

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Suffolk Constabulary



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales

242

350

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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales

6.2

15.8



Crime

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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales

51.5

61.6

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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales

+4.3%

+2.2%

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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales

12.7%

10.7%

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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales

9.6%

10.0%

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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales

+18.2%

+20.8%



Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales



Charge rate

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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales



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

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015

Suffolk Constabulary England and Wales



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

Introduction

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

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

We have looked at four areas:

- How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?
- How well does the force respond to vulnerable victims?
- How well does the subsequent police action and work with partners keep victims safe?
- How well does the force respond to and safeguard specific vulnerable groups (missing and absent children & victims of domestic abuse); and how well prepared is it to tackle child sexual exploitation?

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

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

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

During the in-force inspection, we interviewed chief officers in each force and held focus groups with officers, staff and partners, and made unannounced visits to police stations, force control rooms and specialist teams. We also worked with the force missing person coordinator (or equivalent) to review cases of missing and absent children, including children considered to be 'repeat absent' and 'repeat missing' and children shown to be at risk of child sexual exploitation.

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

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

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

Summary



Requires improvement

Suffolk Constabulary generally provides a good service in identifying and responding to the needs of vulnerable people. The public can be confident that in most cases the constabulary supports victims well. However, in several areas improvement is needed to ensure the service is consistent and that vulnerable people, particularly children, are kept safe. Given the scale of the challenge in this area and the inherent risk to some of the most vulnerable people in society, overall the constabulary requires improvement.

HMIC acknowledges that the constabulary is committed to improving the quality of service it provides to vulnerable people and victims. The chief officer team has made protecting vulnerable people a clear priority for the constabulary, and police officers and staff understand and share this commitment. In order to translate this priority into practice, the constabulary has invested additional resources in the parts of its organisation which supports those who are vulnerable and keeps them safe. It now needs to build on this investment and the good work seen in some areas by HMIC. This should ensure that the risk of harm to vulnerable people is identified early and that this promising work results in a consistently high quality service.

Overall, the constabulary effectively identifies repeat and vulnerable victims and responds to them appropriately. It also investigates those crimes committed against the most vulnerable victims well, and generally assigns the right level of expertise relative to the complexity of investigation. However, the current caseload within the teams who deal with rape and child abuse investigations are on occasions unacceptably high, and can become unmanageable, leading to delays in investigation and a reduced service to the victim. The constabulary needs to ensure that caseloads are manageable and service provision is not being compromised. Frontline staff do not always have access to photographic and/or video recording equipment which means that evidence of injuries and scenes could be lost.

The constabulary needs to do more to ensure it provides a consistent and co-ordinated response to missing and absent children and has recently revised how it investigates such incidents. The current policy providing guidance to staff is out of date and needs to be updated to reflect these changes.

The constabulary has in place a specific risk assessment process for those who go missing and victims of domestic abuse. However, the application of this process is often inconsistent and supervision could be improved. The constabulary needs to ensure that these assessments accurately reflect the risk to ensure an appropriate response by police and partners.

Work between professionals in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)¹ helps keep children safe, and makes sure that, should there be higher levels of risk, the response is then increased.

The constabulary has made a good start in ensuring it is well-prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. It must now build on this initial approach and have confidence that its ambition translates into consistent operational practice. This inspection only considered how well-prepared the constabulary is to tackle child sexual exploitation.

Officers attending domestic abuse incidents have a good understanding of how to keep people safe and routinely assess the risk faced by victims. They can refer to a helpful booklet and checklist produced by the constabulary although supervisory oversight of this process could be improved. Those cases assessed as high or medium-risk are well-supervised. The constabulary has made some progress against the recommendations made in its last domestic abuse inspection in 2014.

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

Suffolk Constabulary has a strong commitment to improving the service provided to vulnerable people. This is an objective within the police and crime commissioner's *Police and Crime Plan for Suffolk 2013-17*,² and is understood and supported by officers and staff at all levels. The chief officer team provides clear leadership on what needs to change in order to improve services for vulnerable victims.

The constabulary has recognised that, in order to provide a different, more tailored response to vulnerable people, it first needs to correctly identify them as such, and then understand which services would best meet their particular needs.

¹ 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.

² *Police and Crime Plan for Suffolk 2013-2017*, Suffolk police and crime commissioner, version 1.1, July 2015, page 4, paragraph 4. Available from: www.suffolk-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Police-and-Crime-Plan-2013-2017-Version-14-for-publication.pdf

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 Crime³ or that referred to in ACPO guidance.⁴ Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

Suffolk uses the definition from the Code of Practice, and defines vulnerability as follows:

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

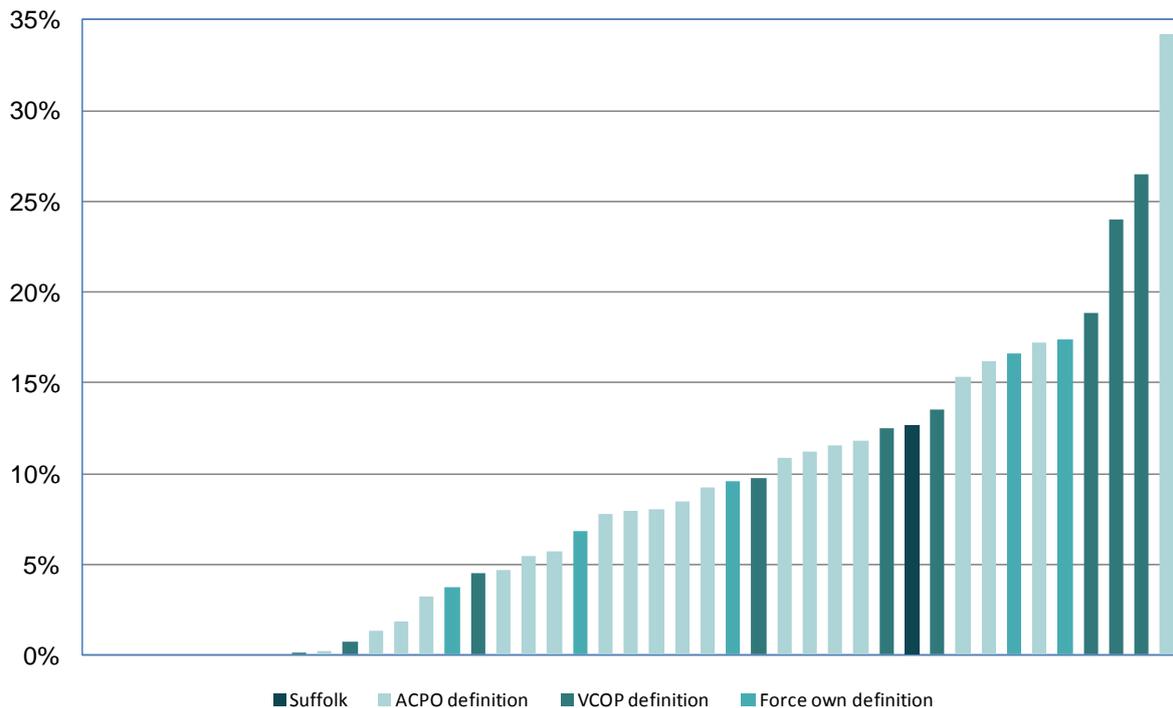
- a) You are under 18 years of age at the time of the offence, or
- b) The quality of your evidence is likely to be affected because:
 - 1) You suffer from mental disorder within the meaning of the Mental Health Act 1983:
 - 2) You otherwise have a significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning; 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, 12.7 percent of all recorded crimes in Suffolk Constabulary were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. Eight forces were unable to provide this data at the time of data collection. There is no standard way in which forces are required to record whether a victim is vulnerable on crime recording systems and forces do this differently.

³ *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

⁴ The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is now the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). *ACPO Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults*, NPIA, 2012, is available from www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/

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



Source: HMIC data return

HMIC found that the constabulary has ensured that the staff who answer calls to identify whether the caller may be vulnerable are well trained. However, the current computer system used by call-handlers does not easily allow information on vulnerability to be captured and shared across the organisation, or automatically flag if a caller has previously been identified as being vulnerable. Instead, staff have to ask a series of questions to identify vulnerability and whether someone is a repeat victim. This may prevent the constabulary from recording accurately the number of vulnerable victims it deals with. Important information concerning the vulnerability of an individual may be missed. This may result in an inaccurate risk assessment and the person not getting the support he or she needs.

HMIC is concerned that those taking calls from members of the public are not routinely required to record their reasons for the assessment they have made. Also, existing quality assurance arrangements within the contact and control room do not address whether the assessment has been applied appropriately. The constabulary therefore cannot be sure that it is accurately identifying risk and vulnerability.

However, the constabulary recently introduced a new approach within the contact and control room to identify vulnerability and to help decide the most appropriate response. The constabulary should ensure that this approach is working effectively as soon as is possible.

Assessing levels of risk and need

Suffolk Constabulary has taken the positive step to ensure that its response to the victim is based on the victim's needs rather than the type of crime being reported, known as (THRIVE).⁵ This is good practice.

Where the risk to a victim is assessed as high, specialist staff are available to offer support and to liaise with other organisations that may have information about the vulnerable person. The constabulary uses a number of separate computer systems and recognises the difficulty this creates in making information available across the organisation. Suffolk, in collaboration with Norfolk Constabulary, is undertaking an ambitious IT change programme involving the introduction of a new crime and intelligence system. The constabulary needs to ensure that the introduction of new systems improves its ability to store and share information, both internally and with partners.

The constabulary has a clear and structured process to review cases involving vulnerable victims on a daily basis. These meetings discuss the vulnerability and level of risk faced by the victim. They aim to ensure the right investigative and safeguarding⁶ actions are taken. As a result, HMIC found that the right people are generally sent to deal with the right incidents, armed with the right information; and that vulnerable victims are at the centre of the constabulary's response.

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

In terms of the police then providing services that best meet the victim's needs, HMIC found that in Suffolk, the requirements of some vulnerable groups are better understood than others. The constabulary has a good understanding of the needs of people who are vulnerable because of domestic abuse, and responds to these well. This understanding is based on a strong mix of local analysis and reference to national guidance, plus partner agencies and the voluntary sector are appropriately involved in the response.

The understanding of and response to the needs of missing and absent people is equally established and the constabulary is in the process of implementing revised ways of working to improve the service it delivers.

⁵ THRIVE is a structured assessment based on the levels of threat, harm, risk and vulnerability faced by the victim, rather than simply by the type of incident or crime being reported in order to help staff determine the appropriate level of response to a call.

⁶ The term safeguarding means providing protection and support to ensure the safety of the vulnerable person and prevent further harm.

However, the constabulary is still developing its approach to tackling child sexual exploitation and has recently commissioned a joint review with Norfolk Constabulary to understand better the scale of child sexual exploitation across the two force areas.

In order to provide the most appropriate support to vulnerable victims, the constabulary has invested more people in the parts of its organisation which works to keep them safe. This has led to the very positive step of the creation of several new posts and structures, including two dedicated posts focused on missing and absent people and dedicated resources to deal with child sexual exploitation through the establishment of a human trafficking and exploitation unit (HTEU).

In addition, the constabulary has recently allocated resources to the provision of a dedicated missing from home co-ordinator in the MASH and the provision of paediatric examination facilities within the sexual assault referral centre (SARC). In June 2015, through additional funding provided by the PCC the number of independent domestic abuse advisers (IDVAs) increased from three to eight.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁷

Suffolk Constabulary generally responds well to vulnerable victims. It has clear and well-understood systems in place to ensure that the police response to vulnerable victims is appropriate and reflects their needs. This includes mental health staff working alongside police officers in Ipswich to help recognise particular issues and respond appropriately, and a risk assessment process which helps to identify and support victims of anti-social behaviour.

The new THRIVE model is intended to ensure that the response to vulnerability across all areas of policing improves. This change looks promising and is clearly supported by senior officers. The constabulary needs to continue to focus on this to ensure that the initiative translates into a consistently high quality service.

Response officers

HMIC found that the police officers who respond to vulnerable people are sympathetic and knowledgeable.

Those attending domestic abuse incidents have a good knowledge of how to assess risk and keep victims safe, and can refer to a helpful booklet and check list to ensure this process is carried out effectively. Staff are encouraged to apply professional judgment in their risk assessment. We found a number of examples where this had

⁷ 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 response to vulnerable victims, rather than the overall police response to vulnerable victims.

happened, and where the rationale for applying professional judgement had been recorded in the DASH⁸ booklet. This booklet contains details of where to access specialist support services, the victim's reference number, the officer's contact information, and the result of the initial risk assessment. All of this information is provided to the victim at the time of the report. This ensures the victim understands what action has been taken by the officer to keep them safe. Frontline staff are aware of the immediate actions they should be considering to keep victims safe. These include installation of panic alarms, allocation of quick response mobile phones, and the facility to relocate vulnerable victims immediately.

Attending officers do not routinely have access to body-worn video cameras, or to digital cameras. This means that in many cases, photographic evidence cannot be captured at the time. This risks losing valuable evidence to support prosecutions.

A specific risk assessment tool is used in relation to missing people. The constabulary does not provide clear guidance as to how the answers to these questions should be used to determine the risk classification. As a result, HMIC found that officers adopt a range of different approaches to the completion of this risk assessment. The constabulary is in the process of implementing a new policy for missing and absent people. It should ensure that officers are consistent in their approach in assessing the risk and how best to support those missing people who are vulnerable. The introduction of the missing from home co-ordinator within the MASH is a positive step, and provides an opportunity to review completed risk assessments and provide feedback to staff on their completion.

Other risk assessment tools include the anti-social behaviour risk assessment matrix which is used in repeat anti-social behaviour cases and helps inform intervention with partner agencies e.g. social services and housing providers.

While specialist officers use a specific template for assessing the risk of child sexual exploitation, the constabulary does not have a specific risk assessment tool for officers attending such incidents. However, officers do know where to go for specialist advice in relation to child sexual exploitation.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

Supervisors are expected to play an active role in checking and approving the risk assessment process. For instance, they are notified by the control room of all new incidents of domestic abuse. They then check the risk assessment done by the response officer, and check the quality of the investigation before it is handed over to another team, such as the domestic abuse unit. This helps ensure that the quality of

⁸Most forces use the domestic abuse, stalking and 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

service remains high and that activity to investigate the incident is pursued. However, HMIC found that the level of supervision in this process could be improved.

These risk assessments are reviewed and signed off by supervisors. Medium and high-risk cases are subject to a secondary assessment by the domestic abuse team. A meaningful review by a supervisor is less evident in cases initially assessed as standard risk.

We found that risk assessments relating to missing people rarely contain a documented rationale to support the level of risk. While supervisors are required to oversee the process, a number of the cases we reviewed showed limited supervisory rigour. Overall, the proportion of missing person reports risk assessed by attending officers as “high” is greater than that of other forces. Inaccurate recording of risk could lead to an inconsistent response by the constabulary and partners to the risk faced by the missing person.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁹

Suffolk Constabulary has invested to improve the investigation of crimes committed against vulnerable people and how they are kept safe. However, HMIC found that this is an area where the constabulary needs to improve further the service it offers to the public, specifically in relation to rape and child abuse investigations. Suffolk Constabulary has a clear focus on identifying and protecting vulnerable people through its various daily operational meetings. These meetings are used effectively to provide governance and oversight of activity across the constabulary and to ensure sufficient resources are deployed to protect vulnerable people based on threat, harm and risk.

HMIC reviewed 39 investigations¹⁰ and found that generally the constabulary carried out effective investigations with the right staff with the right skills being allocated to these cases. The constabulary was generally good at identifying vulnerable victims.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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

This was more apparent however when dealing with those crimes traditionally involving vulnerable victims such as domestic abuse and sexual assault. The level of supervision also varied depending on the type of crime being investigated.

We found that staff working in the protecting vulnerable people directorate were highly committed and knowledgeable, and had a real desire to provide the best possible service to vulnerable victims. However, the case loads found within the rape and child abuse investigation teams were on occasions unacceptably high, with some officers investigating between 20 to 25 rape investigations each, and complex child abuse investigations involving approximately 50 victims investigated by a single officer. HMIC is concerned that high case loads and delays in the allocation of investigations could impact on the quality of service delivered to the victim and the constabulary needs to ensure that service provision is not being compromised.

Compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime

All police forces have a statutory duty to comply with the code of practice for victims of crime, which sets out the service victims of crime can expect from all parts of the criminal justice system. The code states that all victims of crime should be able to make a victim personal statement,¹¹ which they can use to explain how the crime has affected them. However HMIC found not all victims in Suffolk were offered this opportunity at the appropriate time. The constabulary needs to make sure this is explained and offered consistently, and in good time.

We found delays of three months or more in some cases sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for review and a decision on whether to charge alleged offenders. These cases involved child sexual abuse allegations against family members.

While HMIC recognises that this is not an issue for the constabulary alone, the constabulary needs to work with the CPS to resolve these issues to ensure timely justice for victims.

Working with partners

The constabulary works effectively with a number of different organisations such as health, education and social services, to protect those who are vulnerable and to support victims.

¹¹ 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 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.

Suffolk Constabulary has a well established multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) which brings key professionals together to ensure information is shared, analysis takes place and decisions made to safeguard children and vulnerable adults as quickly as possible. This approach helps to identify risk better and to put in place comprehensive and coordinated plans to keep victims safe. The MASH is fully-integrated with agencies working together in one location.

The MASH is effective in identifying and addressing the needs of vulnerable victims. It has robust systems to ensure that risk and vulnerability assessments are used to keep victims safe, and it keeps these assessments under regular review. It uses specialists within the MASH to safeguard and protect victims immediately, and then to provide longer term support. It also provides safeguarding advice to the wider organisation.

The duty team within the MASH provides immediate and appropriate safeguarding advice to frontline officers to protect vulnerable victims. Generally, we found the MASH to be operating effectively. However, the MASH only operates between 8.00am and 6.00pm, with no weekend cover. HMIC has concerns that referrals are not monitored outside these hours, and particularly over the weekend.

We found that partners welcomed the commitment and support for safeguarding the most vulnerable shown by the constabulary and the police and crime commissioner (PCC). The constabulary should consider expanding its success of joint working to include IDVAs, which could include their co-location with other specialists.

HMIC found that officers had a tendency to over-assess the level of risk faced by victims of domestic abuse. Partner agencies confirmed this. This has the potential to create a capacity issue within the domestic abuse team and, subsequently, the MASH/MARAC process. It may also make it difficult for the constabulary to properly differentiate risk and allocate resources accordingly.

The constabulary recognises the limitations of its existing IT systems and the resultant inability to make information relating to vulnerable victims easily and routinely available to the wider workforce and partners. The constabulary is due to introduce a new IT system in autumn 2015.

It should reassure itself that this change will facilitate the timely and accurate sharing of information both within the constabulary and to partner organisations in line with the police and crime commissioner's vision of delivering a more streamlined public service.

The constabulary demonstrates particularly strong engagement with a wide number of statutory organisations and in particular, extensive partnership arrangements with the safeguarding adults and children's boards.¹² We also found examples of partnership working with a number of non-statutory bodies such as private care homes, Women's Aid services, University Campus Suffolk, and a local charity which supports vulnerable people within the community. The constabulary is working with local authority children's care homes to provide effective preventive activity to stop children going missing. The constabulary is in the process of replicating this approach with the private care homes in Suffolk. The partners with whom HMIC spoke welcomed the commitment and support for safeguarding the most vulnerable shown by the PCC and the constabulary.

Suffolk holds multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) with professionals from other bodies in order to safeguard those considered to be at the highest risk of harm. As part of the inspection, HMIC observed a conference and found good participation by those present with clear evidence that the MARAC was effective in safeguarding victims and children through information-sharing and joint action planning.

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

Missing and absent children

The constabulary needs to do more to ensure it provides a consistent and co-ordinated response to missing and absent children.¹³ The constabulary considered its approach to missing people in January 2015 and has made some progress against a number of areas it identified as requiring improvement. While the

¹² Safeguarding Children/Adult boards have a statutory duty to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and adults to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

¹³ A person is classified as absent if they are not where they are expected to be but they are not considered at risk. Whereas, if they are classified as missing the police are obliged to take steps to locate them, as the level of perceived risk is higher.

constabulary has revised its investigation of those that are missing and absent, and undertaken training of frontline staff, the current policy providing guidance is out of date and needs to be updated to reflect these changes.

When children are reported as missing, the constabulary assesses the level of risk. HMIC observed local supervisors overseeing the search, quickly directing resources and actions. Information about missing children is clearly displayed on the briefing pages of the constabulary intranet. The searches for those children thought to be at high risk are reviewed every day by local senior officers.

The constabulary recently invested in two staff to assist in the co-ordination of missing adults and children across the county. These dedicated roles should enable the constabulary to understand better the links to child sexual exploitation and to ensure that the initial assessment of risk and investigation are of an appropriate standard.

Suffolk Constabulary continues to develop effective partnerships to respond to and safeguard missing and absent children. The constabulary has established links to each of the local authority and private care homes in the county, and is establishing agreed working practices to improve and co-ordinate activity towards children who go missing. It has also recently introduced a more focused and co-ordinated approach with other public sector and voluntary organisations, in order to identify and co-ordinate both safeguarding and preventive activity towards those missing adults and children thought to be most at risk. This provides a way of jointly reviewing and improving the investigations into missing adults and children.

The constabulary effectively engages the voluntary sector to help safeguard missing children. Representatives of a local charity speak to children upon their return to gain a better understanding of the reason for their absence, and to assess their risk of being subject to child sexual exploitation. However, the constabulary does not routinely receive feedback from these interviews, and so could miss important information on how to better protect children from risk.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

The constabulary has made a good start in ensuring it is well prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. This inspection has focused on actions and activities the constabulary has taken to understand and identify the extent to which children are at risk of 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 constabulary conducts 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 constabulary is preparing its response to child sexual exploitation and is continuing to develop its understanding through the commission of joint research with Norfolk Constabulary. Suffolk recognises that it currently has a lack of specific intelligence concerning child sexual exploitation and has a plan to develop its response, although activity against this plan is behind schedule. As a consequence, the constabulary is yet to understand fully the scale of child sexual exploitation within the county.

The constabulary is developing its governance and partnership arrangements with other public sector and voluntary services. It is yet to develop standard working practices or a performance framework to measure its success.

The constabulary has raised the awareness of child sexual exploitation issues among its frontline staff through an online training package, regular inputs in training days and by providing an aide memoire to staff to assist them identify child sexual exploitation and provide guidance on where to obtain specialist advice. As a consequence, frontline staff across the constabulary have a good level of understanding of child sexual exploitation issues.

Suffolk Constabulary has recently increased the number of staff dedicated to dealing with child sexual exploitation through the establishment of a human trafficking and exploitation unit. It also has additional specialist support through the provision of paediatric examination facilities within the sexual assault referral centre, which provides specialist examination, interview, and crisis support and counselling to victims of rape and sexual offences.

The level of risk faced by children from sexual exploitation is assessed by specialist officers and the MASH, where safeguarding procedures are in place. This enables the constabulary to share information quickly with other organisations providing services for children and to contribute jointly to effective safeguarding measures.

The level of information provided from 'safe and well' interviews conducted with missing children by police officers is not systematically captured and the constabulary does not have access to information gathered from any of the interviews local authorities conduct with children ('return' interviews). This reduces opportunities to identify and prevent child sexual exploitation and safeguard victims.

The constabulary uses local officers and PCSOs on the safer neighbourhood teams to engage with schools. It is also undertaking work with a local theatre group to raise awareness of sexual exploitation.

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

Domestic abuse

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse in Suffolk increased by 18 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.

Suffolk Constabulary's response to victims of domestic abuse is generally good. Frontline staff recognise domestic abuse as a priority with a clear focus on protecting the victim and arresting perpetrators. HMIC found clear oversight of domestic abuse incidents through its daily operational meetings to ensure that victims are protected and investigations progressed.

Suffolk had a positive domestic abuse report from HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014 and at the time of our inspection, had made some progress in completing four out of its nine recommendations with work ongoing in relation to the remainder. This progress includes:

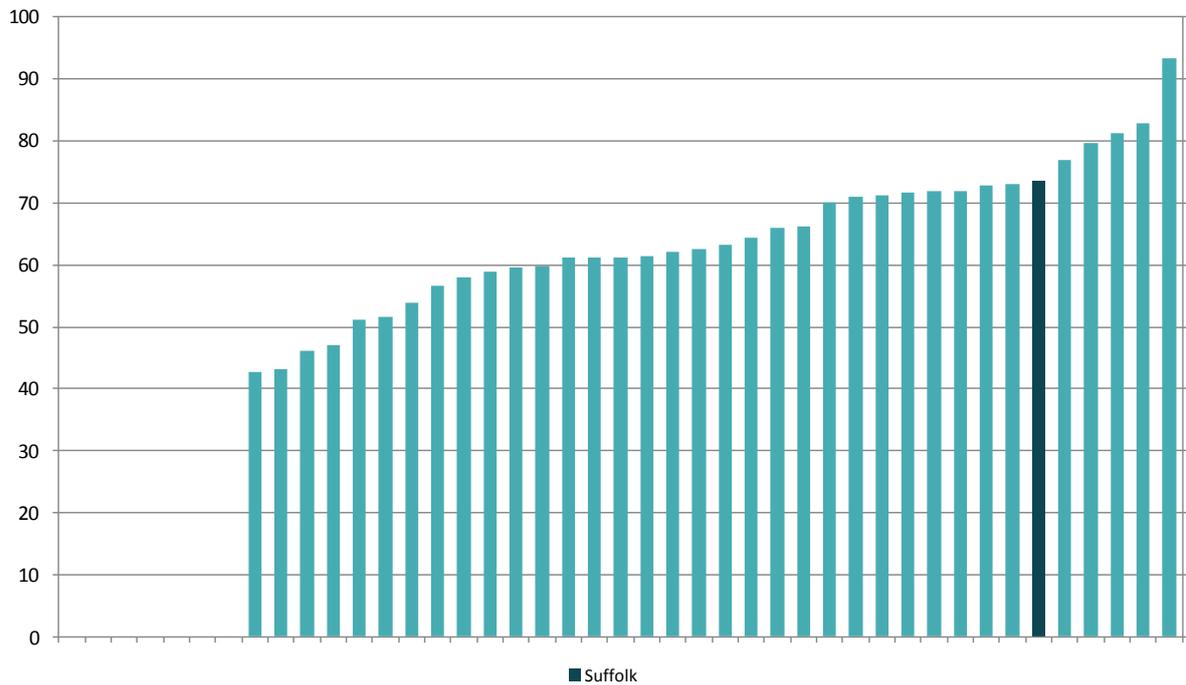
- increasing the number of IDVAs to support victims;
- raising the profile of specialist teams within the constabulary and the support they can offer;
- ensuring that investigations posing the greatest harm to victims are investigated by specialists with the appropriate training and knowledge; and
- clarifying the role of domestic abuse and sexual violence advisors in supporting domestic abuse incidents.

The constabulary needs to continue its work in ensuring that the level of risk faced by domestic abuse victims is accurately recorded to support an appropriate response and that officers are able to capture photographic evidence at the time to support prosecutions.

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

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

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

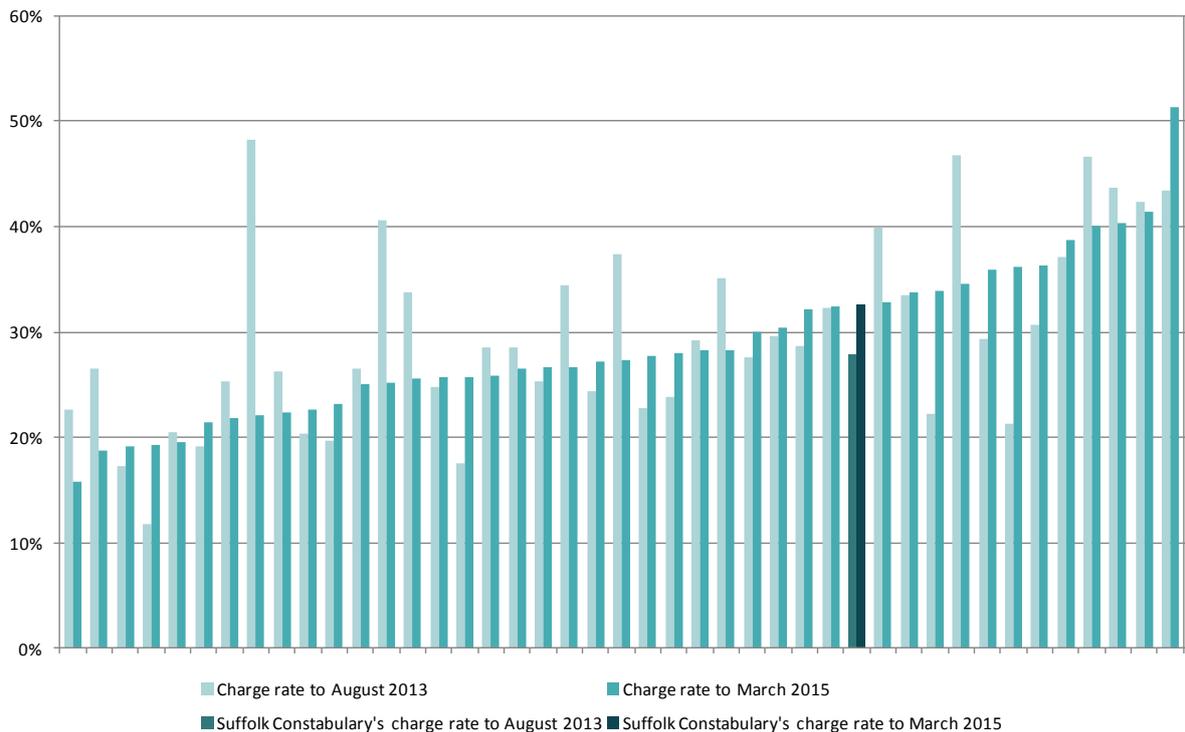


Source: HMIC data return

HMIC reviewed a total of 39 files of which 13 involved domestic abuse. Overall HMIC found a good standard of investigation centred on the victim. The constabulary is good at identifying vulnerable victims and conducting immediate safeguarding actions. However, our review and inspection found that there are often inconsistencies in the recording of victim personal statements and the consideration of special measures for victims.

The constabulary’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 33 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is an increase since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection in 2014 when the constabulary rate was 28 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



Summary of findings



Requires improvement

Suffolk Constabulary generally provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and responds well to them. However, there are several areas where improvement is needed to ensure the service is consistent and that vulnerable people, particularly children, are kept safe.

The PCC and chief officer team has made protecting vulnerable people a clear priority for the constabulary, and police officers and staff understand and share this commitment. It has invested additional resources in the parts of its organisation which supports those who are vulnerable and keeps them safe.

Overall, the constabulary effectively identifies repeat and vulnerable victims and responds to them appropriately. It also investigates those crimes committed against the most vulnerable victims well, and generally assigns the right level of expertise relative to the complexity of investigation. However, the current caseload within the teams who deal with rape and child abuse investigations are on occasions unacceptably high, and can become unmanageable, therefore leading to delays in investigation and a reduced service to the victim.

The constabulary needs to do more to ensure it provides a consistent and co-ordinated response to missing and absent children. It has made a good start in ensuring it is well prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. Officers attending domestic abuse incidents know how to assess risk and keep victims safe.

Areas for improvement

- The constabulary should improve its investigation of cases involving vulnerable victims by ensuring officers and staff within the specialist child protection and rape investigation teams have their workloads properly supervised to ensure a timely and effective investigation. The constabulary should review the resourcing levels immediately to ensure they are appropriate, so that it conducts timely and effective investigations.
- The constabulary should improve its initial investigation of cases involving vulnerable victims by ensuring responding officers have access to photographic and/or video recording equipment to take evidence of injuries and scenes.
- The constabulary should improve its compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime specifically in relation to victim personal statements.
- The constabulary should improve its response to missing and absent children by ensuring there is clarity for frontline officers and supervisors as to their roles and responsibilities in relation to risk assessment and safeguarding action.