

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Northumbria Police



December 2015

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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Northumbria Police

England and Wales

356

350

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

Northumbria Police

England and Wales

22.3

15.8



Crime

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

Northumbria Police

England and Wales

50.8

61.6

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

Northumbria Police

England and Wales

+4%

+2.2%

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

Northumbria Police

England and Wales

15.3%

10.7%

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

Northumbria Police

England and Wales

10.0%

10.0%

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

Northumbria Police

England and Wales

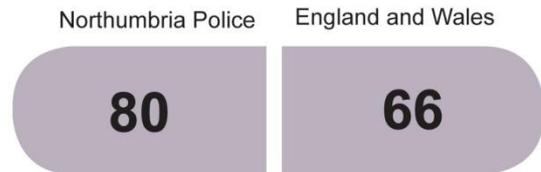
+25.7%

+20.8%



Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

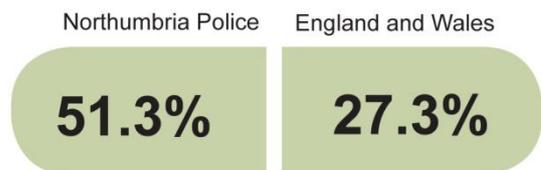


Charge rate

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

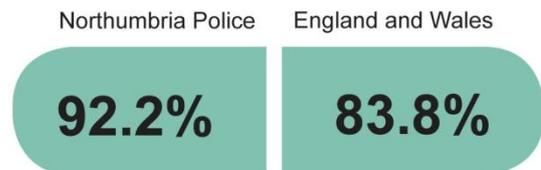


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



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.

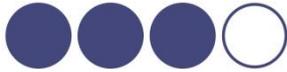
During the in-force inspection, we interviewed chief officers in each force and held focus groups with officers, staff and partners, and made unannounced visits to police stations, force control rooms and specialist teams. We also worked with the force missing person coordinator (or equivalent) to review 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 Northumbria Police.

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

Summary



Good

Northumbria Police has made protecting vulnerable people from harm a high priority for the force. Both the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the chief constable have a strong commitment to improving the services they provide. HMIC judges the force as good at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable and supporting victims.

The force has clear and consistently-applied processes in place to identify repeat and vulnerable victims. We found regular and robust supervision and scrutiny of incidents to ensure an appropriate and timely response.

To help achieve the force's commitment to improve the services provided to vulnerable people, it has invested significantly in training staff. This ensures that they have a good level of knowledge and understanding, which was demonstrated during reality-testing in HMIC's inspection.

The force is using widespread and innovative ways of working to protect and support vulnerable people, often in partnership with other agencies.

The force has made, and continues to make investment in information technology (IT) to support improvements to bring about greater efficiencies and effectiveness in victim care services.

Good arrangements are in place with partner agencies to keep vulnerable people safe, and the force is continually working to enhance these arrangements further. Additional analytical support should make these arrangements even more effective.

Overall the force provides a good response to and safeguards missing children and victims of domestic abuse, and is well prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation.

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

Northumbria Police is good at identifying those who are vulnerable and assessing the risk that they face and what is needed to keep them safe. HMIC found a strong commitment in the force to improving the service provided to vulnerable people. The PCC and the chief constable take a personal lead on the issue. This commitment is reinforced in the PCC's Police & Crime Plan 2013-18 and in the Chief Constable's Delivery Plan.

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.

