tech crime unit functions, the dedicated rape investigation unit, and the locally-based public protection units (who are responsible for the investigation of sexual offences against children). HMIC was pleased to see that the officers allocated to these specialist teams are appropriately trained, qualified and experienced. Cheshire Constabulary has also introduced custody investigation teams to undertake most non-specialist investigations, including domestic abuse.

Cheshire Constabulary's move to the new operating model involved a reallocation of resources, supported and informed by information assessed during a priority-based budget review. As a result the constabulary allocated increased resources to frontline policing and public protection. The new operating model is in its infancy and, while HMIC appreciates that there are structured plans in place for formal evaluation, the constabulary should monitor its new operating model closely to ensure that resources are reallocated as planned, in order to maintain its capability and capacity in frontline policing and its work with vulnerable people.

Response officers

Our inspection found that frontline police officers and staff who regularly respond to and deal with vulnerable people do so in a knowledgeable and empathetic manner. HMIC was pleased by the positive and helpful attitude we observed in all the officers and staff that we met, who embodied the culture of Cheshire as being a caring constabulary. We were also pleased with the physical environment of public enquiry counters, the interactive public contact points, the availability of information and above all the approachable and helpful attitude of staff working on the public enquiry counters.

⁴ The question within the PEEL inspection methodology asks "How well does the force respond to vulnerable victims?" HMIC has amended the heading in this report to make it clear to the reader that this section focuses on the initial police response to vulnerable victims, rather than the overall police response to vulnerable victims.

We found that vulnerability – specifically domestic abuse, missing children and child sexual exploitation – is widely understood by staff as the priority for the constabulary.

The majority of officers and staff that we spoke with confirmed that they had received training on vulnerability within the last year. Many officers spoke highly of the file quality and investigative skills training which the constabulary is in the process of providing to all frontline officers. In particular, officers cited the course as improving their awareness of and response to dealing with vulnerable people. HMIC welcomes the significant investment in providing this three-day, classroom-based training to all frontline officers. The training reinforces the constabulary's expectations of staff and this appears to be providing an improved and more consistent service to vulnerable victims.

Our crime inspection in 2014 recommended that the constabulary should improve the quality of problem-solving. While this inspection focused on domestic abuse, missing and absent children and child sexual exploitation, we were pleased to see that the response to vulnerable victims is also evident in Cheshire Constabulary's approach to tackling anti-social behaviour. For example, Operation Brisbane involved a neighbourhood officer who identified that a group of men were targeting vulnerable elderly people. The officer applied a problem-solving approach and secured civil injunctions against nine men, to safeguard the vulnerable victims. Through working with and supporting the victims, some of whom had mental health problems, the officer was subsequently able to secure criminal conspiracy charges against the men.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

HMIC's inspection and the preceding review of a small number of case files found good evidence that sergeants are routinely managing the response to vulnerable victims. We found that, in accordance with the domestic abuse policy, sergeants were checking the quality of risk assessments made by officers attending domestic incidents and ensuring that any resulting crime had been properly recorded. We also found that sergeants and other supervisors take an active involvement in the investigation of children reported missing from home. In criminal investigations we found that supervisors effectively set and monitor clear investigation plans. In more serious cases such as rape and wounding we found the investigation plans to be comprehensive and detailed.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁵

In line with the police and crime plan objectives and the 'We're Here' commitments, officers and staff strive to put the victim at the centre of the criminal justice system. They work effectively with partners to keep victims safe. Vulnerability is usually identified at a very early stage and appropriate referrals are made to other agencies.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

HMIC reviewed 40 crime investigation files,⁶ of which eight were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. In all eight cases we found that the police had responded promptly and the vulnerability was managed well. We found good evidence that the right staff with the right skills had been allocated quickly to these cases, and the resulting investigations were of a high standard, well-supervised and clearly focused on the victim's needs.

Compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime

All police forces have a statutory duty to comply with the code of practice for victims of crime, which sets out the service victims of crime can expect from all parts of the criminal justice system. The code states that all victims of crime should be able to make a personal statement⁷ which they can use to explain how the crime has affected them. We found strong evidence that Cheshire Constabulary consistently applies the code when working with victims.

