

# PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Staffordshire Police



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## Vulnerability in numbers



### Calls for assistance

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

Staffordshire Police      England and Wales

**244**

**350**

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

Staffordshire Police      England and Wales

**20.1**

**15.8**



### Crime

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

Staffordshire Police      England and Wales

**54.8**

**61.6**

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

Staffordshire Police      England and Wales

**+2.5%**

**+2.2%**

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

Staffordshire Police      England and Wales

**26.5%**

**10.7%**

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

Staffordshire Police      England and Wales

**15.6%**

**10.0%**

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

Staffordshire Police      England and Wales

**+19.4%**

**+20.8%**



## Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

Staffordshire Police

England and Wales

**51**

**66**



## Charge rate

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

Staffordshire Police

England and Wales

**17.3%**

**16.6%**

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

Staffordshire Police

England and Wales

**22.3%**

**27.3%**



## Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015

Staffordshire Police

England and Wales

**89.1%**

**83.8%**

**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 Staffordshire Police.

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

## Summary



**Inadequate**

HMIC found serious weaknesses in the services Staffordshire Police provides to protect and support victims, most notably victims of domestic abuse. We found some staff were focused on identifying and protecting vulnerable victims. Where vulnerability is identified and the risk to victims is assessed properly the force works well with partner agencies to safeguard and support victims. However, there are several areas where urgent improvement is needed to ensure that the force provides a consistent service, and that victims are kept safe. HMIC has particular concerns about Staffordshire Police's poor approach to formally assessing the risks faced by domestic abuse victims. Given the scale of the challenge in this area and the significant risk that these weaknesses pose to some of the most vulnerable people, HMIC judges that overall, the force is inadequate.

In many cases, Staffordshire Police responds well to victims but this standard is not achieved consistently. There are significant weaknesses in the force's processes to identify repeat and vulnerable victims, and there are unreliable and ineffective processes to assess the potential risks posed to victims and vulnerabilities. Some officers do not always recognise and respond appropriately to victims' vulnerability, which undermines the effectiveness of the force's processes to keep vulnerable victims safe. HMIC is disappointed to find evidence of unacceptable attitudes from some officers towards victims.

Action taken by staff to respond to reports of missing children and young people is inconsistent, with little evidence of supervisory oversight in the early stages. However once responsibility for an investigation passes to local neighbourhood officers, there is effective supervision and clear direction of investigative activity.

The force recognises the risks posed to children and young people from sexual exploitation and the senior leadership of the force demonstrates a commitment to tackling the problem. The force has analysed the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation and has produced several training packages to provide a focus for staff. To assist with identifying and assessing risk, the force has introduced a process for 'flagging' incidents and reports of child sexual exploitation, which alerts officers that the incident has a child sexual exploitation connection and enables them to assess properly the risks.

The force has made an encouraging start in ensuring that it is adequately prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation and should build on this initial approach.

The force has good joint working arrangements with partner agencies to safeguard and support victims of domestic abuse who are assessed as high risk. Specialist police investigators deal with high-risk cases and the quality of service from specialist teams is generally good. However, the majority of victims are not assessed as high risk and they receive a much more variable quality of service from the police, with limited access to other agencies for support. This inconsistent approach is compounded by a force policy which means that a significant number of victims are not required to be formally risk-assessed at all. Moreover, we found a worryingly high level of non-compliance by officers with mandatory risk assessments. Although the force has other processes in place to support and safeguard victims, these other services are insufficient to provide an assurance that the majority of cases are being captured. This is a matter of serious concern to HMIC.

As a result of those weak systems, for a significant number of victims of domestic abuse, Staffordshire Police cannot have confidence that it:

- routinely recognises and assesses properly the risk victims face;
- protects victims properly; and
- provides victims with access to tailored support to keep them safe.

Because of the serious, systemic failures described above, and the level of risk to vulnerable people associated with them, HMIC expects the force to provide evidence, by 31 January 2016, of its progress in addressing HMIC's recommendations. HMIC will then review the force's progress in advance of its autumn inspection and will publish its findings on whether Staffordshire Police has improved.

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

There are significant weaknesses in Staffordshire Police's processes to identify repeat and vulnerable victims and in the way that it assesses victims' risks and vulnerabilities, particularly domestic abuse victims.

