

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service



December 2015

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Contents

Vulnerability in numbers	3
Introduction	5
How effective is the force at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims?.....	7
Summary	7
How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?	9
How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?.....	12
How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?	13
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?	15
Summary of findings	21

Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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



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

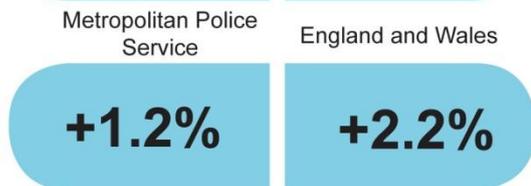


Crime

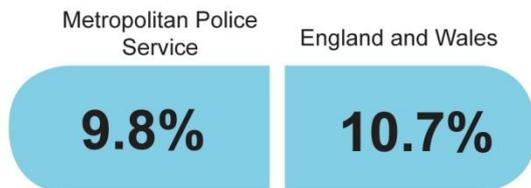
Crimes recorded per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2015



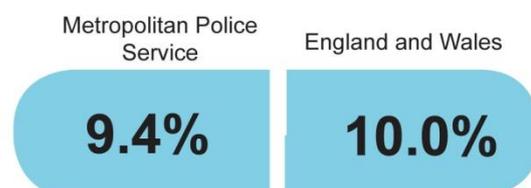
Change in recorded crimes (excluding fraud) 12 months to 31 March 2015 against 12 months to 31 March 2014



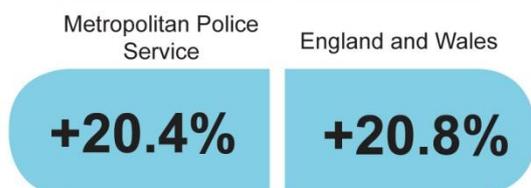
Percentage of total crimes recorded (excluding fraud) as having a vulnerable victim 12 months to 31 March 2015



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



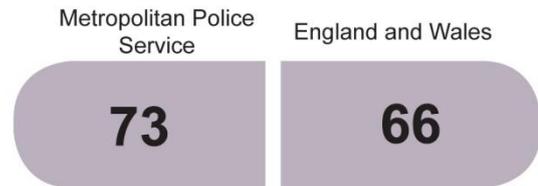
Change in domestic abuse recorded crime 12 months to 31 March 2015 against 12 months to 31 March 2014





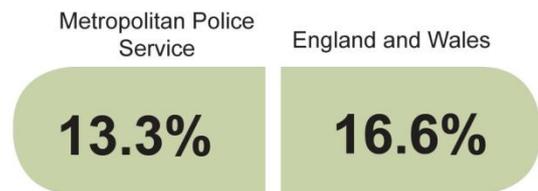
Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

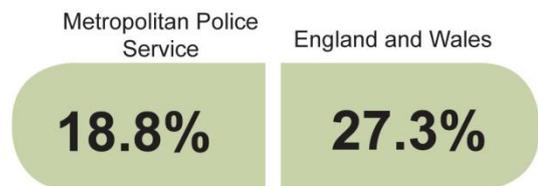


Charge rate

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

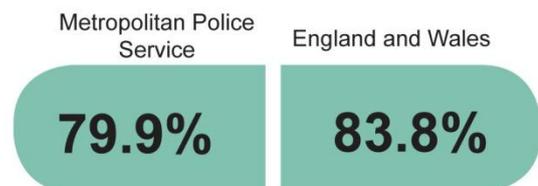


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



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 the Metropolitan Police Service.

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

Summary



Requires improvement

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) generally provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and responds well to them. The public can be confident that many victims are well supported. However, there are several areas where improvement is needed to ensure the service is consistent so that vulnerable people, particularly children, are always kept safe. Given the scale of the challenge in this area and the risk that is posed to some of the most vulnerable people, overall HMIC judges that the force requires improvement.

HMIC acknowledges that the force has committed significant effort and resource to offer a high quality service to the public in this area. The chief officer team has made vulnerability a clear priority for the force. Governance meetings known as ‘diamond groups’ are in place and are chaired at chief officer level to oversee specific areas of vulnerability including domestic violence, and missing and absent children. HMIC found however that at the time of the inspection the missing and absent diamond group had not met for 18 months.