Together with the police and crime commissioner, the constabulary has developed its own 24-page victim information pack, which provides comprehensive information about the code and its entitlements. The pack also includes a detachable victim personal statement for completion by the investigating officer. The booklet is given to all victims of crime and acts as an effective aide-memoire for attending officers.

⁵ The question within the PEEL inspection methodology asks "How well does the subsequent police action and work with partners keep people safe?" HMIC has amended the heading in this report to make it clear to the reader that this section focuses on the investigation of offences involving vulnerable victims, rather than the police's initial response to vulnerable victims.

⁶ HMIC reviewed a sample of rape, burglary, offences of serious violence and actual bodily harm cases. In most forces the review consisted of 10 cases from each crime category, but in some larger forces the sample was increased to 15. The file review was designed to provide a broad overview of the identification of vulnerability and the effectiveness of the investigation.

⁷ 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.

Cheshire Constabulary has a policy of attending the majority of calls, however in those cases where crimes are recorded without an officer attending, the victim information pack is sent by post.

Working with partners

The constabulary covers the four local authority areas of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington. This inevitably leads to slight differences in approach and the services available. The constabulary recognises this and is trying to overcome potential issues by developing pan-Cheshire agreements, for example Operation Arundel, which is a single approach to the management of children missing or absent from care homes across Cheshire, and Operation Encompass, a Cheshire-wide approach to supporting children affected by domestic abuse.

Voluntary and public sector partners that we met from all areas of Cheshire were complimentary and supportive of the constabulary, often describing them as the driving force behind partnership activity.

The Altogether Better initiative is a good example of the development of multi-agency partnerships across Cheshire. The early support access team was initially established in the Cheshire West and Chester areas to provide a single point of access to services, advice and support for families with complex needs. Partners including health, education, social care, the voluntary sector and Cheshire Constabulary are co-located to improve information sharing and joint working to improve outcomes for local people and through problem-solving, reduce demand on public services. The initiative was deemed so successful that the Department for Communities and Local Government awarded £5m to extend the provision of the service across the three remaining areas of Cheshire, and this is in the process of being implemented.

The constabulary holds multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)⁸ with professionals from other bodies in order to safeguard those considered to be at the highest risk of harm from domestic abuse. HMIC observed two consecutive MARAC meetings and found good attendance from all partners and strong participation from those present, with sound evidence that they were effectively safeguarding victims and children through information-sharing and joint action planning.

⁸ MARACs (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) – local meetings where information about high-risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies.

How well does the force respond to and safeguard specific vulnerable groups (missing and absent & victims of domestic abuse), and how well prepared is it to tackle child sexual exploitation?

The first three questions have explained how the force identifies those that are vulnerable, the response that is provided to them and what action the force takes to investigate crimes and to work with partners to keep them safe. This question looks specifically at how the force deals with three specific areas of vulnerability: domestic abuse, missing and absent children and its preparedness to deal with child sexual exploitation.

Missing and absent children

The constabulary provides an effective response to missing and absent⁹ children. In the year to 31 March 2015 the constabulary recorded 3,390 reports of children being missing and 1,148 absences. The constabulary has a clear, structured and well-supervised policy in respect of missing and absent children, which is supported by a pan-Cheshire joint protocol of children missing or absent from care (Operation Arundel), and a common risk assessment tool for use by police and partners.

Missing from home reports are recorded on a paper system. The missing from home report contains all the information concerning the missing person and also details of the actions and investigation. We found good evidence that supervisors are actively involved in directing investigations and undertook timely reviews of ongoing cases. Some elements of the missing report and investigation actions are often duplicated on computer systems including the command and control system and also on the person's record on the constabulary's online records management system. However, the paper record is the single definitive point of complete reference. The use of a paper-based system means that not all the information on an individual case is always readily accessible. It also leads to significant duplication of effort in respect of double or even treble-recording of the same information on different paper and computer systems, particularly for those who go missing on a regular basis.

The constabulary is aware of this and introduced the evergreen report, a 1,000 character summary of critical information, which is readily available on the records management system. However, we found the majority of staff chose not to use evergreen, preferring instead to obtain fuller information from the records management system.