However, the force has worked hard to understand the nature and scale of vulnerability across Staffordshire in order better to shape its response to vulnerable victims. For example, there are dedicated analysts who prepare a profiling report covering all aspects of vulnerability on a five-weekly cycle. This information enables the force to understand where resources need to be targeted better to respond to the current, assessed threat. The profiling also identifies repeat service users and victims who are then referred to local policing teams and their multi-agency local forums, known as vulnerability hubs, to provide prevention and problem solving activity. The force makes Good use of information from partner organisations, for example, obtaining and analysing health records for historic child abuse cases.

### **Identifying those who are vulnerable**

When the force receives calls for assistance, call-handlers can choose to use a script of questions to assess vulnerable people. However, in practice, this script is not being used with both front desk and control room staff preferring to use their experience and professional judgment to identify vulnerability factors and assess risk. HMIC found incidents including crimes where the vulnerability of the victim and other family members was evident but the police response was not tailored to meet their needs. Unless the quality of this assessment is more closely supervised, the force cannot be confident that it is identifying vulnerability reliably and effectively.

Force IT systems do not make it easy for the call-taker to identify effectively whether an incident involves someone who has previously been a victim or has been already identified as vulnerable. The system only recognises whether there have been previous calls from the same location or telephone number. However, the force has put in place additional support in the control room in order to assist in checking previous history across the variety of systems in use. This real-time intelligence unit scans all the main force intelligence systems and provides 'live intelligence' updates for those incidents which have been tagged for their attention, providing a safety net in identifying and assessing vulnerability.

Forces define vulnerability in different ways. The majority of forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime<sup>1</sup> (VCOP) or that referred to in ACPO guidance.<sup>2</sup> Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

Staffordshire 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"

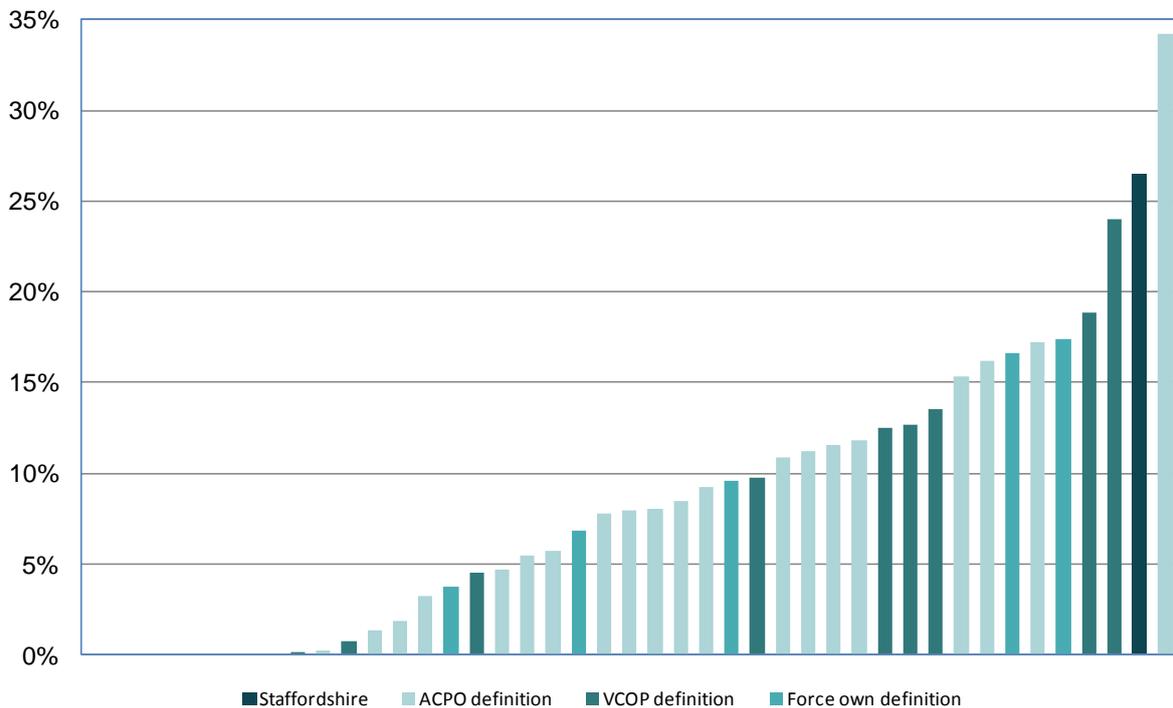
The proportion of crime recorded which involves a vulnerable victim varies considerably between forces, from 0.03 percent to 34.3 percent. For the 12 months to 31 March 2015, 26.5 percent of all recorded crimes in Staffordshire Police were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. This figure is the second highest amongst those forces that provided data, however 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.

