

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of North Wales Police



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

North Wales Police England and Wales

596

350

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

North Wales Police England and Wales

19.5

15.8



Crime

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

North Wales Police England and Wales

52.5

61.6

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

North Wales Police England and Wales

-0.3%

+2.2%

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

North Wales Police England and Wales

0.03%

10.7%

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

North Wales Police England and Wales

10.5%

10.0%

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

North Wales Police England and Wales

+0.1%

+20.8%



Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

North Wales Police England and Wales



Charge rate

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

North Wales Police England and Wales



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

North Wales Police England and Wales



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015

North Wales Police England and Wales



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 North Wales Police.

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

Summary



Requires improvement

North Wales's approach to protecting from harm those who are vulnerable and supporting victims requires improvement.

North Wales Police makes it a priority to protect vulnerable people and support victims and this understood throughout the force. The chief constable and police and crime commissioner want vulnerability to be at the centre of all policing activity in North Wales.

We found increasing evidence that this priority is translating into operational activity with a reinvestment in specialist detectives and support services, more direct access to social care and a greater sensitivity towards the needs of vulnerable people. This means that the service to victims is improving.

This progress is being hindered by some enduring difficulties in the force that HMIC has highlighted previously needs improvement. The accurate identification of vulnerability and repeat victimisation by the force's call-handlers is still inconsistent. Similarly, the allocation of crime investigations to appropriately accredited investigators, although improved, still means that correctly skilled and experienced staff are not consistently dealing with the highest risk cases.

These shortcomings have to be set in the context of recent improvements in standards of investigation, equipping offices with body-worn video cameras and having a greater capacity to support domestic abuse victims – all of which bring tangible benefits. However, they are areas for improvement which the force should have addressed more swiftly.

HMIC considers that the overall service North Wales Police provides to victims and vulnerable people is improving. Among the force's greatest assets are its frontline staff who show an absolute commitment to protect those exposed to harm. However, until the force improves major processes to align its resources more accurately with the needs of individuals, HMIC judges that the force's performance requires improvement.

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

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.

North Wales uses the definition from VCOP and defines vulnerability as:

"You are eligible for enhanced entitlements under this Code as a vulnerable victim if:

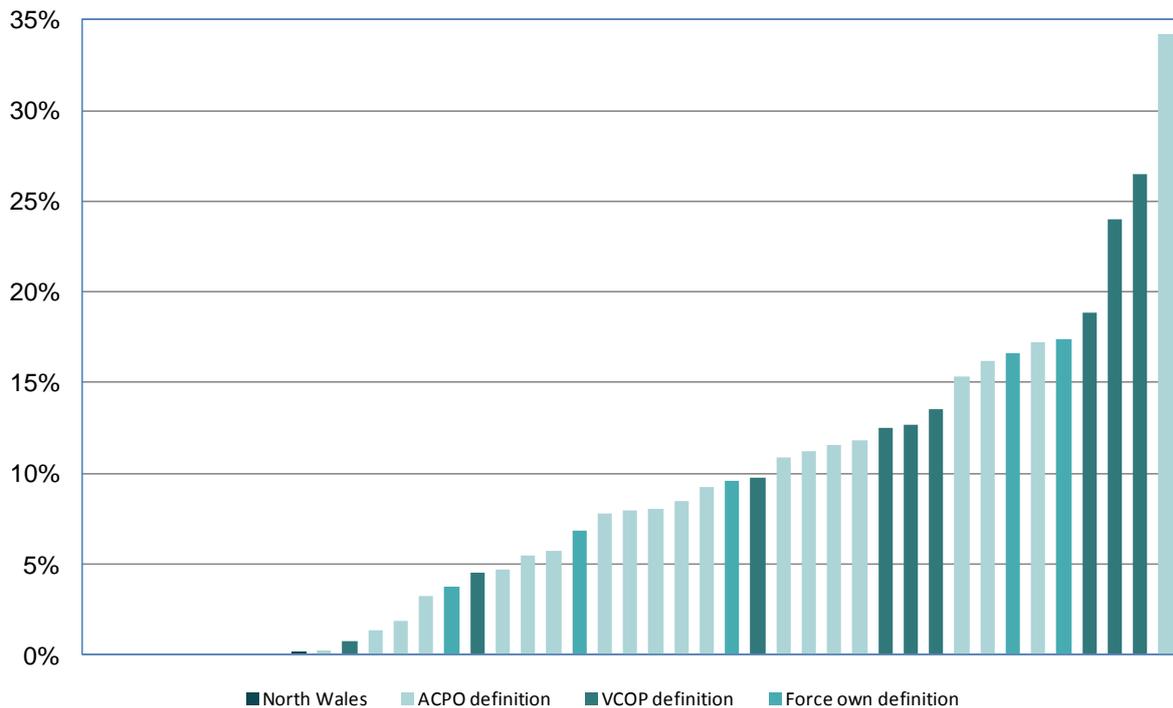
- a) You are under 18 years of age at the time of the offence, or
- b) The quality of your evidence is likely to be affected because:
 - 1) You suffer from mental disorder within the meaning of the Mental Health Act 1983:
 - 2) You otherwise have a significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning; or
 - 3) You have a physical disability or are suffering from a physical disorder"