In order to translate the priority of dealing with vulnerable people into practice MPS has invested more specialist resource in those parts of its organisation which supports those who are vulnerable and keeps them safe. The force now needs to build on this investment and the good work seen in some areas by HMIC in order to give further confidence that the risk of harm to vulnerable people is identified early and that its approach results in a consistently high quality service.

The force identifies vulnerability as set out by the College of Policing definition of adults at risk. This includes environmental factors or an individual’s circumstances or behaviour. Officers and staff are using this definition. This means that a large number of victims are placed in the vulnerable category and creates high demand which leads to managers finding it difficult to prioritise a response for the most vulnerable. The force needs to ensure that it is satisfied that this is a definition that allows it to make decisions about how to prioritise according to levels of risk.

The force has introduced a vulnerability assessment framework to identify repeat and vulnerable victims. This is still being put in place and as yet training has not reached all parts of the organisation.

The force investigates crime committed against most vulnerable victims very well. The force places all cases of domestic abuse with specialist officers who are based in the community safety unit. This ensures all vulnerable victims receive specialist support and a consistent level of service.

HMIC's crime inspection in 2014 recommended that MPS should ensure that investigating officers and police staff are aware of the standards required within the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (victims' code) and have the professional skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties. However, we found that the force is still not wholly compliant with the code. The MPS is not always providing the opportunity for the victim to make a personal statement at the time of the incident. As this is in breach of the code the force should improve the compliance of investigating officers and police staff with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in relation to victim personal statements.

The MPS has a clear, structured and well-supervised process for responding to reports that children are missing or absent. There are dedicated teams in place to deal with missing persons with effective links to the sexual exploitation team where any risk of child sexual exploitation is identified. HMIC has some concerns that there are intelligence gaps in this area which hinder the force's ability to prevent repeat instances of missing and absent children. The MPS has missing and absent co-ordinators on each borough, but we found a lack of role-specific training for specialists, as response staff are trained by way of Operation Makesafe. We found that the force does not have a full understanding of the nature and scale of the missing and absent challenge it faces, specifically in relation to persistent missing children. An up-to-date assessment of available data, including that of partner organisations would help the force to more fully understand this issue. Specialist staff need to receive appropriate training in relation to safeguarding and understanding how to prevent repeat instances of missing and absent children which could lead to harm.

The force has made a good start in ensuring it is prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. An information-sharing agreement or protocol with different groups and organisations working together across London has provided some positive results. This includes evidence gathered and used to disrupt the activity of potential perpetrators using sexual harm prevention orders and sexual risk orders, and child abduction warning notices. The dedicated sexual exploitation team is resourced by experienced detectives who focus on dealing with high and medium-risk cases, low risk cases are dealt with locally at borough level. This inspection only considered how well-prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation.

Officers attending domestic abuse incidents have a good knowledge of how to assess risk and keep victims safe. They can refer to a helpful toolkit and check list to ensure this process is undertaken properly and they are well-supervised. Specialist trained officers supervise all domestic abuse incidents.

A comprehensive action plan is in place to track the progress the force has made since its last domestic abuse inspection in 2014, with overview and scrutiny at deputy assistant commissioner level.

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

The MPS has effective systems in place to identify vulnerable people. HMIC found a strong commitment to improving the service provided to vulnerable people. The force has governance meetings in place, called diamond groups, to oversee eight risk areas identified by the force, four of which relate to vulnerability. The frontline staff we spoke to have a real commitment to identify and respond to vulnerable victims effectively.

The force also recognises that, in order to provide a different, more tailored response to vulnerable people, it needs to identify them correctly in the first instance, and then understand which services would best meet their particular needs.

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 Crime¹ or that referred to in ACPO guidance.² Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

The MPS uses a broad definition of vulnerability. This definition includes vulnerability that may arise from environmental factors and an individual's circumstances and behaviour. Officers and staff are aware of this and consider all aspects of vulnerability when responding to victims. The impact of this is that a high percentage of calls result in a victim being considered vulnerable. This presents a challenge to supervisors required to prioritise and deploy resources. The force needs to ensure that it is satisfied that this is a definition that allows them to make decisions about how to prioritise according to levels of risk.