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<sup>1</sup> *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](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> 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/](http://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 levels of risk and need

Staffordshire’s approach to the assessment of risk and vulnerability is poor. Staff throughout the force do not understand fully what constitutes vulnerability, resulting in ineffective and unreliable processes for the identification and assessment of risk.

Although control room staff use professional judgment to assess risks in cases of missing persons, we found little evidence of effective supervision by either control room supervisors or response sergeants. We found no evidence of any challenge by supervisors to the initial risk assessment. In cases where people regularly go missing, the force has developed ‘trigger plans’ to assist in locating them, but these are not yet fully in use.

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

Similarly, HMIC found that the force understands risk and invests in support for vulnerable victims inconsistently. We saw examples of good practice with regard to neighbourhood teams providing continuing support to vulnerable victims through the force’s seven-step plan approach, but we also found examples where the force’s understanding of risk, and compliance with force procedures to assess risk, was insufficient.

HMIC found that Staffordshire officers and staff do not always identify risks. However, when risks are successfully identified at initial contact, control room staff adopt a common sense approach to allocating resources based on that risk and according to victims' needs. For example, police officers are sent to attend immediately if the offender is on the premises or if children are present.

In cases resulting in a recordable crime or a non-crime case where, in the officer's professional judgement it is necessary, the force specifies that a formal risk assessment known as a Domestic Abuse Incident Assessment Log (DIAL) is required. However in many domestic abuse incidents staff do not complete these mandatory risk assessments. The unreliable and ineffective identification of vulnerability is compounded by a lack of quality assurance by supervisors. The force recognises the risks associated with child sexual exploitation and the senior force officers demonstrated commitment to tackling the problem. The force has analysed the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation and has produced several training packages to improve staff awareness of the problem.

The force has also invested in mandatory training in domestic abuse and other areas of vulnerability, which has been well received by some staff. However, a significant number of frontline staff have not yet received this training, nor has the force evaluated how it is contributing to changing attitudes or improving the service to victims.

Although the majority of calls for police help come in via the force control room, some service requests are received by the police station front desks. Staff working at front desks have received little training in identifying vulnerable people and understanding risk. However, they are aware of issues of vulnerability and do routinely address victims' needs.

## **How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?<sup>3</sup>**

Staffordshire Police responds well to victims in many cases but not universally. Some officers do not always recognise and respond appropriately to victims' vulnerability, which undermines the effectiveness of force processes to keep vulnerable victims safe. In some cases of domestic abuse, we found evidence of staff displaying unacceptable attitudes to victims. This means the force is failing routinely to recognise victims' needs and provide the right tailored support.

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<sup>3</sup> 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**

Response staff understand the initial safeguarding measures they can take to support vulnerable victims. However they are not accurately identifying the risk to victims and children in many cases. This means that although some staff follow the process for referring matters to specialist colleagues such as child protection officers and routinely pass relevant information to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH),<sup>4</sup> some victims and children who should be referred are not part of the wider discussions and joint work with partner organisations.

The force has also invested in technology to enable officers to gather good evidence for prosecutions. Officers have ready access to body-worn video cameras. However, such evidence is frequently not being used to support prosecutions and we found no evidence that the force has undertaken any evaluation of its use.

Of significant concern to HMIC was the attitude we found among some staff whose job it is to respond to vulnerable victims. Although protecting vulnerable victims is a strategic priority for the force, HMIC was disappointed to find that some staff demonstrate judgmental and unsupportive attitudes towards some vulnerable victims. For example, we heard comments indicating that some victims' allegations are being prematurely judged as false before investigations have started.

We also saw victims being discouraged from reporting domestic abuse crimes by some officers. When considered alongside the sustained high levels of non-compliance in completing domestic abuse risk assessments, the fact that the force has a lower arrest rate for domestic abuse cases than most forces, low levels of successful prosecution for domestic abuse and relatively limited use of wider police powers to protect victims, these factors indicate that some staff are responding poorly to the issues surrounding vulnerability. As a result, the force is not providing some victims the necessary tailored support and protection, potentially deterring victims from reporting future incidents, which could place them at significant risk of harm. Staffordshire Police should take urgent steps to address these issues.

## **Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims**

We found that supervision of the initial response provided to vulnerable victims is poor. In many domestic abuse incidents we found that staff are not completing mandatory formal risk assessments (DIALs). The weaknesses in this approach to

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

identifying whether a victim is vulnerable are compounded by a lack of quality assurance by supervisors.

This means that Staffordshire Police cannot be confident that it is providing all victims (domestic abuse victims in particular) with an appropriate service that addresses the risk victims face.