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

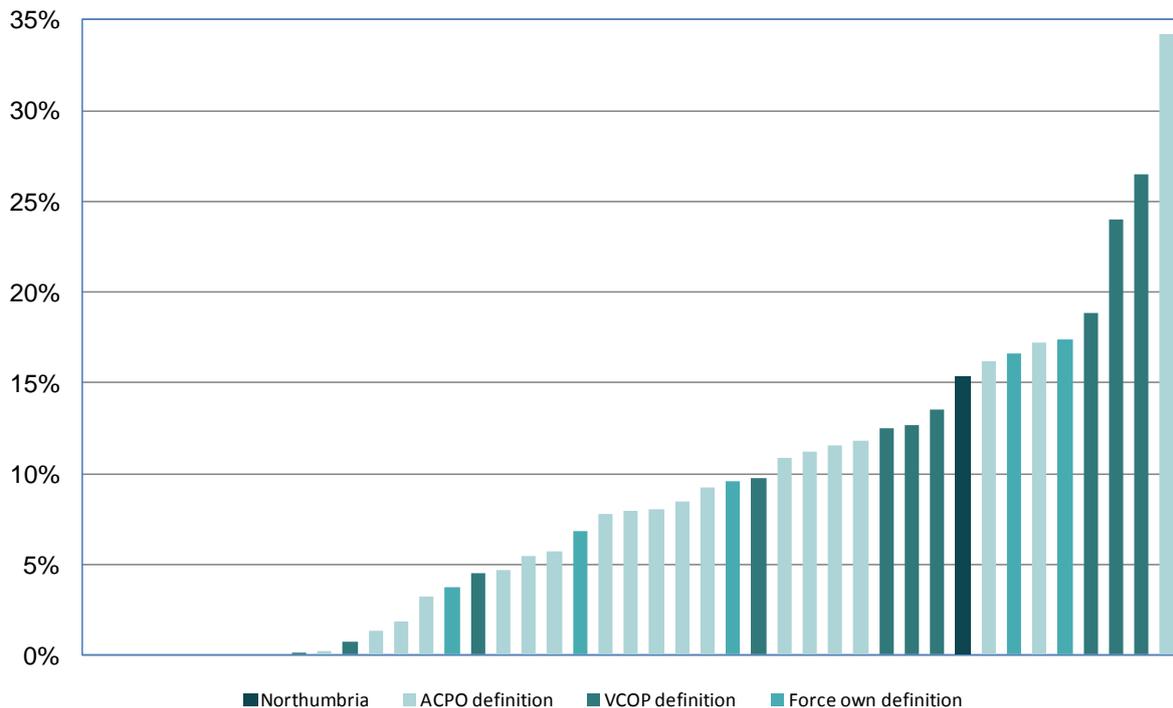
“Any person aged 18 years or over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental, physical, or learning disability, age or illness AND is or may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.”

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, 15.3 percent of all recorded crimes in Northumbria Police 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, 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

HMIC reviewed how incidents involving vulnerable people are dealt with at the first point of contact, and found that the staff who answer calls are well-trained. The majority of incidents are reported by phone into one of the force’s two communication centres. Staff in these centres are assisted in deciding the most appropriate response to such calls by using an automated checking mechanism which searches the force’s IT systems, using the address where the incident is happening and a combination of the caller’s surname, date of birth and telephone number. Any previous incidents or warnings about the address or people involved are automatically updated in the incident log. These checks highlight if a victim has already been identified as a vulnerable or repeat victim and assist in determining the appropriate initial response and risk assessment.

The force has defined what makes a caller/victim a repeat or vulnerable victim. Contact handlers use these definitions to identify vulnerable and repeat victims at the first point of contact. In the case of a caller being identified as such, this is recorded on the force systems in a way that will highlight the issue for future calls. Once graded the incident is passed to a resource controller who uses an IT system and GPS to identify and deploy the most appropriate and timely resource to the incident.

Incidents can also be reported to the front enquiry offices at local police stations. HMIC spoke to contact handlers working in the communication centres and staff working in front enquiry offices.

They demonstrated a good understanding of their role and responsibilities in identifying vulnerability at the earliest opportunity and assessing a person's level of risk and what is needed to keep them safe.

Assessing levels of risk and need

During reality-testing HMIC found that contact handlers are effectively assessing threat, risk and harm in order to decide the most appropriate response to an incident, especially those involving vulnerable and repeat callers/ victims. However, staff were not able to demonstrate a defined process by which they make this assessment with individuals using different approaches. The force has recognised this as an area for improvement and is currently implementing a structured assessment based on the levels of threat, harm, risk and vulnerability (THRIVE)³ the victim faces.