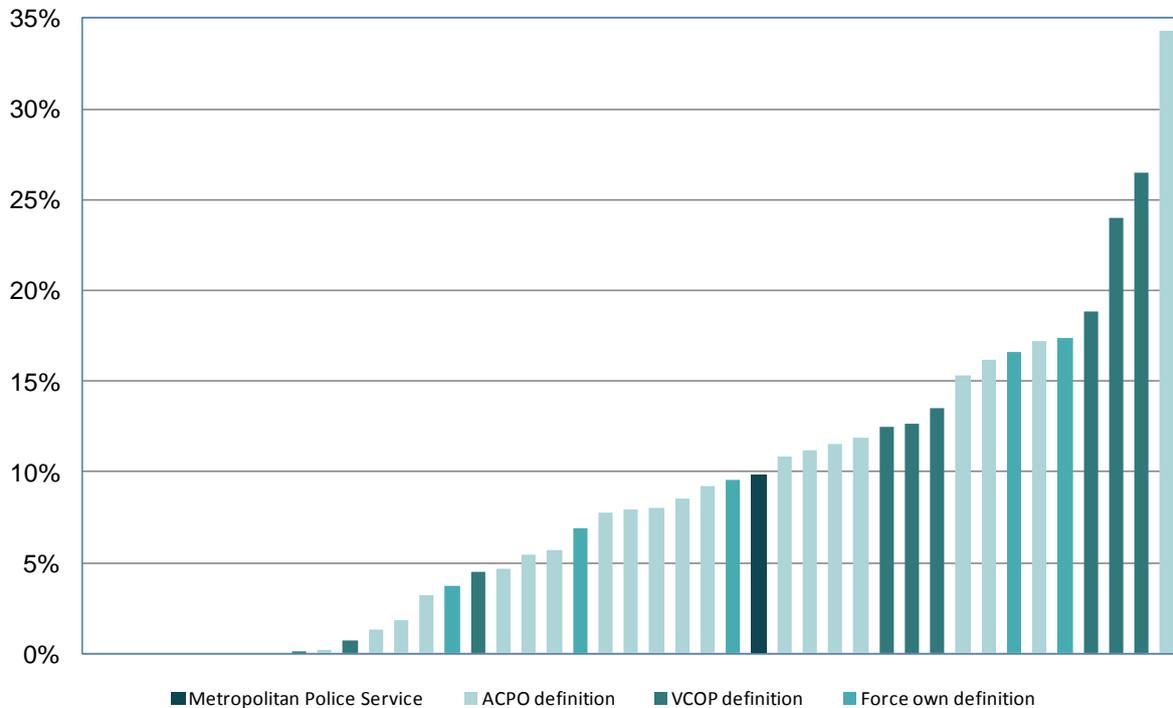
The proportion of crime recorded which involves a vulnerable victim varies considerably between forces, from 0.03 percent to 34.3 percent. For the 12 months to 31 March 2015, 9.8 percent of all recorded crimes in the area police by the MPS were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. Eight forces were unable to provide

¹ *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

² 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/

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

The force has introduced a vulnerability assessment framework which identifies vulnerable victims well when they first contact the police. HMIC found that the force has trained its staff who answer 999 calls and/or work at police station front counters to spot the signs of someone who might be vulnerable in some way. In addition the force has an effective monitoring system in place to dip-sample and supervise the quality of call-handling.

IT systems do not fully support officers who need to gather information about repeat incidents and vulnerability. The force uses a number of systems to gather and hold data. When a call is received about a domestic abuse incident the call handler will check for information in, for example, the crime system and the computer-aided dispatch system (CAD). This is a limited search which may not pick up all of the information that is available. As a result, first responders will often search each system individually when they return to the station to ensure that they have taken everything into consideration when completing the risk assessment. In addition, initial intelligence checks conducted by control room staff to safeguard victims often focus on officer safety issues to the exclusion of the vulnerability of the victim or the repeat nature of the incident.