⁹ A person is classified as absent if they are not where they are expected to be but they are not considered to be at risk. Whereas, if they classified as missing the police are obliged to take steps to locate them, as the level of perceived risk is higher.

We are satisfied that so far the response to missing and absent people has not been compromised by the inefficiencies of the paper-based recording system. However, we consider that the constabulary might usefully explore the options and benefits of moving to a fully-computerised system.

During the inspection, we reviewed a number of missing and absent reports, including six missing children assessed as medium or high-risk and two children reported as repeatedly absent from care settings. In each case we found that the constabulary identified vulnerability and assessed risk at an early stage. We found clear and effective management oversight of investigation plans. In those cases where the child had been located officers undertook initial safe and well checks and submitted a vulnerable person assessment for each one. Full return interviews are undertaken by trained professionals from a charity commissioned to do this work, and relevant information from these interviews is fed back for entering on the records management system.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

The constabulary has made a good start in ensuring it is well prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. This inspection has focused on actions and activities the constabulary has taken to understand and identify the extent to which children are at risk of sexual exploitation and the policies, practices and procedures it is putting in place to tackle this. We did not test the quality of how the constabulary conducted these complex investigations with other agencies such as children's services because these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.

The constabulary has developed the 'Know and See' campaign to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation (CSE) among officers, staff and partners including parents and young people themselves. The campaign is supported by posters and a public-facing website (www.knowandsee.co.uk). In support of the campaign, as well as providing child sexual exploitation training to its own staff, the constabulary has undertaken training and awareness raising with key groups including taxi drivers and those working in the night-time economy. Together with the police and crime commissioner, the constabulary has also held two multi-agency child sexual exploitation summit events during which it stressed the need for even greater intelligence sharing between agencies.

Together with the four local safeguarding children boards,¹⁰ the constabulary has agreed a pan-Cheshire child sexual exploitation strategy, supported by a common multi-agency child sexual exploitation screening tool, which means that partners use a common assessment framework and common language.

¹⁰ Local safeguarding children boards have a statutory duty to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

The constabulary has designated child sexual exploitation co-ordinators in each local policing area. A multi-agency child sexual exploitation team led by the local authority leads on information exchange. The chief officer team receives a monthly report on the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation and continuing investigations. In 2013 the constabulary developed a problem profile¹¹ specifically for child sexual exploitation, based on police information and intelligence. HMIC considers that the constabulary would benefit from commissioning a refreshed, multi-agency problem profile to take stock of the current situation and identify any remaining intelligence gaps.

Domestic abuse

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 23 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 11 percent of all police recorded crime. Across England and Wales during the same period there was a 21 percent increase, with domestic abuse accounting for 10 percent of all police recorded crime.

