

# PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Surrey Police



December 2015

© HMIC 2015

ISBN: 978-1-911194-48-4

[www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmic](http://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmic)

# Contents

<b>Vulnerability in numbers .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>How effective is the force at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable, and supporting victims?.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Summary .....	7
How well does the force identify those who are vulnerable and assess their level of risk and need?.....	9
How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?.....	12
How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe? .....	14
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? .....	17
Summary of findings .....	23

## Vulnerability in numbers



### Calls for assistance

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

Surrey Police

England and Wales

**309**

**350**

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

Surrey Police

England and Wales

**6.7**

**15.8**



### Crime

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

Surrey Police

England and Wales

**43.3**

**61.6**

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

Surrey Police

England and Wales

**+3.8%**

**+2.2%**

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

Surrey Police

England and Wales

**11.2%**

**10.7%**

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

Surrey Police

England and Wales

**11.6%**

**10.0%**

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

Surrey Police

England and Wales

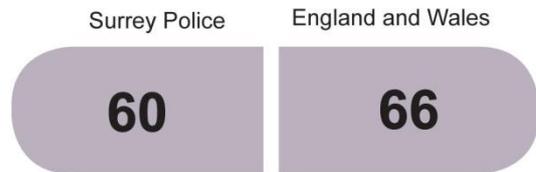
**+21.2%**

**+20.8%**



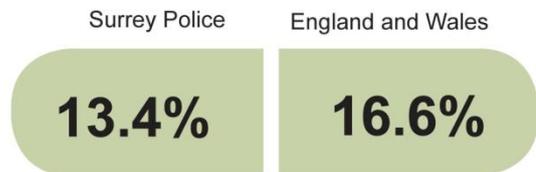
## Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

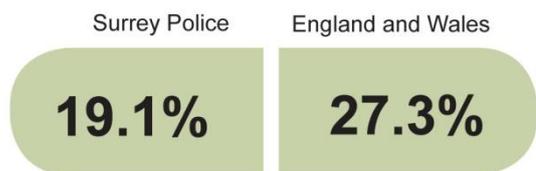


## Charge rate

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

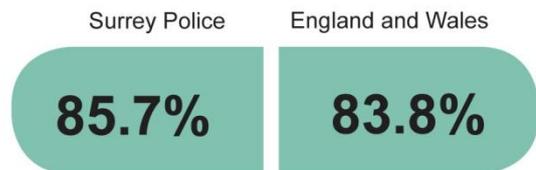


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



## Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015



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

## Introduction

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

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

We have looked at four areas:

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

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

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

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

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

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

This report sets out the findings from this wide-ranging inspection of Surrey Police.

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

## Summary



Inadequate

HMIC found serious weaknesses in Surrey Police's arrangements for protecting vulnerable people from harm and supporting victims.

The force is undoubtedly committed to protecting vulnerable people. This is a high priority for the force, which has allocated additional resources to specialist services to safeguard vulnerable victims. The force leadership is determined to improve services to the most vulnerable members of the community and is working hard to bring this about, and this intention is translating into an operational reality in some areas. However, HMIC still has outstanding concerns about the capability and capacity of the force to safeguard vulnerable people and investigate crimes committed against them. Given the significant risk that these weaknesses pose to some of the most vulnerable people, HMIC judges that overall the force is inadequate in this dimension.

Surrey Police recognises the importance of identifying vulnerable victims as early as possible and properly assessing the risks they face, but there are some significant areas for improvement in its current systems and practices. Training has been provided for frontline officers to help them to identify and understand risk and vulnerability better. Although there are pockets of good practice, some of the force's processes that are designed to enable it to identify vulnerable victims are unreliable and ineffective. This means that the force may not assess fully the risk to these victims. The force needs to improve urgently the way it carries out and supervises the assessment of risk, if the force is to be confident that it provides the most appropriate police response to consistently meet the needs of vulnerable victims.

As part of HMIC's national child protection programme, Surrey Police was inspected in June 2015. HMIC identified weaknesses in the quality and consistency of child protection investigations and subsequent action to keep victims safe. The force recognised quickly the work it needed to do to address the issues and took active steps to improve. HMIC commends the force for the significant progress that it has made since then but some of the changes will take time to have an effect and there is still work to do.

The force has made a start in ensuring that it is well-prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. Staff are clear about the importance of tackling this vitally important issue and have received training to help them better understand and be able to

identify those children who may be at risk. It has also improved its understanding of the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation across Surrey, although some gaps remain in the force's understanding of the extent of the problem.

Tackling domestic abuse is a force priority and is clearly a focus in daily meetings to allocate resources. Following HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014, the force has made good progress in improving its response to victims. The force has developed a comprehensive action plan in response to HMIC's recommendations.