Assessing levels of risk and need

The MPS has clear processes in place to identify risk. Risk assessments examined by HMIC were completed well and were well-supervised. Supervisors of staff who answer 999 calls and of response officers check that the risk faced by a victim is properly recognised and assessed.

Where the risk to a victim is assessed as high, duty inspectors' responsibilities are clear. Risk is managed at daily management meetings and through the force 'grip and pace'³ processes to ensure the correct safeguarding⁴ response is provided. The focus on risk management means high risk victims are likely to be prioritised, but those at medium and lower risk may not receive the same level of safeguarding support which risks repeat victimisation. HMIC found that generally the right people are sent to deal with the right incidents.

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

HMIC found that in the MPS the requirements of some vulnerable groups are better understood than others. The force has a good understanding of the needs of people who are vulnerable because of domestic abuse, and responds well to these people. This understanding is based on having effective 'flags'⁵ on crime systems, and specialist investigators working closely with local response and neighbourhood teams using local intelligence analysis. Partner agencies and the voluntary sector are involved appropriately in the response.

The response to the needs of missing and absent people is equally well-established. However there are gaps in intelligence which leads to a lack of understanding of the issues that cause vulnerable people to go missing. This prevents the force being able to reduce demand on its services while at the same time identifying repeat missing instances that would help to protect vulnerable people.

³ The force has a robust process, known as 'Met Grip', which it uses to keep a tight control of its performance and to ensure that resources are aligned with both strategic and community priorities. Alongside the police and crime plan priorities, community concerns are captured through scheduled meetings in each of the 32 boroughs' sub-districts (called wards), and by other less formal community engagement meetings and initiatives. This, together with real-time information from social media feedback and intelligence collected by neighbourhood police patrols, is fed to borough-level 'grip and pace' meetings, which are held three times a day. Each borough has a 'grip and pace' centre where a wide range of information is available including recent crimes, incidents of anti-social behaviour and current intelligence.

⁴ The term safeguarding means providing protection and support to ensure the safety of the vulnerable person and prevent further harm.

⁵ The incident management IT systems highlight a caller's previous contact history by way of a number of 'flags' that appear on the computer screen when an address or telephone number are keyed in by the operators.

The force has a good understanding of child sexual exploitation and has established a pan-London multi-agency protocol (an information-sharing agreement with other organisations working together across London) to tackle child sexual exploitation. There is effective training in place for officers plus a wider awareness programme known as Operation Makesafe, which has been implemented in order to educate important members of the community to recognise those who may be at risk.

In order to provide the most appropriate support to vulnerable victims, the force has invested more resource in the parts of its organisation which works to keep these victims safe.

Within the MPS change programme, known as the Met Model 2020, the force has a clear plan to bring together resources for managing vulnerability. This aims to ensure that issues associated with vulnerability such as domestic and child abuse, sexual offences, adult and child safeguarding, hate crime, mental health and missing persons are managed together. The plan includes building mixed multi-disciplinary teams to manage all aspects of the investigation.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁶

The MPS responds well to vulnerable victims. It has clear and understandable systems in place to ensure that the police response to vulnerable victims is appropriate and reflects the victim's needs.

When a call reporting an incident of anti-social behaviour is received, the call handler will mark the CAD entry with this information. Safer neighbourhood inspectors are then responsible for checking all call markers and identifying if vulnerability is a factor or the call involves a repeat victim. In such cases, the incident is logged onto the database which the force uses to record anti-social behaviour.

Officers enter relevant information onto the database and this results in an incident being scored. Officers can also use their judgment and override a score if they feel that the automatic scoring does not reflect the level of risk being posed. A monitoring process is in place to ensure vulnerability is correctly highlighted.

⁶ 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.