Supervisors in the communication centres carry out regular and robust quality assurance checks to ensure all incidents relating to repeat or vulnerable victims are appropriately assessed and managed. This includes all incidents involving domestic abuse, missing persons, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and child sexual exploitation. The force operational manager (a chief inspector) based in one of the communication centres also oversees and scrutinises all incidents involving a victim assessed as being at high-risk of harm.

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

To help achieve the force's commitment to improve the services provided to vulnerable people, it has invested significantly in training its staff. HMIC spoke to a range of staff including 24/7 response officers and staff working in communication centres and front enquiry offices. They confirmed that they had received recent training to help them effectively identify and manage incidents involving vulnerability especially those relating to domestic abuse, missing persons, ASB and child sexual exploitation.

Alongside this work, the force has also invested in additional specialist officers and a dedicated safety planning team to improve the services provided to vulnerable victims identified as being at greater risk of harm. The force is using technology to enhance further how it supports vulnerable victims and protects them during criminal proceedings. For example, improvements have been made to the criminal justice experience for children and vulnerable adults by enabling them to give their evidence to a court from remote sites via a video-link.

³ The THRIVE approach considers, threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement.

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

The force responds well to vulnerable victims. They receive a priority response, and support is given to those victims who are the most vulnerable.

Response officers

HMIC found that the police officers who respond to incidents are clear that improving the service provided to vulnerable people is a priority. Those attending incidents showed good knowledge of how to assess risk and keep victims safe. In the case of incidents involving domestic abuse, officers use a domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence (DASH)⁵ risk assessment process. A similar process is used to establish the vulnerability of victims of anti-social behaviour. Officers understand the need to ensure the safety of the victim and children and put the necessary measures in place to protect them. For example, they can relocate a victim to a place of safety, or provide the victim with a mobile phone, so they can have immediate contact with the force's communication centres.

This way of working means that levels of risk are quickly determined and appropriate action taken including referral to partner agencies, for example children's and adult services. During reality-testing officers confirmed that in cases where risk is identified to a child they would complete a child concern notification (CCN) form which would alert the force's protecting vulnerable persons (PVP) department and children's services of the concern or identified risk. However, staff expressed differing views as to whether a CCN would be required where children may not be present at the time of police attendance meaning the potential risk to children is not consistently being identified. It would be beneficial for the force to clarify this issue with officers.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

Supervisors provide oversight and scrutiny of incidents involving vulnerable and repeat victims from call handling, through to initial response and investigation, especially those relating to domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour, missing persons and child sexual exploitation.

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.

⁵ 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

HMIC attended area command daily management meetings and found good scrutiny and management of cases, and the co-ordination of resources to ensure a timely and appropriate response. The meeting is used to make sure victims are being protected from further harm and that perpetrators are actively being sought.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁶

The force conducts good investigations and works well with partners to effectively safeguard and protect victims.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

Northumbria Police has a very strong focus on providing good quality investigations, especially for those crimes or incidents of anti-social behaviour involving repeat or vulnerable victims. The force has made a quality of service commitment to victims of crime and anti-social behaviour to ensure investigations are consistently of a high standard. Sergeants are required to prepare an investigation plan for every crime report. They also review each crime report after seven days to ensure that the investigation is being progressed and that the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime is being complied with. All sergeants within the force have received specific crime file training that included identification of investigative opportunities and evidential requirements.

HMIC reviewed 50 investigations,⁷ of which 10 were identified as involving a vulnerable person. It found vulnerability was identified at an early stage in the investigations relating to violence and rape, but this was less evident in the investigations of burglary. In the majority of cases investigations were of a high standard and effectively supervised, with a clear focus on the needs of the victim.

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

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

make a personal statement,⁸ which they can use to explain how the crime has affected them. HMIC found that staff know how they comply with the requirements of the code. However, some were unclear about the enhanced services the code provides for victims of domestic abuse. It would be beneficial for the force to remind staff of the requirements of the code and explain how they relate to the force's other initiatives to improve victim care.