The way the force handles reports of missing children is poor. Its risk assessments of, and investigations into, missing children are a concern to HMIC. We found evidence of inconsistent risk assessments resulting in high risk cases not being dealt with quickly enough to protect vulnerable children properly.

As a result of feedback from our inspections the force has recently produced a comprehensive action plan of which a number of actions it has already completed including:

- increasing the number of detective constables and sergeants in its safeguarding investigation units together with two additional detective chief inspectors;
- appointing external specialist investigators to ensure the effectiveness of child protection investigations, to support live child protection investigations and to perform ongoing mentoring to child abuse investigators;
- delivering a comprehensive child sexual exploitation awareness campaign both internally and externally, working with Surrey County Council and Victim Support; and
- establishing a process to place flags or markers on the force IT systems to identify those who are vulnerable or at risk.

Because of the serious causes of concern arising from this inspection, HMIC has asked Surrey Police to provide evidence, by 31 January 2016, of its progress in addressing HMIC's recommendations. HMIC will then review the force's progress and will publish its findings on whether Surrey Police has improved.

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

Surrey Police recognises the importance of identifying vulnerable victims and properly assessing the risks they face, but there are some significant areas for improvement in the force's current systems and practices. Training has been provided for frontline officers to help them to identify and understand risk and vulnerability better; consequently there are pockets of good practice, with some staff able to identify risk well and to respond appropriately. However, there are some unreliable and ineffective processes in place to identify vulnerable people which means that this does not always happen.

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

All 999 and 101 calls for service are dealt with by the force contact centre and staff understand the importance of identifying and assessing a vulnerable victim.

The force has provided call-handlers with standard question sets to assist in identifying whether the person involved has previously been a victim or is vulnerable in any way. HMIC found that call-handlers do not consistently ask the full set of questions, instead relying on their own experience to elicit information and assess risk. As a result, vulnerable victims may not always receive the appropriate police response.

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

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

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

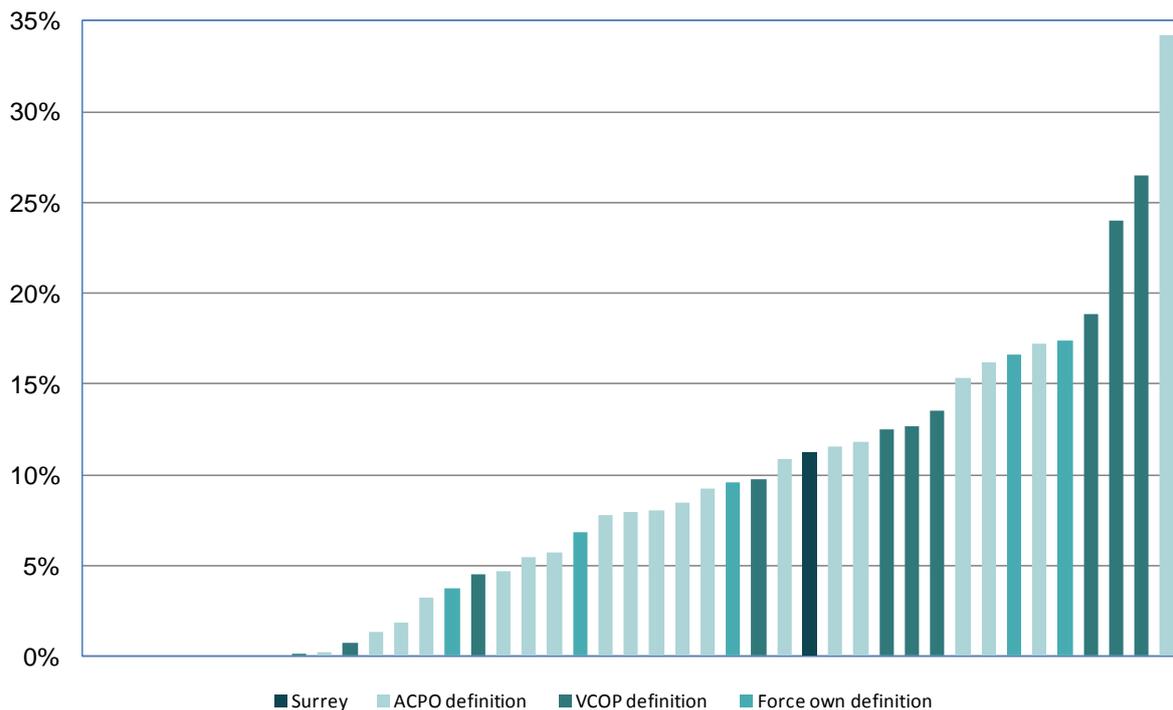
---

<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/)

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, 11.2 percent of all recorded crimes in Surrey were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. Eight forces were unable to provide this data at the time of data collection. There is no standard way in which forces are required to record on crime recording systems whether a victim is vulnerable and forces do this differently.

**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**

Supervisors sample calls regularly to quality-assure them and also monitor in live-time staff handling calls, subsequently providing feedback to the staff.

The force IT system enables staff to apply markers to records of incidents to identify people who are known to be vulnerable or at risk, for example, of domestic abuse. This alerts the call handler if the person calls again. Markers for child sexual exploitation and child protection have only recently been introduced and they are not yet applied consistently on the system. This impedes the ability of the force to identify and respond effectively to cases, and creates intelligence gaps in respect of crimes being committed. The force understands this issue and is taking action to ensure full compliance.

## **Assessing levels of risk and need**

All incidents judged to require police attendance are immediately transferred to the force control room so that operators can dispatch the most appropriate police response. However, the IT system the force uses to manage incidents does not readily provide access to any previous history of police involvement with a victim, as it only shows previous history at the same address. Therefore, if the operator has not specifically gathered this information (and if there is no marker on the system), it may not be apparent that the incident involves a repeat or vulnerable victim. This means that the risks faced by vulnerable victims may not be fully understood by the force when deciding on the most appropriate response. The previous history of individuals is recorded by name on other force systems and this may require additional, manual searches if the information is not readily available.

The force recognises these weaknesses in accessing full information about potentially vulnerable people. A dedicated response intelligence officer working in the force control room has access to a wide range of the force systems and can assist in collating information and intelligence for attending officers. This also includes partner organisation information which is accessible via the social services emergency duty team. This is a useful and important role that improves the quality of the information being made available to the attending officer.

The force has been running a pilot scheme within the control room where mental health nurses work alongside police call-handlers for two shifts per week. Where an incident involves somebody with potential mental health issues, they provide guidance and support. They also have access to health records to ensure that the police have the full picture before deciding on the most appropriate response. This positive approach has enabled officers attending incidents involving vulnerable people with mental health issues to be better informed and be able to provide a service that is more suited to the needs of the individual. The project has now received funding for the next two years and is being extended to seven days per week.

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

Surrey Police understands the needs of some vulnerable groups better than others. For example, the force has recently provided training for frontline staff to improve their understanding and awareness when dealing with certain categories of vulnerable people. This included victims of so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation.

The force needs to do more work to understand fully the problems of child sexual exploitation in Surrey in order that it can properly plan its response. There has, however, been some investment at a tactical level, for example, aides-memoires have been issued to staff to assist in identifying those at risk of child sexual

exploitation, including examples of warning signs and actions to be taken upon arrest of suspected perpetrators.

HMIC identified a poor approach to identifying children who are repeatedly reported as absent, which means the force cannot be confident that it provides the right response.

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

There are weak systems in place to ensure that the force carries out and supervises the initial assessment of risk, which means that the force cannot be confident that vulnerability is recognised and responded to routinely and risks properly assessed. This means that where the vulnerability of a victim is not identified from the outset then the police response may not be appropriate to meet the needs of vulnerable victims consistently.

### **Response officers**

Officers in targeted patrol teams (TPTs), who provide the police's 24/7 initial attendance and response to incidents, generally have a good understanding of vulnerability and can identify risks and take the appropriate action to safeguard victims. Officers nominated as domestic abuse or mental health champions in each division offer support and guidance to colleagues.

Officers are trained to use the national decision model<sup>4</sup> when assessing risk, with an additional risk assessment being formally completed for domestic abuse victims. HMIC found that some risk assessments on missing children are of poor quality with examples where risk was assessed as medium but ought to have been high risk and dealt with accordingly.

---

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

<sup>4</sup> National decision model (NDM) is specific to policing. It provides a consistent framework in which decisions can be examined and challenged, both at the time and afterwards. It is composed of six key elements: the police code of ethics being central to the decision; gather information; assess threat and risk; consider powers and force policy; identify options; and, take action and review what happened.

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

HMIC reviewed a sample of case files, telephone calls from the public for service and incident records to check the quality of supervision. We found a mixed picture which is particularly concerning in cases of missing children investigations. Some TPT inspectors show a poor understanding of risks when completing and reviewing risk assessments of missing children, which leads to ineffective decisions and inappropriate risk grading. Some cases are assessed as medium risk when the information suggested that they should have been assessed as high risk due to factors such as being at risk of child sexual exploitation, self-harm, using drugs or it being out of character for them to go missing. Some risk assessments are not adequately reviewed as they should be when there is a shift change or when circumstances change. Record-keeping is, on occasions poor. The force should ensure supervisors are appropriately skilled and trained and understand their role in reviewing risk and ensure that the risk is properly managed.

Domestic abuse risk assessments are not consistently well-supervised. HMIC found that when TPT officers attend a domestic abuse incident, they undertake and record a risk assessment. If the victim is assessed as medium or high risk, it is reviewed by staff in the safeguarding investigation units (SIUs). Incidents assessed as standard risk are not reviewed. This ineffective process is of concern to HMIC because the force may not identify repeat and vulnerable victims and as a result may not take the appropriate safeguarding action. In these circumstances there would be no opportunity for safeguarding action to be considered jointly with partners.

The force recognises the risk around this approach and during the period of our inspection, changed the process so that all incidents of this nature are reviewed by the TPT sergeants. In addition, medium and high-risk cases continue to be reviewed by the SIU.

We also found areas for improvement in supervision of SIUs. During HMIC's recent National Child Protection inspection, we found that there was very little performance oversight and scrutiny within SIUs, and limited use of investigation plans set by supervisors. The force has since addressed this and implemented a standardised performance framework which is scrutinised by its public protection delivery board.

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

Surrey Police is committed to working constructively with partners and recognises the importance of sharing information with other local organisations in order to provide better support and safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable victims and their families. The police play a major role in the MASH which serves the county; it also includes the local authority children's services and adult social services as well as the mental health service.

However, HMIC has serious concerns with the quality of some police investigations in respect of children at risk.

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

HMIC has serious concerns relating to weaknesses in the quality and consistency of child abuse investigations and subsequent action to keep victims safe, particularly where children are at risk. During June 2015 HMIC undertook a National Child Protection Inspection of Surrey Police. Evidence from this inspection revealed that a significant proportion of child protection investigations were not of an acceptable quality. Inspectors assessed 69 child protection cases and investigations. Of those reviewed, 36 were found to be inadequate and 17 to require improvement. A number of cases had to be brought to the immediate attention of the force as there were continuing safeguarding concerns for the child which had not been resolved. HMIC has significant concerns about the poor standard of child protection investigations within the force. Since these inspections the force has shared a comprehensive improvement plan with HMIC and has started to address these systemic weaknesses. Increases in staff in the SIUs and an ongoing independent audit and review of case files has been put in place.

Surrey Police has specialist public protection staff within the SIUs, located in each of the three divisions across the county area. The units provide a service between 7.00am and 10.00pm each day, although coverage is more limited over weekends with staff working until 4.00pm. One division has recently reviewed service coverage and extended working hours until 10.00pm seven days a week which enables it to provide an improved service from specialist staff over the weekend.

Accredited investigators within the units are fully trained but HMIC found examples of untrained staff investigating cases involving vulnerable people without the skills to do so. The heavy workloads within the SIU are having an impact on staff and affecting

---

<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.

adversely the quality of service the force provides to some of the most vulnerable victims. Lack of capacity is resulting in delays to investigations and an inability to provide a consistently good standard of service. This means that victims may lose confidence in the police and offenders may not be effectively dealt with. Additional resources for supervisors have recently been put into the unit and the force is undertaking a review of resourcing in the SIU which was planned to report by September 2015.

### **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.<sup>6</sup> HMIC found that not all victims in Surrey are offered this opportunity at the appropriate time. Taking victim personal statements early on in an investigation is important because it allows victims the opportunity to describe the wider effects of the crime upon them, express their immediate concerns and indicate whether or not they require any support. HMIC found this is variable and they are often taken much later in the investigation. The force needs to make sure this is explained, offered consistently and in good time.

Victims should also be kept updated about the progress of their case. Staff are aware of the requirements to provide regular updates but acknowledge this is inconsistent. This means that on occasions victims may not have information about the progress of their crime. The force has a dedicated witness care unit that supports vulnerable victims. Within the team are staff who specialise as domestic abuse officers and also receive specialist training and information that they share with their team.

### **Working with partners**

Surrey Police is committed to working constructively with partners and recognises the importance of sharing information with other local organisations in order to provide better support and safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable victims and their families. The force plays a major role in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)<sup>7</sup> and has arrangements in place to share information with partner

---

<sup>6</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 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.

<sup>7</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.

organisations and, in particular, to refer any children who are potentially at risk to local authority children's services. However, we found inconsistencies in the way staff implement these arrangements and a lack of robust oversight and supervision which ensures compliance.

HMIC found examples of children potentially at risk not being referred on to the local authority by investigating officers. This was also apparent from reviewing MARAC<sup>8</sup> minutes where mention is made of referrals not being received. No governance system is in place to ensure that referrals are submitted, and in a timely manner. Failing to make a referral means that partner organisations are not aware of incidents that may be putting children at risk of harm and as a result, they are not receiving the care and protection they need.

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

The force plays a major role in the MASH which serves the county. The MASH also includes the local authority children's services, adult social services and the mental health service. The victim support service will also be joining shortly. Information on vulnerable and high-risk victims and their families can be shared quickly and effectively to ensure that a joined-up response from all relevant services can be provided to support and protect victims. The force has full information-sharing protocols with partner organisations. However, concerns were expressed at the delays in making referrals to the independent domestic violence advocates (IDVAs) resulting in delays and therefore poor support being offered to victims.

In addition, HMIC found backlogs of work in the MASH and that joint working between organisations is still limited. We were informed of the intention to move to a seven-day service located on non-police premises with a single referral route. The force is committed to the development of the MASH and has commissioned an independent review of the police elements which made a number of recommendations for improvement. This review has now been extended to a full multi-agency review to ensure that all partners are engaged and was ongoing at the time of our inspection.

---

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

## **How well does the force respond to and safeguard specific vulnerable groups (missing and absent & victims of domestic abuse), and how well prepared is it to tackle child sexual exploitation?**

The first three questions have explained how Surrey Police 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**

The force does not understand fully the scale and nature of the problem of missing and absent children in Surrey as it has only analysis partially information held by the force and partner agencies. These gaps in understanding are particularly concerning with regard to children who repeatedly go missing, as the lack of information makes it difficult for the force to properly recognise and manage effectively the risks faced by these vulnerable children.

IT systems do not readily identify those children who regularly go missing which means that proactive police action is poor. It is good practice in such cases to record comprehensive details of where children have been found when they have been missing previously and with whom they have been known to associate. This type of information forms the basis of a 'trigger plan', which can be used as soon as they are reported missing again to direct police enquiries and locate them quickly.

We found that some trigger plans are in use in Surrey but they are not consistent in form or content. Frontline officers expressed frustration about attending incidents in respect of children who repeatedly go missing from home, and the lack of a more proactive approach to the child. Understanding the reasons why children repeatedly go missing from home and working jointly with other services to prevent further incidents can provide a much more effective approach to safeguarding and managing the risks.

Each local policing division has a specialist missing person's team which has responsibility to review, support and undertake missing person's investigations continuing from the previous day. A missing person's co-ordinator based at Guildford covers the whole force area and collates all missing-from-home reports, which are then shared with the local authority children's services department, so that it can provide additional safeguarding and support as necessary.

Until recently Surrey Police had operated a policy of only categorising children as missing and never absent. Absent children are defined as those who are not in the

location they should be in but there is no apparent risk to them. Such cases are logged but no immediate police investigation takes place. Children classed as missing are assumed to be at risk and a full investigation begins immediately. In order to manage the demand it faces, the force decided to re-introduce the classification of 'absent' for children. The force does not understand fully information about children that are repeatedly recorded as absent. Children and young people who are repeatedly missing or absent may be at risk of sexual exploitation. Without the full intelligence picture, the force may not routinely recognise risks and may not safeguard the child properly. The force should take steps to ensure that it can routinely identify repeatedly absent children and assess properly the risks they face.

Reports of missing children are normally received via the force contact centre and an officer deployed to investigate. The report is then reviewed by the TPT inspector and assessed as being standard, medium or high-risk. This risk assessment determines the urgency of the investigation and level of resources deployed. The investigation moves between the TPT inspector, the missing persons unit and, in high-risk cases, a detective inspector is also involved. Staff are not always clear as to what the process is, and consequently who is ultimately responsible for the investigation. There is a risk that this lack of clarity may lead to investigations not being coordinated or conducted in a timely manner. One inspector described how on the last four shifts he had worked, the records were of a poor standard and necessitated a full review by him in order for him to understand what actions had been taken.

We found weaknesses in the consistency and effectiveness of the way Surrey Police investigates incidents of missing children and young people. HMIC found that staff generally have a good understanding that missing children are vulnerable, and have a clear awareness of the risks they face from possible sexual exploitation; however, this does not always extend to completing a satisfactory risk assessment or a timely and thorough investigation.

Our review of a sample of missing children investigations in Surrey revealed a number of areas for concern. We found examples where risk assessments were of an inconsistent quality, for example missing children cases that had been assessed as medium risk but which should have been dealt with as high risk, including incidents involving young people where there was a known risk of sexual exploitation. This means that the force cannot be confident that the police response is always appropriate to deal with the risks involved and young people may not be adequately protected.

HMIC also found that investigations are not always as effective as they should be. Specialist staff in the missing persons unit direct the type of investigation that should take place, having reviewed the incident details. We found examples where the investigative activity required had not been effectively carried out, and had to be repeated. Although ongoing cases are discussed at the force's daily management meetings, we found that the discussion was cursory and lacked thoroughness as to

the risk assessment and actions completed. Staff confirmed that risk assessments lacked consistency between different inspectors.

Effective action to properly deal with missing and absent children requires prompt information-sharing and good joint work between the police and other organisations, particularly local authority children's services. All missing children should be interviewed once they have been located and returned home in order to understand the reasons for their absence, so that they can be properly safeguarded and to assist with preventing this from happening again. It is the responsibility of the local authority to arrange and undertake this. Provision in Surrey is extremely limited, and restricted to children who are in local authority care. The force has properly used its influence as a partner to strongly encourage the local authority to extend these independent return interviews to all children. It is understood that the local authority is working to introduce the service, if possible from April 2016.

As a result of the force's poor understanding of the scale and nature of the problem, its inability to effectively identify repeat missing and absent children and the limited use of trigger plans, the force does not always respond adequately to missing and absent children who may need safeguarding. This is also compounded on occasions with the poor standard of record keeping and investigation, the inaccurate risk assessment, the lack of clarity as to who is ultimately responsible for the enquiry and poor supervision.

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

The force has made a start in ensuring it is well prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. This inspection has focused on actions and activities the force has taken to understand and identify the extent to which children are at risk of child sexual exploitation and the policies, practices and procedures it is putting in place to tackle it. It did not test the quality of the force's complex investigations undertaken in combination with other agencies such as children's services as these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.<sup>9</sup>

Although the force has improved its understanding of the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation across Surrey it does not yet have a comprehensive picture that takes into account all available information. The force's analysis in December 2014 drew only on information about missing children held on the police records. It did not include information held by partner organisations and did not identify those children who were at risk, or were victims of child sexual exploitation. A fuller analysis would provide a more complete intelligence picture which could be used to lead joint work to protect children at risk and bring to justice those suspected of abusing children.

---

<sup>9</sup> HMIC's National Child Protection Inspections, available from [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/our-work/child-abuse-and-child-protection-issues/national-child-protection-inspection/](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/our-work/child-abuse-and-child-protection-issues/national-child-protection-inspection/)

In January 2015, the force made tackling child sexual exploitation one of its six top priorities. Since then the force has improved staff awareness of the nature, scale, and importance of protecting children from child sexual exploitation including the campaign “Identify it. Act”. Staff are clear about the importance of tackling this issue and have received training to help them better understand and be able to identify those children who may be at risk.

Force leaders take an active role in partnership working in Surrey, for example the local safeguarding children’s board. An assistant chief constable chairs the multi-agency child sexual exploitation strategy group, ensuring visible police strategic oversight and contribution to the partnership. Information and activity is shared at senior management meetings with divisional commanders to ensure they are kept informed of areas of development, including practice and policy.

All children and young people who are identified as being potentially at risk of sexual exploitation in Surrey are formally risk-assessed by the Missing and Exploited Children’s Conference (MAECC) which is a multi-agency meeting chaired by Children’s Services. MAECC categorises the degree of risk as standard, medium or high risk. Neighbourhood police officers are then responsible for working with those assessed as standard or medium risk, and the specialist police staff in the SIU are responsible for those assessed as high risk. The intention of this approach is to get to know the child and their family and undertake activity that helps safeguard the child. HMIC is concerned that some children assessed as medium risk have not been allocated an officer. We are also not confident that those high-risk cases passed to the SIU receive the support intended from SIU officers, as a result of pressures of other work being dealt with by the team.

### **Domestic abuse**

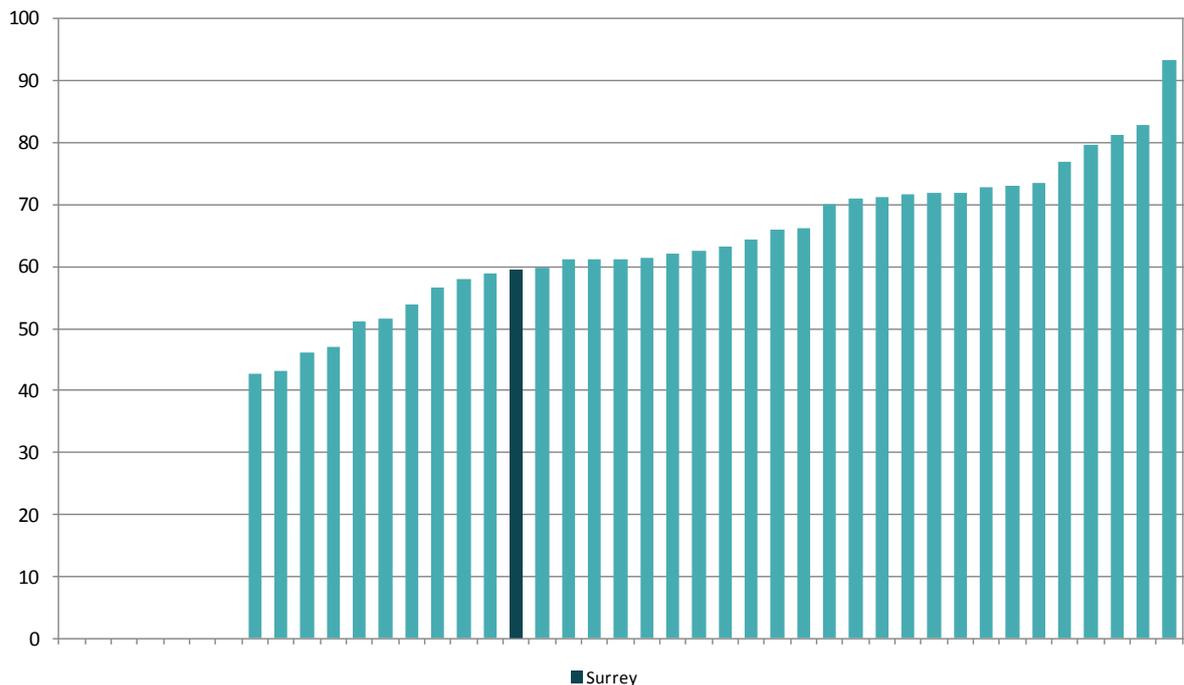
Tackling domestic abuse is also a priority for the force and is clearly a focus in daily meetings to allocate resources. Local partner organisations are positive about what they see as recent improvements in the police response in Surrey, although they are concerned about delays in referring victims to support services as well as some victims not being kept informed and updated by the police about their case.

Following HMIC’s last domestic abuse inspection in 2014, the force has made good progress in improving its response to victims. A comprehensive action plan was developed which incorporated a number of HMIC’s recommendations. More work is needed to address all of the improvements identified. However, officers we spoke to are confident about what they should do on initial attendance, including taking positive action at the scene if the perpetrator is still present as well as safeguarding the victim.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 21 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 12 percent of all police recorded crime. Across England and Wales during the same period there was a 21 percent increase, with domestic abuse accounting for 10 percent of all police recorded crime.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Surrey made 60 arrests.

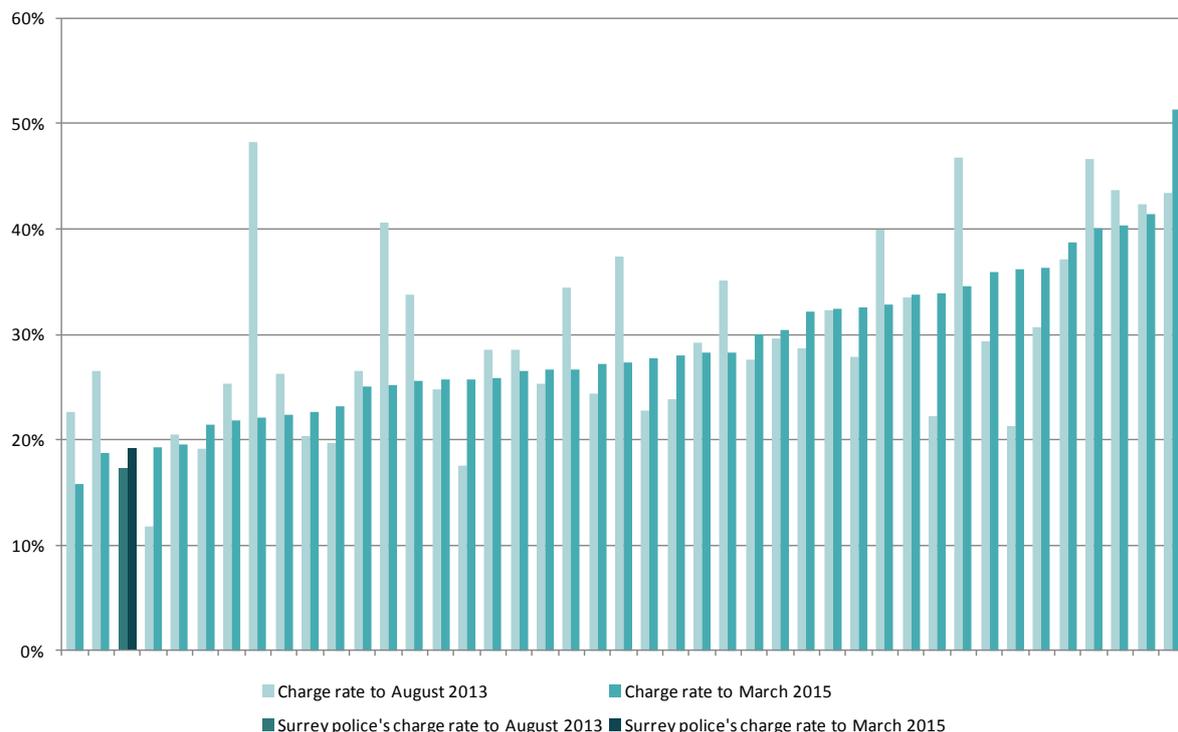
**Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015**



**Source: HMIC data return**

The force’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 19 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is an increase since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection when the force rate was 17 percent for the 12 months to 31 August 2013, compared with 30 percent for England and Wales. HMIC is encouraged to see that the force has made good progress increasing the percentage of cases where an offender is charged with a domestic abuse offence.

**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**

Domestic abuse victims whom the force assesses as being at high-risk of further abuse are referred to MARACs so that the police and other organisations can share information and plan jointly how best to safeguard and support the victim and their family. HMIC found that, in Surrey, the force is an important partner in this process, chairing the meetings and coordinating the personal safety plans for victims. However, the number of referrals to a MARAC in Surrey has reduced by 25 percent for the first six months of this year, compared to the same period last year. Domestic abuse incidents reported have increased and the force needs to understand the reasons behind this reduction in referrals so that it can be certain that victims facing the greatest risk are properly protected.

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 June 2014; it made 106 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 96 were granted. Twelve DVPOs have been breached. Breaches occur when the offender fails to comply with the condition of the order and is taken back before the magistrates' court. This represents a DVPO breach rate of 13 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

## Summary of findings



**Inadequate**

HMIC has significant concerns about the capability and capacity of Surrey Police to safeguard vulnerable people and investigate crimes committed against these vulnerable people. We found serious weaknesses in the force's arrangements for protecting vulnerable people from harm and in supporting victims.

The force has prioritised protecting vulnerable people and recognises the importance of identifying vulnerable victims as early as possible and properly assessing the risks they face. However, the force's current systems and practices are unreliable and ineffective. We found inconsistencies in the way it assesses risks and carries out investigations which means that vulnerable people may not always get the response from the police that is needed to keep them safe. The force needs to take urgent action, particularly where children are at risk, to ensure it improves and supervises properly its services.

The force has made some promising progress in beginning to tackle child sexual exploitation and needs to continue this work to ensure it can identify proactively offenders and protect children at risk.

The way the force deals with reports of missing children is poor. We found evidence of an inconsistent and poor approach to decision-making which resulted in high-risk cases often being graded lower than they should be. This meant they were not being dealt with by the right people with the right skills or with sufficient urgency to therefore properly protect vulnerable children.

## **Causes of concern**

The force's investigation and safeguarding of vulnerable victims is a cause of concern. There are weaknesses in the quality and consistency of child protection investigations and subsequent action to keep victims safe. The force needs to take urgent action to ensure services are improved and properly supervised. Accredited investigators within the safeguarding investigation units (SIUs) are fully trained but HMIC found examples of untrained staff investigating cases involving vulnerable people. The heavy workloads within the SIUs are having an impact on staff and affecting adversely the quality of service to some of the most vulnerable victims with whom the force deals. Lack of capacity is resulting in delays to investigations and an inability to provide a consistently good standard of service.

## **Recommendation**

The force acts to improve child abuse investigations, with particular attention to:

- staff awareness, knowledge and investigative skills;
- prompt responses to concerns raised;
- risk assessments that consider the totality of a child's circumstances and risks to other children;
- capacity of its investigators; and
- its audit, supervision and management of cases.

### **Causes of concern**

The force's response to missing and absent children is a cause of concern. The force has a poor understanding of the scale and nature of the issue as it has only partially analysed information held by the force and partner agencies.

Understanding the reasons why children repeatedly go missing from home and working jointly with other services to prevent further incidents can provide a much more effective approach to safeguarding and managing the risks.

Staff are not always clear as to what the process is, and consequently who is ultimately responsible for the investigation. This lack of clarity may lead to investigations not being as effective as possible. Risk assessments are not consistently carried out and supervisors display a poor understanding of risk factors when completing and reviewing risk assessments of missing children, leading to inconsistent decisions and inappropriate grading.

### **Recommendation**

- To address this cause of concern, the force should review immediately its approach to reports of missing children, specifically those who persistently go missing or absent, and ensure it puts in place measures to understand the issue, risk-assess reports and carry out appropriate investigations and safeguarding activity.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The force should improve the way it identifies, assesses and responds to risk and vulnerability by ensuring its contact staff consistently use processes available to support decision-making and that information from systems is consistently made available to attending officers.
- The force should improve its compliance with the duties under the code of practice for victims of crime specifically in relation to victim personal statements and keeping victims informed regarding the progress of their case.
- The force should improve the way it works with partner organisations to share information and safeguard vulnerable people, specifically in relation to making referrals to other organisations of children at risk.
- The force should improve its response to children at risk of sexual exploitation by ensuring it understands the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation; and that its officers provide the appropriate safeguarding support to children assessed as at medium and high risk.