Response officers

HMIC found that the police officers whom we met and who respond to vulnerable people are sympathetic and knowledgeable. Those attending domestic abuse incidents have know how to assess risk and keep victims safe, and complete risk assessments well. Arresting the perpetrator is seen as the priority in domestic abuse incidents but this is not always possible in the first response. When an arrest has not been made first responders will look at using safeguarding measures such as panic alarms and emergency phones for victims. They will also check the flag on the system so that any repeat calls will be graded to receive an immediate response.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

Supervisors play an active role in checking and approving the risk assessment process. We found evidence of effective oversight at daily management meetings and effective investigation plans and supervision of handover to specialist units. This ensures that the quality of service remains high and that work to investigate the incident is pursued.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁷

HMIC found that the force deals with vulnerability issues in investigations well and has increased resources in specialist units to respond to demand. It is evident that victims are the focus of police activity and safeguarding vulnerable people is a priority. HMIC found evidence that the force worked together effectively with other organisations, especially where police and local authority partners were based in the same building.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

HMIC reviewed 60 file investigations,⁸ in which 13 were identified as involving a vulnerable person. We found that generally the right staff with the right skills had been allocated quickly to these cases, and the resulting investigations were of a high standard, and clearly focused on the needs of the victim.

⁷ The question within the PEEL inspection methodology asks “How well does the subsequent police action and work with partners keep victims 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.

⁸ 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.

However, HMIC found some evidence during our fieldwork that those officers who investigate the crime or supervise the investigation are not always adequately trained. The force recognises this, having increased staff within Community Safety Units, that there will be staff waiting to be trained and are responding to this by ensuring Boroughs identify staff requiring training prior to posting. HMIC also noted that staff turnover is high due to the rotation of specialist resources, the force ensures that detectives undertake a variety of investigative roles to ensure they become well rounded investigators. The force needs to assure itself that it allocates investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people and young people to appropriately trained staff. This should ensure that the force takes all opportunities to keep safe those who are vulnerable.

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 statement, which they can use to describe the wider effects of the crime upon them, express their concerns and indicate whether or not they require any support. HMIC found that not all victims with whom MPS dealt are offered this opportunity at the appropriate time.

We also found that victim personal statements are offered during the course of the investigation. However, this was generally near the time of the resulting court case rather than at the time the incident was reported. To comply with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, the force needs to make sure the impact on victims is understood throughout the investigation and the ability to make a victim personal statement is offered at the time the offence is reported. This should ensure that each victim has an opportunity to explain the impact that the crime has had on them. The force should improve compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime specifically in relation to victim personal statements.

HMIC found that the force keeps victims updated about the progress of their case well, with regular victim contact and updates that are evident in investigation logs. The force also complies well with guidelines on informing victims of decisions to take no further action against a suspect, and considering the victim's wishes.

Working with partners

The MPS holds multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)⁹ in each borough with professionals from other bodies to safeguard those considered to be at the highest-risk of harm. As part of our inspection, HMIC observed two consecutive conferences and found good participation by those present with clear evidence that the MARAC effectively safeguards victims and children through information-sharing and joint action-planning.

The force also uses a community-risk MARAC process. This helps neighbourhood policing teams to lead and direct policing activity for any vulnerable individuals at risk who fall outside the traditional public protection MARAC processes. For example, this could include a vulnerable victim of anti-social behaviour where domestic abuse is not a factor in the offence.

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 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 force provides a good response to missing and absent children. It is clear, structured and well-supervised. A governance structure is in place with a 'diamond group' that should provide overview and scrutiny. However, HMIC found that at the time of the inspection, the group had not met for 18 months.

All cases of missing persons are dealt with by the dedicated missing persons unit (MPU) which is open beyond regular office hours and at weekends. If a missing person call comes in outside the MPU's opening times, the shift supervisor will take the lead on a case and will handover and provide a debrief when the unit opens. Once a case has been assigned to the MPU it is reviewed by the supervisor to ensure that the risk has been appropriately assessed. High risk cases are also brought to the attention of the borough's chief officer.

⁹ MARACs (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) are local meetings where information about high-risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies.

Missing cases where there is a risk of child sexual exploitation are managed in conjunction with the sexual exploitation team. HMIC found that not all missing person co-ordinators have received specific, role-related training.

In the 12 months to March 2015, the force reported that it dealt with 98,371 missing incidents. However the force lacks analytical products to help it to understand the scale of the problem, or to develop approaches with partner organisations to reduce the instances of people going missing or to implement prevention plans.

When a missing person is found, the force will conduct a 'safe and well' interview. A debrief interview should also be conducted by the local authority so that any information that may not be immediately obvious can be gathered and used to prevent repeat instances. However these interviews are only taking place in 20 to 30 percent of cases reducing the intelligence available. The force is aware of this and it is being addressed at a strategic level.