## **How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?<sup>5</sup>**

Staffordshire Police generally provides good support to victims, but HMIC found some significant areas for improvement. Special measures and victim personal statements are being used at the appropriate times during some investigations. However, staff do not fully understand issues of vulnerability or identify when victims require special measures. The force works effectively with partners, however collaboration with partners is somewhat restricted due to the large number of different IT systems in use across the force to record safeguarding information.

### **Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people**

HMIC examined a small sample of case files in which vulnerable victims were identified.<sup>6</sup> Investigations conducted by specialists are of a satisfactory standard. We found evidence of effective and regular supervision of investigations within the public protection investigation teams (PPITs). However, supervision is less consistent in cases being investigated by non-specialists.

Generally, the force allocates staff with the right specialist skills to cases involving vulnerable people and risks, with higher risk cases going to specialist investigators or to CID. Specialist officers are available to provide advice to frontline staff although there is only very limited support available outside of normal working hours.

In HMIC's crime inspection in 2014, Staffordshire was judged to require improvement in investigating offending. HMIC recommended that the force improve the quality of investigations and of victim service and contact.

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

Investigations remain of variable quality. Generally, investigations of domestic abuse conducted by specialist staff have investigation plans, effective supervision and good victim contact. However, investigations carried out by non-specialist staff show limited use of such plans and a lack of supervision. This is of particular concern as a significant proportion of crimes against vulnerable victims are investigated by non-specialist staff who need to be able to recognise need routinely and provide tailored support.

### **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. The code sets out the service victims of crime can expect from all public sector criminal justice organisations, including the police.

The code states that victims should be regularly updated about their case. HMIC found examples of regular victim updates by investigators and agreed plans made with victims on the frequency of updates and how these would be achieved. However, we found other examples where victim updates were less frequent, particularly for cases being investigated by non-specialists, and even found some instances where domestic abuse victims were provided with poor support which failed to meet their needs, receiving no updates at all about the progress of their cases.

The code also states that all victims of crime should be able to make a victim personal statement,<sup>7</sup> which they can use to explain how the crime has affected them; and they should also be offered access to special measures to make any court appearances less intimidating. We found good examples of these being offered to victims in an appropriate manner, although the lack of a full understanding of aspects of vulnerable people on the part of some officers means that some victims who need support may not be offered additional services at the right time, which may make them less willing to support a prosecution.

### **Working with partners**

The force works effectively with a range of partners to safeguard victims. The MASH is central to this work and presents an excellent opportunity for information sharing and early joint action. We found cases being referred to the MASH where immediate joint safeguarding and action-planning took place. However, the MASH is experiencing a backlog of cases which means that some victims may experience delays receiving longer term support.

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)<sup>8</sup> provide a further opportunity to safeguard those considered to be facing the greatest risk of harm. HMIC observed a conference and found good participation by those present, with clear evidence that the MARAC was effectively safeguarding victims and children through information-sharing and joint safety-planning.

MARACs provide tailored support for those victims assessed as facing the highest risk of harm. HMIC found some victims were managed within the MASH when they should be discussed at a MARAC. Some victims who had not been subject to a proper risk assessment were not referred to the MASH or MARAC although information was available indicating they might be facing high risk of harm. HMIC considers this may be the reason for the lower than expected number of cases discussed at Staffordshire MARACs. 908<sup>9</sup> cases were discussed between July 2014 and June 2015, which is 50% of the recommended 1,820 cases. The total number of cases is considerably lower than other forces (20 cases per 10,000 female adult population, compared with 32 nationally and 34 per most similar force group ) and the number of repeat cases discussed at MARAC is also low (12% compared with 25% nationally and 19% per most similar force group).

### **Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)**

The force has a well-established MASH which covers both the county area and Stoke-on-Trent. Staff in the MASH receive all of the completed risk assessments of victims of domestic abuse related crimes to review and check that appropriate action is taken to safeguard the victim and any children involved. Staff then refer cases assessed as high risk to a MARAC to ensure a comprehensive joint response from all agencies to safeguard all those at risk. However HMIC found that in some cases if the MASH staff considered the victims were already managed within the MASH, they were not referring them to a MARAC. The staff in the MASH also review domestic abuse incidents reported even if a formal risk assessment has not been completed. We found some cases where risk was identified and the details were shared with partner agencies, however this did not apply in every case where it was needed.