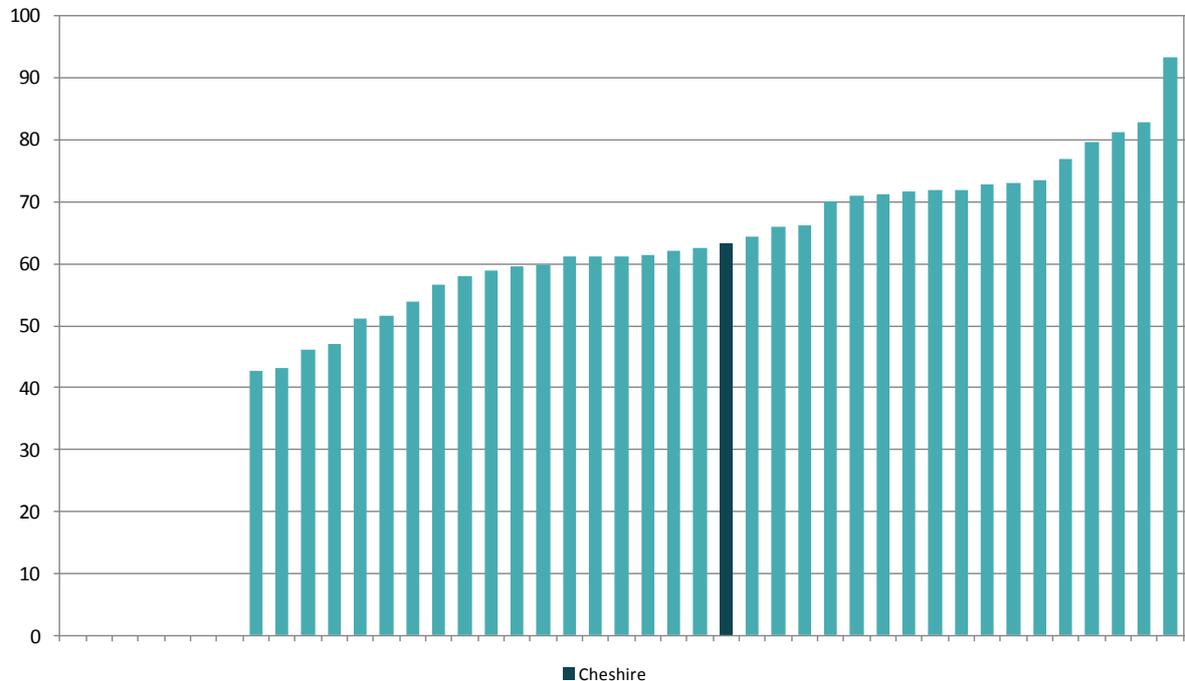
In 2014, Cheshire Constabulary had a positive HMIC report on its handling of domestic abuse and has since addressed 12 out of HMIC's 14 recommendations, with work continuing on the final two.

The constabulary demonstrates effective immediate and longer-term safeguarding measures to protect victims of domestic abuse, including a positive approach to arresting domestic abuse perpetrators.

¹¹ A problem profile is intended to provide the constabulary 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.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Cheshire made 63 arrests.

Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015

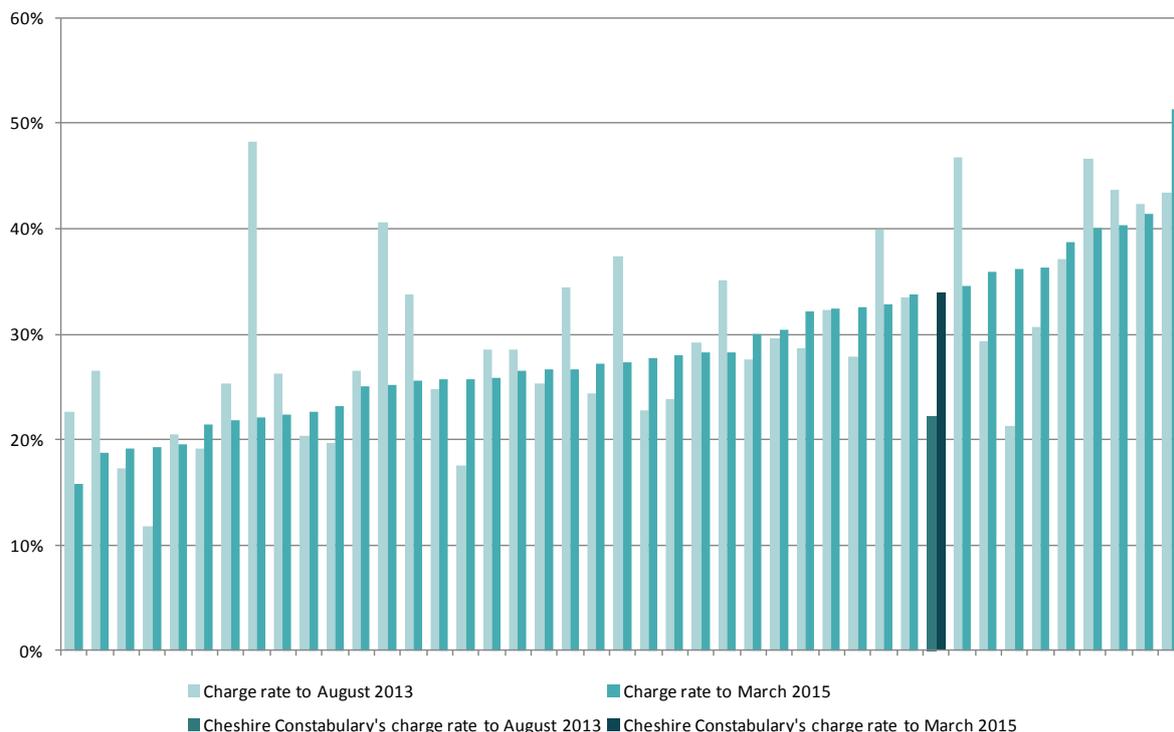


Source: HMIC data return

HMIC reviewed 10 domestic abuse files, and found a good standard of investigation centred on the victim. We found good evidence of the identification of vulnerability and appropriate referral to support agencies.

The constabulary’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 34 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is an increase since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection when the constabulary rate was 22 percent for the 12 months to 31 August 2013, compared with 30 percent for England and Wales.

Figure 3: Domestic abuse charge rate for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 compared to the 12 months to 31 August 2013



Source: HMIC data return

We found that frontline staff and supervisors are aware of the immediate options available to keep the victim safe and where to obtain specialist advice. Longer-term safeguarding issues and support are managed through the public protection units. An officer attending a domestic abuse incident is required to complete a domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence (DASH)¹² form, which includes an initial assessment of the risk to the victim. The DASH form is submitted to the public protection unit for review by specialist officers.

Partners working with domestic abuse victims reported that the general quality of the initial risk assessments was good and that they had noticed an improvement in the quality of the information contained within DASH referrals since the 2014 HMIC domestic abuse inspection report.

At the time of our inspection there was a backlog in the public protection unit's review of standard-risk DASH forms. We were reassured that this had not had an adverse impact on the timeliness or quality of safeguarding provided to victims of domestic abuse. The constabulary is aware of the issue and has already put

¹² Most forces use the domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence risk identification, assessment and management model (DASH): www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/risk-and-vulnerability/#approaches-to-risk-assessment

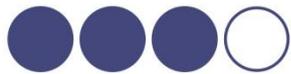
measures in place to reduce and remove the backlog. It is in the process of recruiting additional staff in the referral units to increase capacity. The constabulary may wish to consider providing weekend cover for this task, to prevent backlogs at times of peak demand.

Operation Encompass is a joint agreement between the constabulary and schools across the county. The constabulary has appointed designated schools liaison officers, who work in and with schools. Those schools that operate the scheme identify a member of staff to act as the single point of contact or key adult. Under the scheme the key adult in school is informed if and when one of their pupils is involved in or affected by domestic abuse. This allows the key adult to monitor the pupil's behaviour and ensure any appropriate support is in place.

HMIC also examined the constabulary's use of new legal powers to protect victims. Domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) were introduced in England and Wales in 2014 to prevent a suspected offender from returning to a victim's home or contacting the victim. The constabulary began using DVPOs in June 2014; it made 88 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 82 were granted. Seventeen DVPOs have been breached. Breaches occur when the offender fails to comply with the condition of the order and is taken back before the magistrates' court. This represents a DVPO breach rate of 21 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹³

¹³ The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

Summary of findings



Good

Cheshire Constabulary is good at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable and supporting victims.

The chief officer team provides strong leadership and clear direction to officers and staff. The constabulary has responded well to the recommendations made by HMIC in its inspection reports. It is good at identifying those who are vulnerable at an early stage. The constabulary investigates crimes committed against the most vulnerable victims well, assigning the right people with the right skills and experience to deal with the complexity of such investigations.

The constabulary has clear and structured processes for responding when children are reported missing or absent. The constabulary's investigations into missing children are well-supervised and it works well with partners to keep these children safe.

The constabulary has made a good start in ensuring it is well prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. With the four local safeguarding children boards, it has agreed a pan-Cheshire child sexual exploitation plan, supported by a shared multi-agency child sexual exploitation screening tool. The constabulary's Know and See campaign to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and provide information and training to a range of partners including parents and children is proving effective.

Cheshire Constabulary provides a good response to victims of domestic abuse and has immediate options available to keep the victim safe and obtain specialist advice.