Since the code was introduced, the force has improved how it supports victims. We found been a particular drive by the force to improve satisfaction regarding follow-up contact with victims. The force uses a 'victim's contract' which is agreed with every victim when a police officer attends either a crime or an incident. The contract ensures that victim contact is determined by the victim in terms of how often and by what means they are kept informed regarding the progress of the investigation. Victim contracts are reviewed by supervisors and are also the subject of peer review and quality assurance by managers from other local policing areas.

An initiative called 'Victims First Northumbria', introduced by the PCC, has improved further the way that the force supports victims. It co-ordinates the care of victims of crime, with emotional and practical support and provides a service for those indirectly affected by crime including partners, siblings, children, and close friends. At the point of recording a crime, officers are required to complete a needs assessment. This has been incorporated with the victim's contract at the beginning of the DASH booklet. The assessment assists officers to understand the impact of the crime, whether the victim is vulnerable and what additional support they require. Each victim with identified needs will be contacted by a 'Victims First' co-ordinator who will plan with victims the support needed to cope with and recover from a crime. This support may come from a range of agencies, organisations, and specialist services, but will be co-ordinated and facilitated by the co-ordinator to make the journey through the criminal justice system seamless and manageable for the victim.

There are processes in place to understand and act on the views of vulnerable victims. Independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) work closely with officers and staff and this provides the opportunity to feedback formally the views of victims. Domestic abuse surveys are also used to seek the views of victims and this is helping the force shape the services it provides.

⁸ 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.

Working with partners

The force works closely with partners to protect vulnerable people within communities. For example, there are three multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs)⁹ for children (Newcastle, North Tyneside and Sunderland) and one for adults (Gateshead). These enable staff from the force to work alongside staff from children, adult and health services to share information and agree joint action which safeguards vulnerable individuals.

The force also works with partners outside the MASH arrangements. This work includes, for example, a triage response for domestic abuse. Officers work alongside domestic abuse specialists to ensure support is provided to victims at the earliest opportunity. Another example is the missing from home co-ordinators, who work within children's care homes to identify the issues that cause children to go missing from care.

Formal partnership arrangements exist, with multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)¹⁰ operating in each of the six local authority areas. Their purpose is to bring relevant agencies together to share information and provide a co-ordinated response to victims of domestic abuse. All victims assessed by the police or partner agencies as high-risk victims are discussed at the MARACs. Victims who suffer a further episode of violence within 12 months are also discussed. As part of this inspection, HMIC attended two MARACs. The meetings were chaired well, information was shared effectively, actions agreed and those responsible for delivering them were held to account.

The force has identified that some MARACs continue to deal with high levels of demand; they are currently working with partner agencies to address the issue and ensure those cases referred to MARAC are appropriate.

⁹ 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 ensures that the most appropriate response is provided to effectively safeguard and protect the individual.

¹⁰ 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 force provides a good response to children who go missing.

The force has three missing from home co-ordinators in place to provide advice and oversee more complex cases. This role is vital in ensuring officers and partner agencies are monitoring, supporting and managing missing children effectively, especially those who are vulnerable and/or repeatedly go missing. For example, they work closely with each of the six local authority areas and attend their multi-agency risk management group meetings for missing children at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking.

We spoke to officers and representatives from other agencies as part of this inspection. They were very positive about the role of the police and the significant improvements this had made to the way cases of missing children were managed. However, concerns were expressed about the impact the long-term absence of one of the co-ordinators was having on the capacity and capability of the other two co-ordinators. To ensure this role continues to be performed effectively the force needs to address this issue and ensure sufficient resilience for the future.

The force has a good understanding and analysis of missing children, particularly those children who go missing from care homes. For instance, the force regularly identifies the top ten premises from which children regularly go missing. This information has previously been provided to the director of social services in one local authority (responsible for commissioning care homes) to ensure funding is withheld until significant improvements are made by these establishments. This is helping to safeguard children and reduce unnecessary demand on the force.