HMIC found a backlog of work of up to 9 days in the MASH with a large number of domestic abuse cases waiting to be fully processed before referral to a MARAC. Given that a large proportion of cases are not currently receiving a proper risk assessment, these delays raise a further concern that victims are not receiving timely support. Once the force improves its compliance and completes all necessary risk assessments, this will place an even greater workload on the staff in the MASH. There is also likely to be a corresponding increase in the number of cases referred to

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

<sup>9</sup> MARAC data provided by SafeLives for the period July 2014 to June 2015.

a MARAC. Therefore the force (and its partner organisations) should plan for this in order that more victims can be supported in a timely way.

The force uses many different information systems to record safeguarding information and activity. As a result, some staff engaged in dealing with vulnerable victims do not have access to, or routinely conduct, research on all of these systems. This may undermine effective information-sharing and partnership-working.

Each of Staffordshire's 11 local policing areas has its own vulnerability hub, a local partnership which enables neighbourhood police staff to share information and agree joint activity to prevent crime and support vulnerable victims. Officers are using vulnerability hubs to work well with partners to safeguard victims in some areas.

However, we found that the hubs do not have a consistent format or structure, leading to different approaches being adopted across the force. The force's safeguarding service to victims would be enhanced by adopting minimum standards and developing consistent working practices for MASH, vulnerability hubs, local policing teams and investigators to collaborate with partners in a more co-ordinated and consistent way.

## **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 absent children and its preparedness to deal with child sexual exploitation.

### **Missing and absent children**

When the force receive a call in which children are reported as missing, the call-taker makes an initial assessment of the risk, then passes this to a duty sergeant to decide what the police response needs to be. We found little evidence of supervision of the initial response and no evidence of any challenge of the initial risk assessment. In line with national guidance, a child categorised as missing will trigger an immediate investigation, whereas an absent child may be given several hours to return home before any investigation begins.

We found some confusion about the circumstances where individuals should be classified, respectively, as 'missing' or 'absent'. In one example, we found that a young person who was regularly missing had been variously identified on different occasions as 'missing' or 'absent' on the basis of the same limited information, without full consideration of the vulnerability factors.

The lack of consistency and supervision in the early stages of missing person investigations compounded by an initial lack of directed activity in some cases to trace the missing person quickly, has the clear potential to put vulnerable children and young people at greater risk.

However, this is in contrast to the clear direction and positive action taken by local policing team supervisors, once responsibility for an investigation is passed to them. The force discusses missing persons at its daily management meeting and we found that this meeting provides valuable additional direction and support in relation to safeguarding and investigations.

Staffordshire Police has established procedures for local officers and PCSOs to build relationships with staff and residents at care homes. Each care home has a nominated officer or PCSO who regularly visits to understand better the reasons why some of the home's children go missing regularly, and consider potential diversionary activity for them in conjunction with partner organisations.

HMIC saw effective partnership working to deal with missing children and the force shares all reports of missing and absent children with children's social services. The force has two missing persons co-ordinators, based in the MASH, who maintain an overview of cases of children who repeatedly go missing. The co-ordinators work with partners to protect children and prevent further occurrences through longer-term problem-solving.

### **Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation**

The force has made an encouraging start in ensuring it is prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. This inspection has focused on the force's assessment of the extent to which children are at risk of child sexual exploitation and the policies and practices it is putting in place to tackle this. This inspection did not test the quality of how the force conducted these complex child abuse investigations with other agencies such as children's services, because these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.

Staffordshire Police has demonstrated a strong commitment to tackling the problem of child sexual exploitation. It is one of the strategic priorities for the force and this is understood by the workforce at all levels. We found evidence that the force is prioritising operational activity to arrest offenders and protect children at risk of child sexual exploitation.

The force continues to develop its understanding of the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in Staffordshire by analysing available information. This analysis supports the development of the force's overall approach to and investigations of child sexual exploitation.

However, capacity is limited and the force acknowledges that the analytical support for child sexual exploitation investigations has reduced recently due to the force's commitment to a large ongoing child sexual exploitation operation.

The force has produced several training packages for staff. These were developed with input from partner agencies. The force has also provided a guide to tackling child sexual exploitation, which is available electronically. The training has been valued by the staff that have received it, however we found that some staff have not received the training, despite it being mandatory. The force should ensure that all relevant staff receive this training at the earliest opportunity in order to maintain the current operational focus on child sexual exploitation and its effectiveness.

In cases of children or young persons who go missing regularly, whom the police suspect may be at risk of sexual exploitation, the force develops trigger plans. These contain information about previous history and suggested immediate actions to locate the missing child or young person. The plans, combined with clear direction from supervisors, provide an effective response. However we found that

Staffordshire officers do not yet take this approach consistently in all appropriate cases.

## **Domestic abuse**

Staffordshire Police is not providing a good service to all victims of domestic abuse. Some officers and staff fail to demonstrate appropriate attitudes and behaviours towards victims of domestic abuse. In addition we found significant weaknesses in the processes for assessing the risks faced by victims. These failings risk undermining the force's stated priority to protect vulnerable victims and should be addressed urgently by the force.

HMIC's previous domestic abuse inspection of Staffordshire Police in 2014 highlighted concerns in relation to the force's approach to assessing the risks faced by domestic abuse victims. At the time, we had particular concerns that some repeat victims were receiving a poor level of response and therefore not getting the tailored support they needed. These issues have yet to be resolved and now present an even greater risk as they extend to an even larger number of victims of domestic abuse.

Staffordshire Police is one of only a few forces nationally that does not use the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH)<sup>10</sup> risk assessment tool. Instead, the force uses a risk assessment tool known as domestic incident assessment log (DIAL). Also unlike most forces, Staffordshire does not require a formal risk assessment to be completed in all domestic abuse cases.

The force specifies that only those incidents resulting in a recordable crime should be assessed for risk or non-crime cases where, in the officer's professional judgment, a risk assessment is required. Even applying the force's criteria, there are still sustained unacceptably high levels of non-completion of risk assessments among this smaller number that the force requires. HMIC found that in the 12 months to 30 June 2015 only 56 percent of victims of domestic abuse-related crimes were formally risk assessed. We found no evidence that the situation is improving. These unreliable and ineffective processes mean that for many victims of domestic abuse which did not result in a crime, and almost half of those that did, Staffordshire Police cannot be confident that it routinely recognises and properly assesses the risk that victims face. Neither can the force be sure that it is properly protecting victims and giving them access to the tailored support to keep them safe.

In spite of these shortcomings, Staffordshire Police has processes to provide safeguarding and support for victims of domestic abuse. The force provides this

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<sup>10</sup> 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](http://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/risk-and-vulnerability/#approaches-to-risk-assessment)

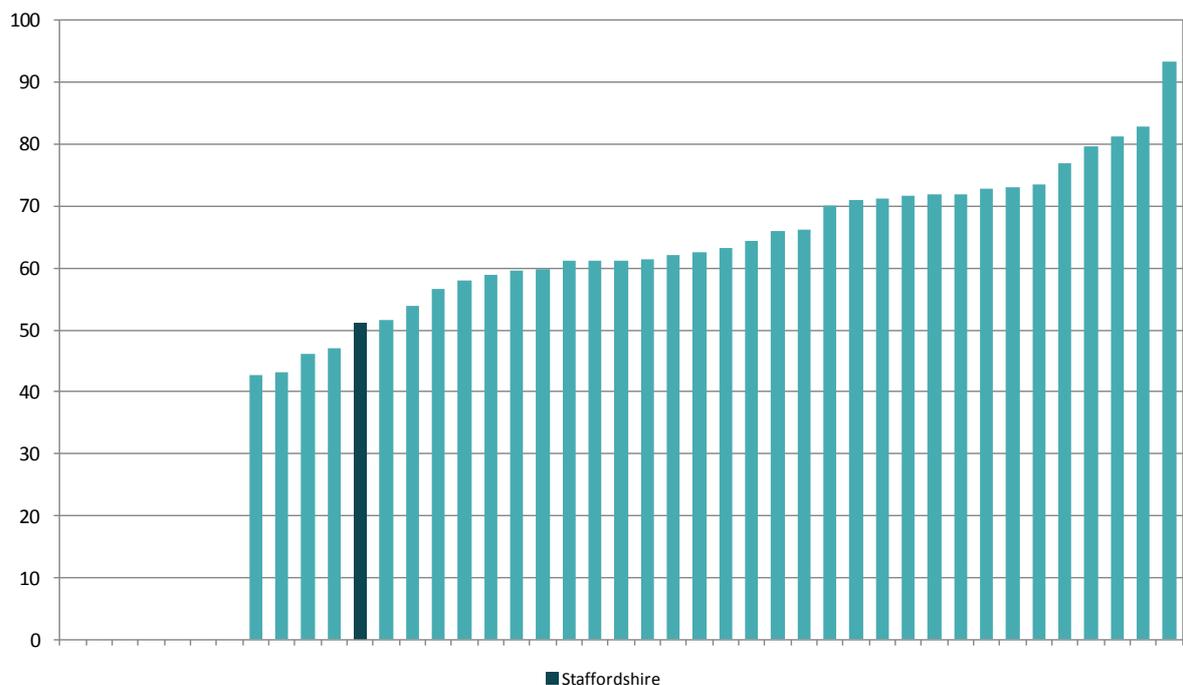
support regardless of whether a formal DIAL is completed. This support is provided through the MASH, the local vulnerability hubs and neighbourhood officers providing additional support to vulnerable victims. Although these additional processes involve consideration of the risks present and could potentially allow new risks to be identified, no consistent process is in place to record this secondary risk assessment.

The force is responding to HMIC’s concerns regarding assessment of risk, for instance providing domestic abuse risk assessment training to frontline staff to enhance their understanding of the importance of risk assessment. Recently the force has analysed the reasons for poor compliance with risk assessment requirements. Staffordshire has recognised that it needs to improve its approach to dealing with domestic abuse and has recently introduced a new aid for officers known as the domestic abuse risk assessment tool (DART). The force hopes that this additional guidance will help officers to understand potential risks in domestic abuse cases better.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015 recorded domestic abuse increased by 19 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 16 percent of all 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 recorded crime.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Staffordshire Police made 51 arrests.

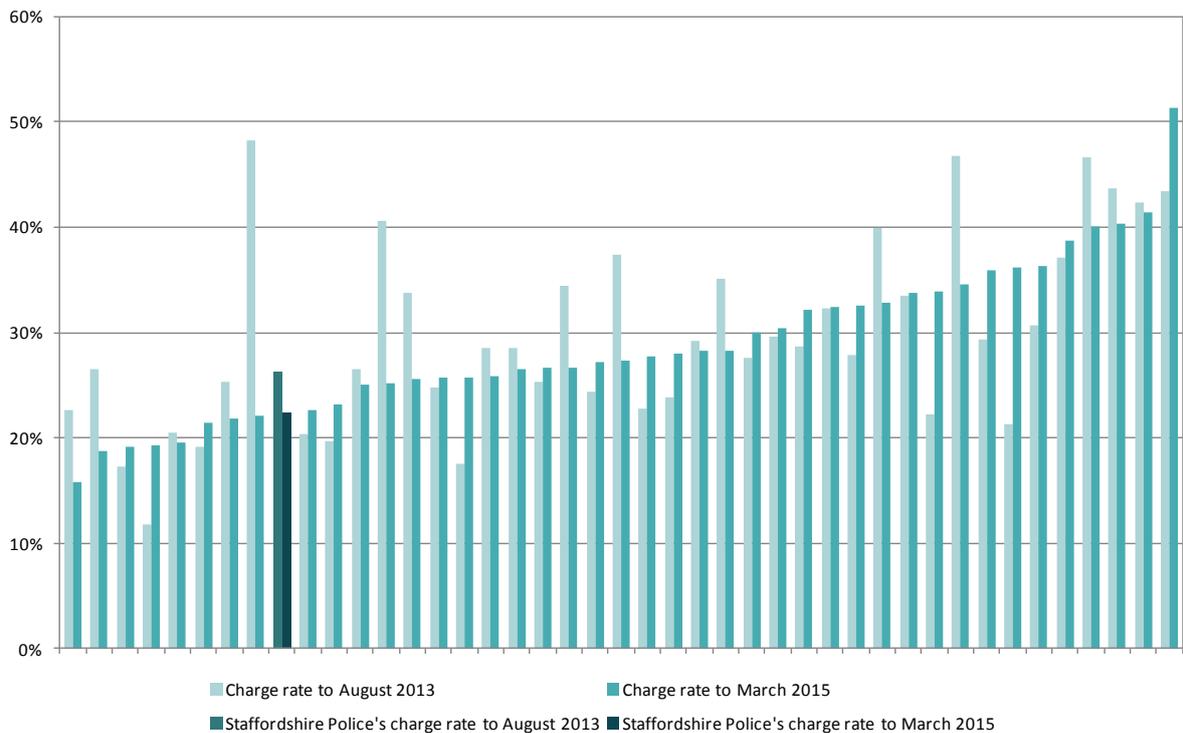
**Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015**



Source: HMIC data return

The force's charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 22 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**

The force seeks to develop new ways of safeguarding victims of domestic abuse and has been taking part in a national pilot for out of court disposals since November 2014, developing alternative approaches to prosecution. The pilot has set criteria and some forms of domestic abuse are excluded, however the pilot does include some domestic abuse cases. For this reason it is accepted that the charge rate for the 12 month period up to 31 March 2015 would likely have been higher than the 22 percent.

Conditions are imposed on perpetrators to address the risks and or vulnerabilities present in individual cases such as conditions to engage with services such as drug/alcohol diversion schemes, referral to GP and stress counselling. The pilot scheme is still underway and is being overseen by the Ministry of Justice.

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 July 2014; it made 62 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 55 were granted. Twenty 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 36 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.<sup>11</sup>

## Summary of findings



HMIC found serious weaknesses in the services being provided by Staffordshire Police to protect and support some victims, most notably victims of domestic abuse. We found that some staff were focused on identifying and protecting vulnerable victims. Where vulnerability is identified and the risk to victims is assessed properly, the force works well with partner agencies to safeguard and support victims who are identified as being at risk. However, we found significant areas where improvement is needed.

In many cases, Staffordshire Police responds well to victims. Local policing teams generally support and protect vulnerable people well, but this is not a consistent activity across the force. We found some officers do not always recognise and respond appropriately to victims' vulnerability. The force is assessing the risks faced by some domestic abuse victims poorly. Victims' needs may not be met fully by the police and partner organisations because the risk they face has not been routinely recognised and properly assessed leading to the offer of tailored support.

Action taken by staff to respond to reports of missing children is inconsistent, with little evidence of supervision in the early stages. The force recognises the risks posed to children and young people from sexual exploitation and it has made an encouraging start in ensuring it is prepared to tackle this issue.

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<sup>11</sup> The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

### **Causes of concern**

The force's response to vulnerable people is a cause of concern to HMIC. We are disappointed to find that some Staffordshire Police officers demonstrated judgmental and unsupportive attitudes towards some vulnerable victims. For example, we heard comments which indicate that some victims' allegations are being prematurely judged as false before investigations have started. We also found that some victims were discouraged from reporting domestic abuse crimes by some officers.

Despite the force's provision of training to staff, HMIC found significant weaknesses in a number of areas including the risk assessments at initial point of contact and by response officers. We also observed poor supervision of key processes such as risk assessments, investigation and safeguarding action in relation to vulnerable people.

### **Recommendation**

- To address this cause of concern the force should immediately assess the behaviour of its staff towards vulnerable people and evaluate the effectiveness of its training in relation to vulnerability.

## **Causes of concern**

Staffordshire's response to victims of domestic abuse is a cause of concern to HMIC. The force does not require that a formal risk assessment is carried out in all domestic abuse cases. The force specifies that only those incidents that have resulted in a recordable crime should be risk assessed or non-crime cases where in the officer's professional judgment a risk assessment is required. Despite this restriction, there are sustained, unacceptably high levels of non-completion of risk assessments even among this smaller number that the force requires.

There are processes provided through the MASH, the local vulnerability hubs and neighbourhood officers that provide support for vulnerable victims, however the force can have no confidence that it recognises routinely and assesses properly the risk faced by many persons reporting domestic abuse and, therefore, no confidence that it is properly protecting them with tailored support. Moreover, a significant proportion of domestic abuse cases are investigated by non-specialist staff and the investigation lacked plans, with poor supervision and there were examples of victims not being kept informed of the progress of their case.

## **Recommendation**

To address this cause of concern, Staffordshire Police should immediately take steps to ensure that:

- it reviews its policy in relation to the completion of risk assessments take place especially in relation to discretion which is permitted in non-crime cases;
- it supervises effectively the completion and submission of risk assessments;
- officers and staff with the appropriate professional skills and experience carry out investigations and that processes are put in place to supervise them; and
- officers and staff comply with the duties under the code of practice for victims of crime, specifically in relation to keeping victims of domestic abuse informed of the progress of the case.

## Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its initial assessment and response to incidents involving vulnerable people. The force should do this by:
  - providing training on the identification of vulnerable people and assessment of risk to staff who work in call-handling, control rooms or on the front desk of police stations; and
  - using approved force processes designed to support the assessment of risk and with effective supervision of their decision-making.
- The force should improve its response to missing and absent children, so that:
  - officers and staff use the missing and absent categories appropriately;
  - the force fully understands the factors that escalate the risk of harm to children; and
  - the initial stages of an investigation include effective supervision to direct appropriate and timely enquiries and safeguarding action.
- The force should also improve how it works with partners to share information and safeguard vulnerable people. It should adopt minimum standards and consistent working practices within vulnerability hubs, neighbourhood policing teams and investigation units. These improvements should also identify the most suitable system for recording all safeguarding activity.