The proportion of crime recorded which involves a vulnerable victim varies considerably between forces, from 0.03 percent to 34.3 percent. For the year to 31 March 2015, 0.03 percent of all recorded crimes in North Wales 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 on crime recording systems whether a victim is vulnerable and forces do this differently.

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/

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

Assessing the levels of risk and need

At a strategic level, the force has an agile research and analysis capability which can identify fluctuations in crime, including those associated with vulnerable victims. It identifies exceptional trends through a process known as statistical process control. These are then further analysed to instigate operational deployments in response to escalating problems.

HMIC saw good use of these techniques being used to direct patrols to support people subjected to anti-social behaviour. Intelligence-based deployments of this nature ensure that victims, whose circumstances might otherwise be overlooked, receive a better service.

At a more day-to-day level, the force has a team of well-motivated and experienced staff within its force control room who manage 999/101 calls. However, HMIC is not yet satisfied that the force can identify vulnerability and repeat victims on a consistent basis. The force has operational guidance, known as standard operating procedures (SOPs) which guide force control room operators to interrogate databases and provide attending officers with up-to-date information about the caller and any perpetrators they are likely to meet. However, staff found the SOPs difficult to navigate and time consuming and compliance with them was patchy.

This detracts from the force's capability to forewarn officers of any risk and vulnerability that may have been identified previously or that is historically associated with the caller. This may mean that an officer is not in the best position to tailor their service to an individual's needs.

When assessing the vulnerability of callers, force control room staff certainly understand vulnerability issues but HMIC believes that they are over-reliant on their professional judgment. We found cases where the vulnerability factors surrounding particular individuals were in danger of being overlooked. For example, the assignment of a high-risk classification to a missing person appeared too dependent on such factors as an immediate risk to life rather than a more rounded appreciation of their vulnerability. Better-structured conversations with callers are likely to build a more accurate picture of risk and determine more precisely the level of response required.

HMIC recognises that the imminent implementation of a call-handling procedure known as THRIVE,³ which will guide call handlers through an evaluation of threat posed to individuals, is intended to address this. However, training for these new techniques has been delayed. Until it has been completed and the THRIVE principles are embedded as routine practice, the force cannot be certain or guarantee that callers receive the level of response that they require.

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

HMIC found that in North Wales the service provided to different groups of vulnerable victims was mixed. For example the force considers the experience and skills of officers and the vulnerability of victims in deciding how the crime is allocated for investigation. However, HMIC noted some examples of offences being investigated by officers without the requisite experience.⁴ Officers are issued with prompt cards outlining details of all domestic abuse service providers, which provides a more direct route for victims into support services. The increasing availability of Barnardo's outreach workers means that more and more children who are reported missing have access to professional support.