An important part of a force's understanding about missing children is gained from the information provided by children when they are found. This process is called a 'return interview' and in this force area it is carried out by third party organisations on behalf of local authorities. HMIC inspectors found inconsistencies in the number of return interviews being completed and the processes in place to pass information from these interviews to the force. This is especially important in gathering

intelligence to identify those children at risk of sexual exploitation and the perpetrators involved.

Northumbria Police has adopted the national guidelines for dealing with missing and absent¹¹ children. The force does not currently use the absent category for missing adults or children which means a full investigation takes place in all cases. At the time of this inspection, the force had identified the need to reduce the current burden of managing these types of incident, both on communications room staff and response staff. It was exploring the feasibility of adopting the absent category for those persons missing from care, hospital or school where their whereabouts are known or there is no information to suggest they are at risk. Plans were in place to carry out work with other forces to learn from their experiences.

Interviews with staff and representatives from other agencies provided evidence of the force working in partnership to reduce the risks to missing children often through forums such as local safeguarding children boards.¹² However, the creation of a problem profile¹³ for missing children would help the force have a clearer picture of the issue and inform how it works with its partners to tackle it.

A review of nine missing children cases by HMIC found the force's initial response to be timely and appropriate. We found evidence of regular reviews by supervisors of both the investigation and the levels of risk to the child. In all cases the child had been found and a safe and well check had immediately been completed and recorded by an officer. There was evidence of referrals being made to other agencies (such as social services) where appropriate.

There are processes in place which provide appropriate oversight and scrutiny of incidents involving missing children. This was evident during reality testing in one of the force's two communication centres, and in daily management meetings, which are chaired by senior officers and take place in each of the three area commands. Staff demonstrated a good level of understanding of the potential risks to children reported missing and the actions they must take to reduce those risks.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ A problem profile is intended to provide the force 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.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

The force 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 child 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.

The force has a good understanding of the issue of child sexual exploitation and has made a clear commitment to tackling it. The force has implemented a large-scale investigation into sexual exploitation of vulnerable people (including children) with the main focus being in the west end area of Newcastle. The operation started in January 2014 and at the time of this inspection more than 130 arrests had been made, and 21 people charged with offences. The operation has been supported by partners from social care, health and the voluntary sector. A comprehensive and innovative range of policing tactics have been used to investigate current and historic allegations of sexual offending linked to sexual exploitation. This investigative element is supported by significant community engagement and an extensive media and marketing campaign. The operation places the safeguarding of vulnerable victims as its main priority, with the investigation a secondary priority.

The PCC has recently secured Home Office funding to launch a long-term project to safeguard vulnerable women and girls from abuse. Two multi-agency teams are being formed in the north and south of the force area to tackle sexual exploitation, vulnerability and modern day slavery. The initiative is bringing together children and adult social care services, the police and a broad range of voluntary sector organisations and partners. Police resources are already in place with work still in progress to select other members of the team.

To develop further its understanding of child sexual exploitation, the force has compiled a problem profile. However, this is currently based entirely on police data. The force is working with other agencies to share child sexual exploitation data which will enhance knowledge of the threat, harm and risk posed by child sexual exploitation across the force area. HMIC found that analytical resources are mainly directed to reactive investigations and their work is not prioritised according to threat, harm and risk issues.

The force's commitment to tackle child sexual exploitation is reinforced in its child sexual exploitation strategy and delivery plan, with progress monitored and managed through the strategic management board which is chaired by the chief constable and attended by the PCC or her representative. A key part of this plan has been the training of staff and the running of a high-profile media campaign to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation internally with staff and externally with other organisations (including taxis and hotels) and members of the public. HMIC was provided with

three case studies which evidenced the value of a media campaign to help identify and tackle child sexual exploitation. The three investigations into potential grooming for child sexual exploitation originated from reports made to the force by a member of the public, staff at a supermarket and staff working in a hotel.