The force effectively engages the voluntary sector to help safeguard missing children. A pilot scheme with a charity assesses if missing people would talk to the charity to give details about why they went missing. The results showed that 50 percent of the people engaged with the charity and provided more information about their background circumstances than before. The force is trying to put together the evidence to show the potential of this approach and then obtain funding to extend this.

The force needs to understand the scope of missing and absent¹⁰ incidents. The force should improve its response to missing and absent children by ensuring its understanding of the nature and scale of the issue, specifically in relation to persistent missing children, is developed through an up-to-date assessment of available data, including that of partner organisations; and specialist staff receive appropriate training in relation to safeguarding and understanding how to prevent repeat instances which could lead to harm.

¹⁰ 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 are classified as missing the police are obliged to take steps to locate them, as the level of perceived risk is higher.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

The force 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 force 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. It did not test the quality of how the force conducted these complex investigations with other agencies such as children's services as these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.¹¹

The MPS has demonstrated strong leadership in preparing the force's response to child sexual exploitation and has a comprehensive intelligence profile identifying threat and risk areas. A governance board is well established to provide overview and scrutiny and a pan-London multi-agency protocol (an information sharing agreement with other organisations working together across London) is in place. Each borough has a dedicated single point of contact (SPOC) from the sexual exploitation team which works to combat this crime across London.

In addition to the dedicated resources, HMIC found evidence of good involvement with partner organisations. This includes having a named senior lawyer within CPS, and continuing work with Transport for London and the United Kingdom Borders Agency to raise awareness of trafficking.

Operation Makesafe is in place to educate the community to recognise children who may be at risk; training has been provided to hoteliers, mini-cab drivers and licensees. Internal training has been provided to all staff by way of videos, outlining the warning signs of child sexual exploitation and giving a survivor's account, and through presentations to frontline staff.

The force reported that it had 1,700 referrals within the first 12 months of the protocol being in place, and 900 flags have been added to the Police National Computer to identify those at risk as well as perpetrators. The force has recorded 466 disruptions of the activities of potential perpetrators, 250 of which resulted in civil orders (sexual harm prevention orders and sexual risk orders) and abduction notices¹² being served, and 77 offenders have been charged with criminal offences linked to child sexual exploitation.

¹¹ HMIC's National Child Protection Inspections, available from www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/our-work/child-abuse-and-child-protection-issues/national-child-protection-inspection/

¹² Child abduction warning notices can be issued against individuals who are suspected of grooming children by stating that they have no permission to associate with the named child and that if they do so they can be arrested under the Child Abduction Act 1984 and Children Act 1989.

The force needs to build on these approaches to ensure that child sexual exploitation risk is identified at an early stage and that continuing investigation and protection of the young people involved is carried out by staff with the right level of expertise, working in partnership with the right agencies.

Domestic abuse

The MPS response to victims of domestic abuse is good. It is clear and well understood by officers and staff across the force. A diamond governance group chaired by a deputy assistant commissioner with representatives from all the force directorates provides clear overview and authority, as well as clear scrutiny and accountability of actions to improve service.