HMIC also acknowledges the force's resolve to invest in new investigative teams and adjust operating procedures to ensure that emerging threats, and the priority to support vulnerable victims, are properly resourced.

³ The THRIVE concept assesses threat, harm, risk, investigation opportunities, the vulnerability of the victim and the engagement level required to resolve the incident.

⁴ The force has recognised this as an issue and is in the process of introducing a crime management plan which identifies which officers should deal with which cases of vulnerability.

Examples include North Wales Police's investment in a data-mining and predictive analysis tool; this has the capability to forecast the likelihood of victims being persistently targeted and enables the force to build in protective measures. The establishment of a team dedicated to co-ordinate care services for victims of child sexual exploitation and the securing the services of more third party professionals to co-ordinate care for victims (independent domestic abuse advocates); this is ensuring that high-risk domestic abuse victims receive better care plans more rapidly.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁵

HMIC found there is a common thread, which links consideration of a victim's needs from the moment the force is contacted to the arrival of emergency responders to later contact with victims in the course of investigations.

Officers and staff who were interviewed during the inspection frequently made reference to the force's commitment to protect vulnerable people. Corporate guidance exists in a multi-media format on the force's intranet and in other literature. Staff spoke positively of how this guidance is reinforced by podcasts from the chief officer team which has heightened awareness.

HMIC believes that the strategic prioritisation of vulnerability issues is routinely translated into operational activity.

Response officers

North Wales Police has a standard way that it reports vulnerability in all interactions with people who have called for its services. In domestic abuse cases, the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH)⁶ risk assessment which is commonly used in England and Wales is built into this reporting procedure.

We found clearly that the force's directive to take positive action when called to domestic abuse incidents is put into good effect. Offenders are arrested as a matter of course unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so and children are questioned sensitively to ensure that there is immediate provision for their wellbeing.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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

The force is exploring ways to enhance its evidence gathering to support vulnerable victims. Currently, it has a small number of officers who are equipped with body-worn video camera devices with a view to extending this to the whole force. The benefit to gathering evidence using these devices has been proved elsewhere by recording injuries to victims and the demeanour of perpetrators; successful prosecutions have increased as a result. Officers spoke positively of the use of this technology both in supporting victims and establishing a better case for prosecution.

Supervision of response to vulnerable victims

Supervision procedures for contact with victims are clear. Risk assessments are presented to sergeants for ratification and HMIC saw examples where the assessment was changed to reflect concerns raised by supervisors. The adequacy of safeguarding⁷ arrangements for high-risk domestic abuse victims has to be approved by an inspector.

HMIC also saw effective follow-up interventions to pursue known offenders and protect vulnerable people. In daily management meetings, officers are detailed to track down high-risk domestic abuse offenders who have not been arrested and complete any new lines of enquiry relating to missing persons on a daily basis.

⁷ The term safeguarding means providing protection and support to ensure the safety of a vulnerable person and prevent further harm.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁸

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

HMIC examined the case files of 10 investigations⁹ where vulnerable victims were identified. HMIC also interviewed investigators in specialist investigative units and frontline officers who also investigate crime.

The force has developed a policy with the intention of ensuring that allegations of crime are allocated to investigators based on an evaluation of the vulnerability of the victim. Historically, crime has been allocated for investigation on the basis of the type of offence that had been committed; those deemed to be more serious were investigated by CID officers who have more training than colleagues in uniform.

While this has led to some changes, for example, allegations of domestic abuse involving serious assault being allocated to CID officers, this is the exception rather than the rule. The majority of investigations are still conducted by uniformed officers who receive less training; this is irrespective of the risk associated with the victim. To reinforce its commitment to victims, North Wales Police should take more steps to discern exactly which victims, on the basis of their individual need, should be referred to detectives. This is likely to enhance the service provided to victims; it would also be in line with the stated aims of the force to protect the most vulnerable.