Tackling child sexual exploitation is a clear priority for the force, with clear policies and procedures in place to guide staff in the identification and management of such incidents. Staff we spoke to during reality-testing understand their roles and responsibilities well. However, the force could involve neighbourhood staff more in preventive work to address child sexual exploitation, using their problem-solving skills to target and tackle specific locations.

To ensure vulnerable children are protected there is support available to the force from specialist officers and other organisations, often working in partnership. For example, the three children's MASHs provide valuable support across the force area to address child sexual exploitation.

The force also works in partnership with other agencies through various fora. For instance, officers from the PVP department attend the multi-agency missing and exploited (MSET) groups which are held within each of the six local authority areas (Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Newcastle and Northumberland). The primary focus of these groups is to identify and protect children at risk of child sexual exploitation. HMIC spoke to staff and representatives from partner agencies and they described the positive contribution the MSET groups were having in safeguarding vulnerable children. However, arrangements could be improved further with additional analytical support to improve the way intelligence is developed, identify patterns and identify potential perpetrators.

Domestic abuse

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 26 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 10 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.

Northumbria Police's response to victims of domestic abuse is good. Tackling domestic abuse is a clear priority for the force and this has been especially reinforced since December 2013 when the first ever regional strategy to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) was launched in the north-east by the three regional PCCs (for Cleveland, Durham and Northumbria). Together, they devised a 20-point plan to provide support and protect women and girls who are victims of violence or abuse of any kind.

The strategy contains pledges around:

- domestic and sexual violence and abuse;

- human trafficking and sex work;
- forced marriage and so-called honour crimes;
- harassment and stalking; and
- female genital mutilation.

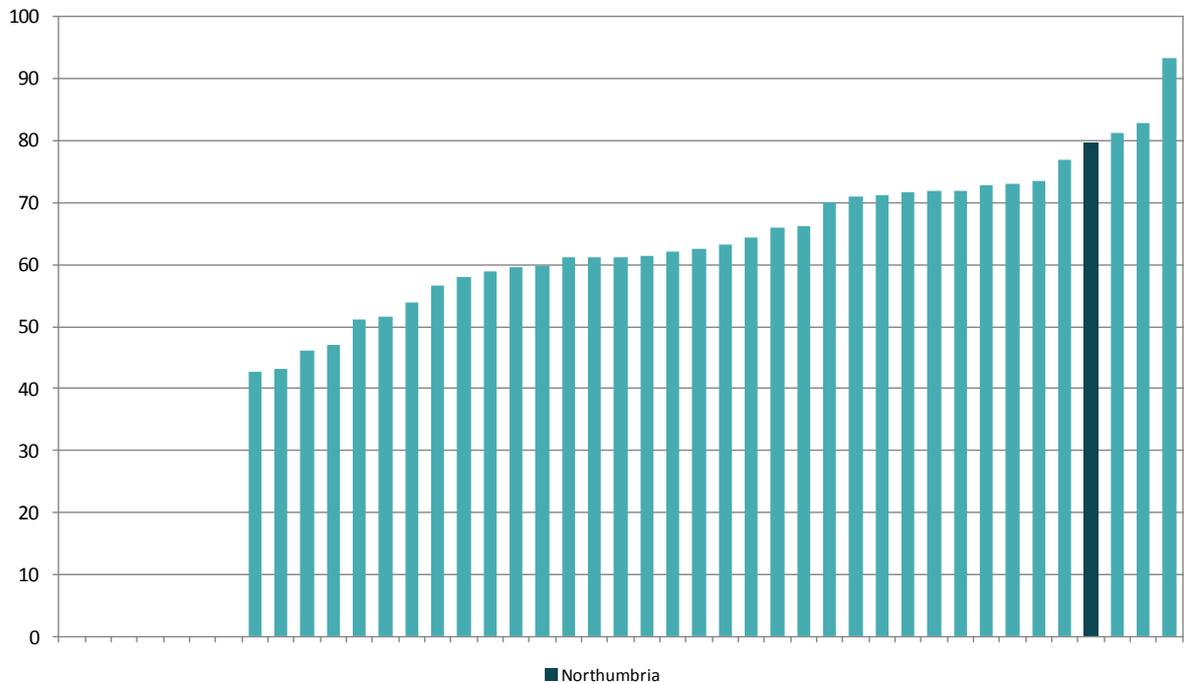
Good progress has been made since HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014. Northumbria Police received a positive report, and recommendations from this inspection and those made in HMIC's national report were incorporated into an action plan. HMIC has since reviewed this plan and provided feedback to the force. The plan demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing domestic abuse at a senior level within the force, with it being highlighted as a priority within the PCC's police and crime plan.