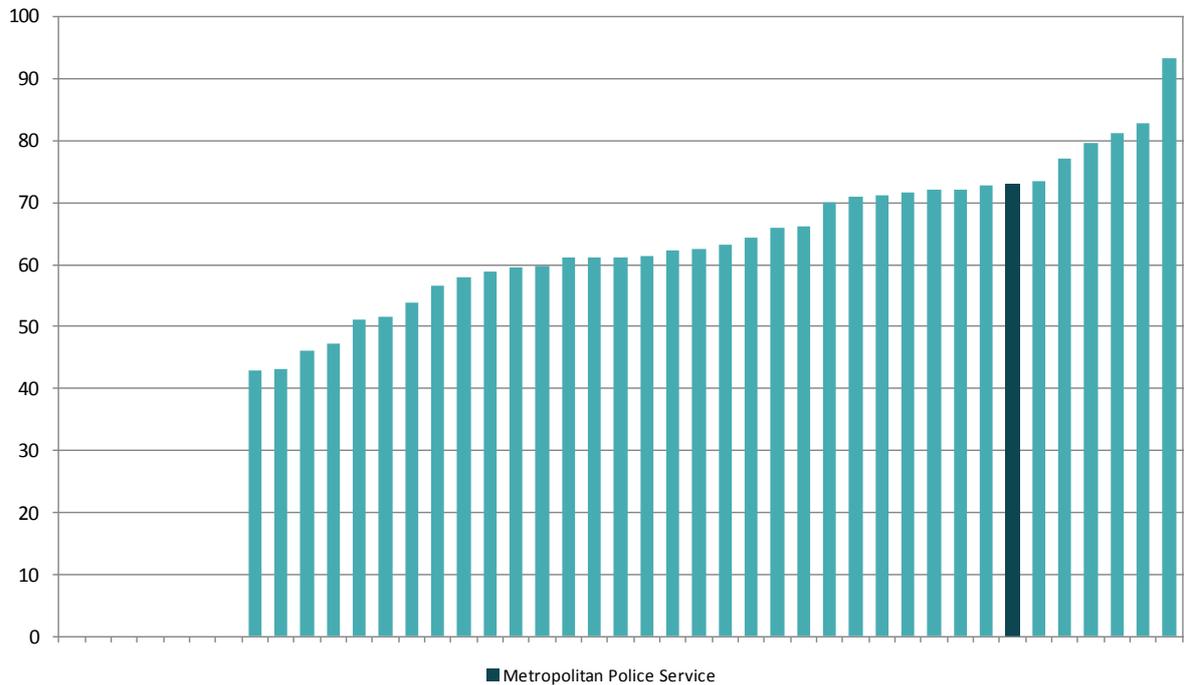
HMIC found that supervision is focused and appropriately intrusive. Staff have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in relation to supporting victims and investigating incidents of domestic abuse.

The MPS had a positive domestic abuse report from HMIC in 2014 and has addressed the six recommendations with comprehensive action plans overseen by the diamond group.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 20 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 9 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.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded MPS made 73 arrests.