HMIC identified improvements to the standard of force investigations, including prompt allocation of crime allegations, effective use of investigation plans to direct investigations, exhausting of all possible lines of enquiry and the consideration and re-appraisal of the vulnerability of the victim at frequent intervals. It was also clear that prosecution files are assembled promptly when there is evidence to charge offenders and there was no undue delay in them appearing before the courts. These standards represent progress in relation to comments made by HMIC in an inspection of crime in North Wales in 2014.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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 vulnerability and the effectiveness of the investigation.

Compliance with the codes of practice for victims of crime

All police forces have a statutory duty to comply with the code of practice for victims of crime. The code sets out the service that victims can expect from all organisations, including the police, who have a role in the criminal justice system.

Knowledge and understanding of the victim's code was mixed. There is a strong emphasis in the force on victims' contracts; these set out the frequency of contact that victims can expect both in terms of the progress made with investigations and the manner in which they wish to be contacted. These are well understood by frontline staff, they were apparent in the case files HMIC reviewed and are subject to firm supervision by sergeants. The force's crime management system is flexible enough to enable electronic 'prompts' to be programmed into individual crime reports to remind officers when contact with victims is necessary.

We identified a potential anomaly in relation to the force's use of victim personal statements.¹⁰ These statements make courts aware of the psychological impact of becoming a victim. The force uses them infrequently, although officers in emergency response teams and working in neighbourhoods understand their importance as part of the prosecution process. This was in contrast with specialist officers whose use of these statements was more commonplace, notably specialist domestic abuse officers who routinely use them as part of wider support measures for high-risk victims.

North Wales Police relies on a high proportion of non-specialist staff to investigate crime. HMIC believes that the force must take further steps to make sure all the requirements of the code of practice are part of its routine activity.

Working with partners

North Wales Police works with a number of different councils and has become adept at adapting to different working practices in each council. All partners approve of the efforts the force has taken to advance the cause of joint working.

HMIC saw evidence of effective joint operating protocols for safeguarding vulnerable missing persons and high-risk domestic abuse victims. A recent innovation involves a senior officer bringing together with the heads of service from the force's principal partners in the statutory and charity sectors.

¹⁰ 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.

This forum considers the higher-risk vulnerable victims that are known to the force and joint action plans are put in place to make them more resilient and less prone to being victimised again.

HMIC also notes the efforts the force has made in persuading statutory and non-statutory partners to co-opt staff into multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs).¹¹ Elsewhere in the country bringing service providers together in this way has improved decision-making, led to better and quicker care plans for victims and ultimately made vulnerable people safer. Despite its early promise, it is regrettable that some partner organisations are finding it difficult to continue to commit staff to a pathfinder safeguarding hub in Flintshire. HMIC hopes that joint working practices can be re-negotiated in the interests of vulnerable victims in North Wales.

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 victims safe. This question looks specifically at how the force deals with three specific areas of vulnerability: domestic abuse, missing and absent¹² children and its preparedness to deal with child sexual exploitation.

Missing and absent children

The force has a comprehensive missing persons policy which draws on national police-approved professional practice and Home Office guidance. It is strengthened by the All Wales child protection procedures and missing persons protocol. The force gives clear guidance to operational staff, which spans from the moment an individual is reported as missing to the point when the person returns and the circumstances of the disappearance are discussed with a view to providing support to the vulnerable.

¹¹ A multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) brings together into a single location key safeguarding agencies to better identify risks to children (and in some areas, vulnerable adults), and improve decision-making, interventions, and outcomes. The MASH enables the multi-agency team to share all appropriate information in a secure environment, and ensure that the most appropriate response is provided to effectively safeguard and protect the individual.

¹² 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 missing the police are obliged to take steps to locate them, as the level of perceived risk is higher.

The force has firm corporate oversight of missing persons' inquiries. Current investigations are handed over to inspectors as shifts rotate and should a disappearance continue for more than 72 hours, a further review is instigated by a senior CID officer.

To conclude investigations, the force takes a structured approach to interviewing children on their return. The force has recently invested in an enhanced contract with child practitioners in the charity, Barnardo's. Any child who is at risk of child sexual exploitation, or who is living in the children's home, will be interviewed by a Barnardo's worker. This is an important intervention to establish an understanding of who the child has been with, where they have been and why they absconded. Protocols are in place to ensure that the relevant details are entered onto force intelligence systems. This enables the force to have a head start in searching places the child is known to frequent, should the individual habitually abscond.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

HMIC is reassured that the force is approaching a state of readiness in terms of its capacity to tackle child sexual exploitation. Legislative procedures have been established for more than ten years within the All Wales Child Protection Procedures to safeguard children. Additionally Barnardo's Cymru launched the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF) as long ago as 2006 which specifically supports children who are at risk of being sexually abused in Wales.

North Wales Police has completed recently research and analysis to determine a better understanding of the scale and potential implications of this type of crime. The analysis could be enhanced if it was accompanied by data from partner organisations, for example from NHS Wales, a point which is being addressed. Nevertheless it has enabled the force to allocate resources to the problem, define training requirements and direct operational activity in a coherent manner.

The force has established a specialist team to work alongside partner organisations to provide support to young people who are susceptible to coercion. Building stronger ties with these young people is also providing the force with a fuller picture of perpetrators who are involved in this sort of crime. The force is midway through a training programme provided by specialist officers and Barnardo's workers, frontline staff were complimentary about the benefits of this training. It was clear through the briefings and allocation of resources to frontline officers at the start of shifts that vulnerable youngsters who are susceptible to this nature of victimisation are central to police activity. One officer described to us how young people who frequently ran away were once considered as a nuisance but are now a priority in day-to-day patrols.

The anomaly in how crime is allocated for investigation, highlighted earlier in this report, also has implications for investigation of child sexual abuse. Published force policy states that allocation will be made on the threat, harm and risk to which victims

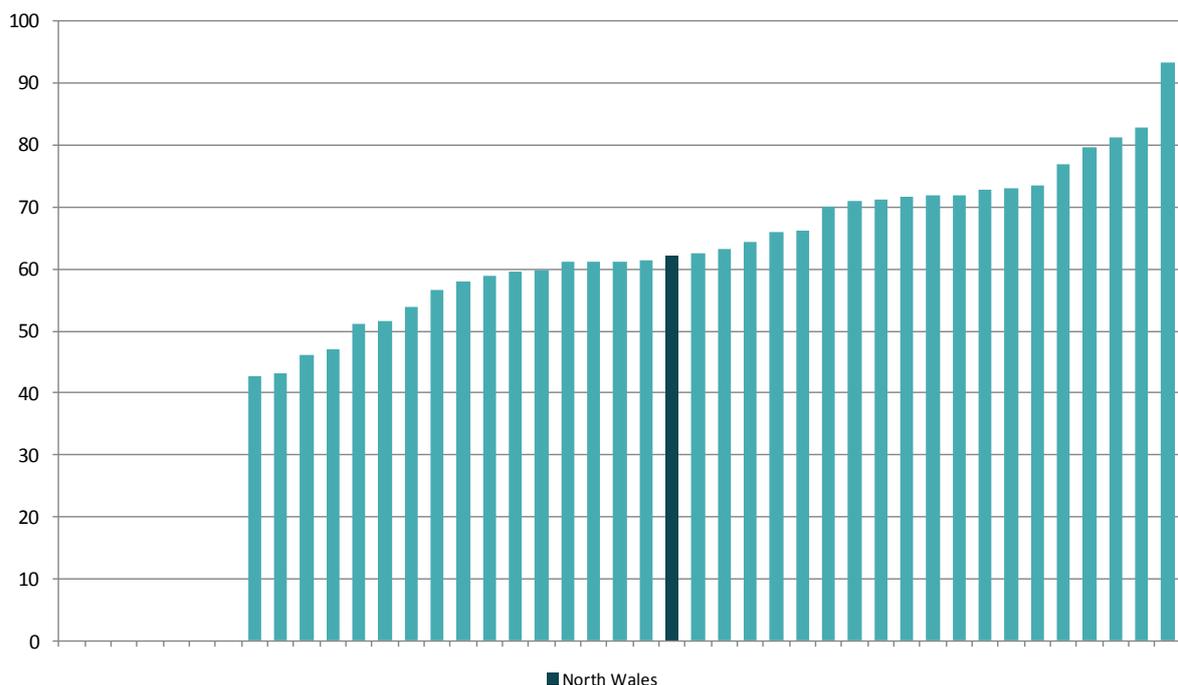
are exposed. However, HMIC saw examples of offences being investigated by CID officers as well as emergency response officers without a clear rationale behind the decision-making. In particular, a review by HMIC of two cases involving the sexual grooming of young girls that were being investigated by frontline uniformed officers identified shortcomings which stemmed from their lack experience and training. This finding reinforces the need for the force to review how crimes are allocated for investigation.

Domestic abuse

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 0.1 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.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded North Wales Police made 62 arrests.

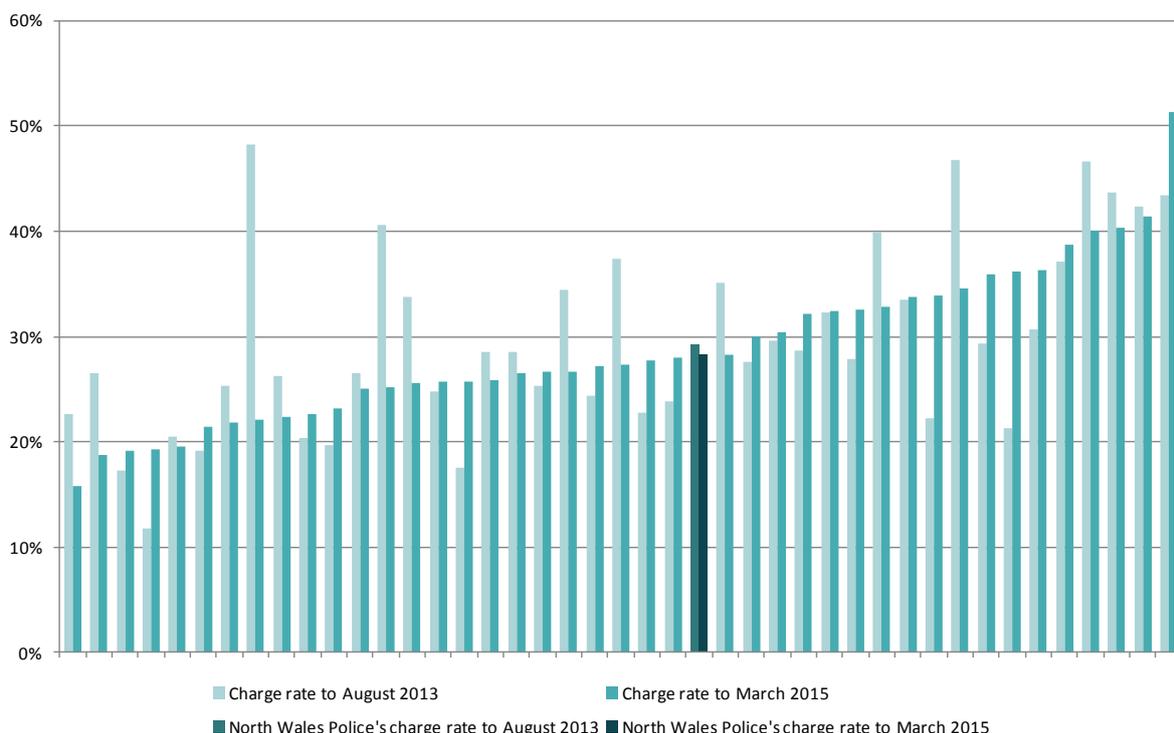
Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015



Source: HMIC data return

The force’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 28 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 29 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 February 2014; it made 29 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 27 were granted. Ten 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 37 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹³

HMIC found that the force has responded positively to the previous inspection of domestic abuse and had made some progress in implementing change; in particular officers are better trained and the supervision of risk assessments completed by frontline officers who attend to victims of domestic abuse has been enhanced. This brings greater confidence that service provided by officers in the immediate aftermath of incidents of abuse is of a good standard.

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

The force has also strengthened its capability to put safeguarding measures in place for victims. The funding of additional Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA)¹⁴ posts, boosting their numbers from 5 to 11 full-time workers, is notable; IDVAs play a crucial role in co-ordinating the contributions of all domestic abuse service providers in developing care plans to support high risk victims.

The police role in partnership working is also a strength in the force. HMIC observed partnership committees known as multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs).¹⁵ These fora draw together social services, housing authorities, drugs and alcohol treatment providers, NHS Wales, education and the probation services to consider the needs of victims and address the offending behaviour of perpetrators. In the meetings observed, these committees were chaired by detective inspectors who showed dexterity in managing a complex and lengthy caseload. External service providers commended their leadership.

The force has forged strong relationships with partner agencies. This ensures that MARACs are attended by senior representatives who are empowered both to commit resources and remain accountable for the measures put in place to support victims.

North Wales Police's progress to tackle domestic abuse is commendable. Steps still need to be taken to identify risk better at the first point of contact and more consideration needs to be given to how allegations of domestic abuse are allocated time for investigation. These matters however, as previously mentioned in this report, are not related to domestic abuse alone and need to be part of everyday work in the force's wider plan for organisational improvement to address vulnerability.

¹⁴ IDVAs (independent domestic abuse advisors) are advocates who work separately from the police to address the safety of victims (and their children) who are at high risk of harm from intimate partners, former partners and family members.

¹⁵ MARACs (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) – meetings where information about domestic abuse victims who are at risk of serious harm is shared with local partner agencies to ensure that comprehensive safeguarding measures are put in place.

Summary of findings



Requires improvement

North Wales Police has a strong work ethic to protect vulnerable people; clear leadership direction is being provided from the top of the organisation; it is explicit about its provision of frontline services and partner organisations are complimentary of the lead it takes in bringing together public services.

HMIC found that progress has been made since we last inspected domestic abuse in North Wales. Frontline response officers complete risk assessments with greater consistency and they are subject to better supervision. Safeguarding has become more assured as frontline officers develop awareness of how to gain support from other service providers; similarly an increase in the number of independent domestic advisors mean that the support available for high-risk victims is better.

An understanding of the scale and impact of child sexual abuse is developing and joint service delivery with Barnardo's is building stronger support for young people who are at risk.

This progress is being hindered by two enduring problems which HMIC has previously highlighted: the ability of the force to accurately identify vulnerability at the first point of contact; and the force's allocation of crime for investigation in a manner that matches the skills and experience of the investigator to the vulnerability of the victim. The impact of these shortcomings means that overall HMIC judges that the force's performance requires improvement.

Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its identification and assessment of risk to vulnerable people at the initial point of contact. It should do this by ensuring staff who work within the force control room consistently use approved force processes, which are designed to support the assessment of risk together with effective supervision of their decision making.
- The force should improve the investigation of cases involving vulnerable victims, specifically in relation to cases involving children at risk of sexual exploitation and victims of domestic abuse, to ensure appropriately skilled and experienced staff conduct the investigation.