The force has addressed most recommendations, but at the time of inspection we identified two areas requiring further progress. First, the development of systems to embed the learning from victim feedback into policy/practice, and second, the development of approaches to identify serial perpetrators and manage them in a similar way to how persistent offenders of other types of crime are managed.

During this inspection, we reviewed these areas and found the force has made good progress. For example, it has conducted various surveys to find out the views of victims of domestic abuse and this is now shaping how and what services are being provided. In addition, the force has improved the way it identifies and manages serial perpetrators of domestic abuse in partnership with other agencies.

As shown in figure 2 below, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Northumbria Police made 80 arrests.

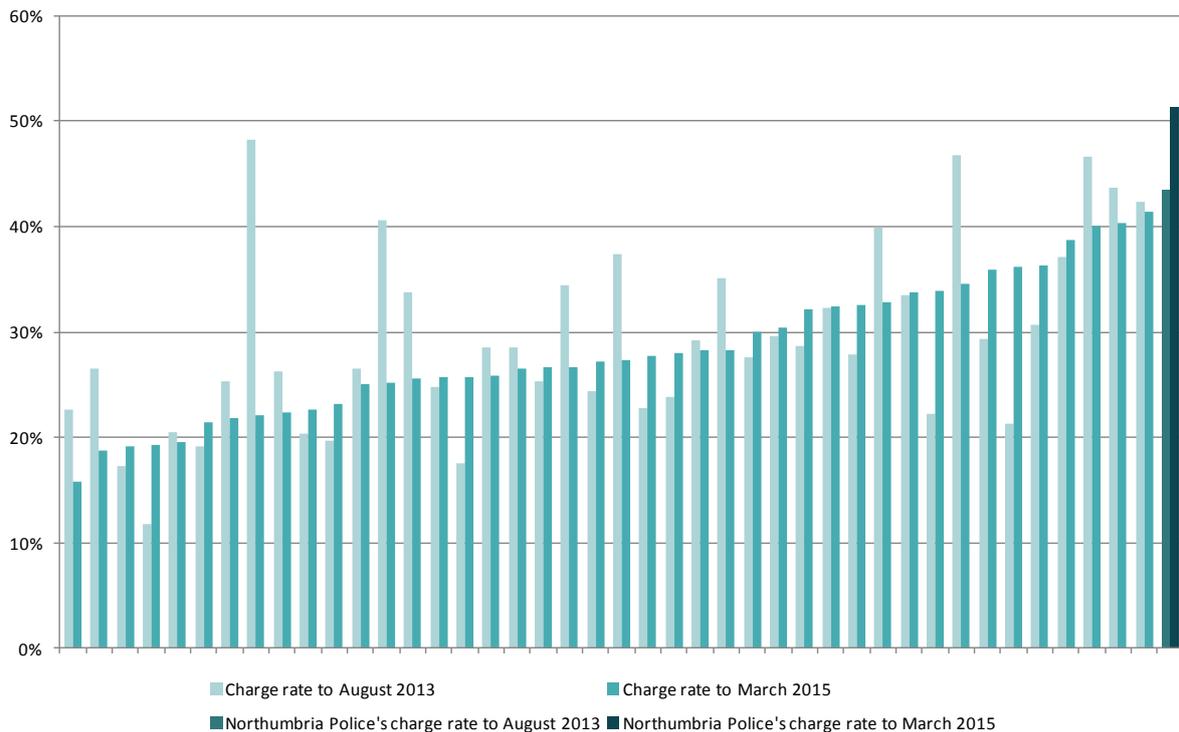
Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015