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



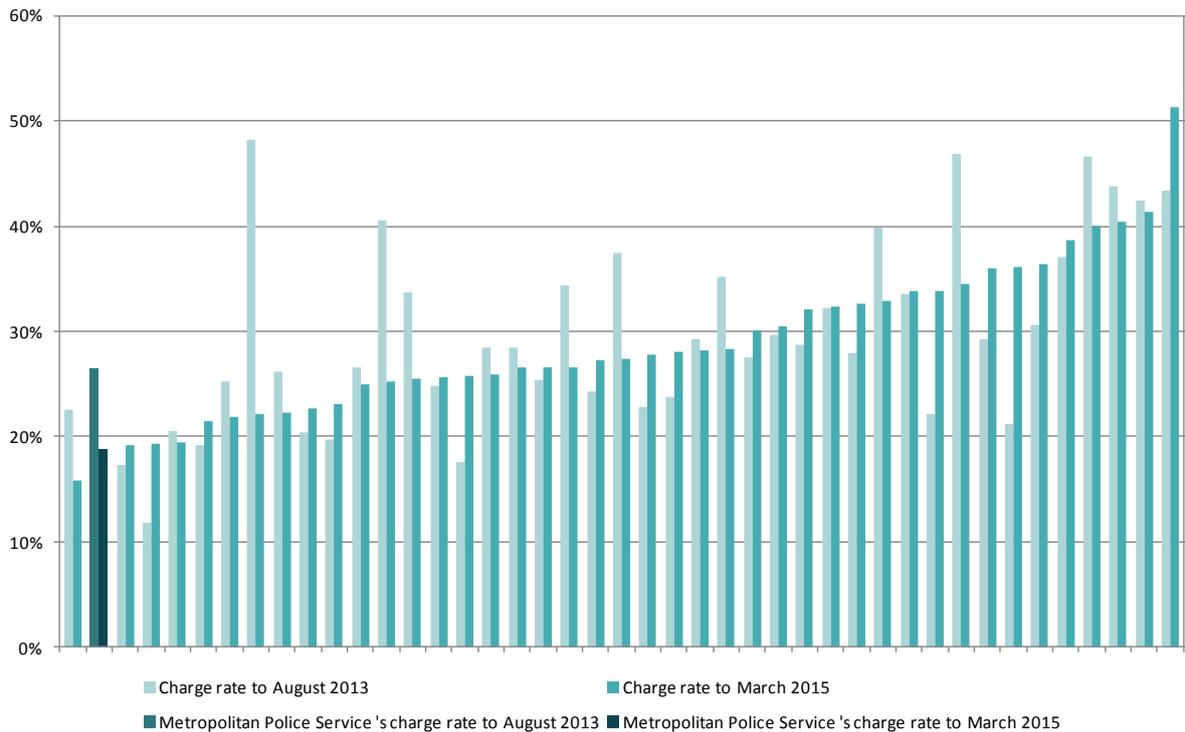
Source: HMIC data return

Safeguarding the victim is considered from the point of initial reporting and throughout the investigation. The person answering the 999 call offers immediate and practical safeguarding advice.

However, the force still appears to have only a limited ability to identify repeat victims of domestic abuse. HMIC found differing views among frontline officers as to what constitutes a repeat victim. Intelligence checks conducted by 999 call handlers appear to focus on officer safety concerns rather than addressing the wider repeat vulnerability of the victim.

The force’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 19 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is a decrease since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection when the force rate was 26 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

HMIC also examined the force’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 force began using DVPOs in November 2014; it made 85 applications to magistrates’ courts for their use, of which 68 were granted. The force did not provide data on how many DVPOs have been breached.

HMIC 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 community safety units which have access to independent domestic violence advisers. HMIC identified strong evidence of joint safeguarding activity to support vulnerable victims of domestic abuse, even when the victim was reluctant to engage with staff.

HMIC also found strong links with specialist CPS lawyers and clear efforts to share learning when cases are unsuccessful in order to improve service. The force continues to manage offenders through the use of Operation Dauntless where each borough has a clear knowledge of offenders within its area and plans in place to manage them. The force is working to raise awareness of the full range of measures contained within the Offenders Rehabilitation Act 2014 to manage offenders and prevent repeat offences.

Summary of findings



Requires improvement

HMIC found that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) generally provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and it responds well to them. But there are specific areas that the force must improve to provide a satisfactory service to protect some of the most vulnerable people.

The force uses a broad definition of vulnerability which means that a large number of victims are in the vulnerable category. This creates high demand and difficulties in prioritising the most vulnerable people. The force needs to ensure that it is satisfied that this is a definition that allows it to make decisions about how to prioritise according to levels of risk.

The force investigates crime committed against most vulnerable victims very well. However, HMIC found that whilst victim personal statements were being offered during the investigation they are not consistently offered at the time the incident is reported. As this is in breach of the code the force should improve the compliance of investigating officers and police staff with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in relation to victim personal statements.

MPS has a clear, structured and well-supervised process for responding to reports that children are missing or absent. However, training for both specialists and response staff could improve and there are intelligence gaps around repeat instances of missing and absent children. We found that the force does not have a full understanding of the nature and scale of the missing and absent challenge it faces, specifically in relation to persistent missing children. An up-to-date assessment of available data, including that of partner organisations would help the force to more fully understand this issue. Specialist staff need to receive appropriate training in relation to safeguarding and understanding how to prevent repeat instances of missing and absent children which could lead to harm.

The force has made a good start in ensuring it is prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. An information-sharing agreement across London with partner organisations has provided some positive results.

Officers attending domestic abuse incidents have a good knowledge of how to assess risk and keep victims safe. All domestic abuse incidents are supervised by specialist trained officers.

Given the scale of the challenge in this area and the risk that is posed to some of the most vulnerable people, overall HMIC judges the force requires improvement.

Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its response to missing and absent children by ensuring that it develops its understanding of the nature and scale of the issue, specifically in relation to persistent missing children, through an up-to-date assessment of available data, including that of partner organisations. It should also ensure that specialist staff receive appropriate training in relation to safeguarding and understanding how to prevent repeat instances which could lead to harm.
- The force should improve its compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime specifically in relation to victim personal statements.