Source: HMIC data return

The force’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 51 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is an increase since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection when the force rate was 43 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

The force has been effective in securing additional funding to improve services for victims of domestic abuse and provide interventions for perpetrators. For instance, domestic violence workers accompany police officers on patrol to ensure that appropriate support is given to victims at the earliest opportunity. An enhanced perpetrator programme and multi-agency tasking and co-ordinating (MATAC) processes have also been established to target serial perpetrators. The force and PCC have plans in place to evaluate these initiatives and are making future budget provision to ensure those services making the greatest impact in tackling domestic abuse are maintained.

To help achieve the aims of both the force's domestic abuse action plan and the VAWG strategy, it has made significant investment in training staff. A particular focus has been placed on improving the way officers make victims safe and how they identify and address coercive/controlling behaviour by perpetrators. Frontline staff we spoke to during this inspection demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities to support and protect victims of domestic abuse and the investigative opportunities available to them to prevent further abuse.

Alongside this work, the force has also invested in additional specialist officers and a dedicated safety planning team to improve the services provided to victims of domestic abuse identified as being at greater risk of harm. Technology is being used to enhance further the way victims are supported and investigations are managed.

For example, through the use of body-worn video cameras, evidence can be captured to support prosecutions if the victim is not willing to support proceedings (often due to the victim being too frightened). GPS tracking is being used to help manage perpetrators and keep victims safe by using a mobile phone app which alerts a victim if the perpetrator is nearby.

This investment by the force is helping to tackle domestic abuse and ensure that all options to support and safeguard victims are available at the earliest opportunity. Officers have embraced new preventative measures such as domestic violence prevention orders (DVPOs) and domestic violence prevention notices (DVPNs).¹⁴

HMIC examined the force's use of new legal powers to protect victims. 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 June 2014; it made 220 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 171 were granted. Twenty-three 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 13 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹⁵

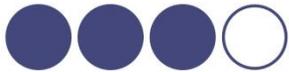
However, there is a need for the force to reinforce the circumstances as to when and how DVPOs and DVPNs should be used. Reality-testing with representatives from partner agencies raised concerns that some officers are trying to use them in circumstances that are not appropriate, for example without first consulting the victim.

The force works effectively with partner agencies to keep victims safe. A domestic abuse problem profile has been compiled which has provided a clearer picture of the issue and has helped to inform how the force and their partners work together to tackle it.

¹⁴ DVPNs (domestic violence prevention notices) may be issued by an authorised police officer to prevent a suspected perpetrator from returning to a victim's home and/or contacting the victim. Following the issue of the DVPN the police must apply to the magistrates for a domestic violence prevention order (DVPO). The DVPO will be granted for a period of up to 28 days.

¹⁵ The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

Summary of findings



Good

Northumbria Police is good at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable and supporting victims. Protecting vulnerable people and supporting victims is a high priority for Northumbria Police. Both the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable are committed strongly to improve the services they provide.

The force has clear and consistently applied processes in place to identify repeat and vulnerable victims. There is regular and robust supervision and scrutiny of incidents to ensure an appropriate and timely response.

To help achieve the force's commitment to improve the services provided to vulnerable people a significant investment has been made in training staff. This ensures that they have a good level of knowledge and understanding. The force uses widespread and innovative ways of working to protect and support vulnerable people, often in partnership with other agencies.

The force has made, and continues to make investments in IT to support improvements to bring about greater efficiencies and effectiveness in victim care services.

The force has good arrangements with partner agencies to keep vulnerable people safe and is continually working to enhance these arrangements further. Planned additional analytical support should make these arrangements even more effective.

Overall the force provides a good response to and safeguards missing children, and victims of domestic abuse, and is well-prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation.