

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Sussex Police



December 2015

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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Sussex Police

England and Wales

330

350

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

Sussex Police

England and Wales

15.1

15.8



Crime

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

Sussex Police

England and Wales

54.4

61.6

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

Sussex Police

England and Wales

+7.5%

+2.2%

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

Sussex Police

England and Wales

5.7%

10.7%

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

Sussex Police

England and Wales

10.2%

10.0%

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

Sussex Police

England and Wales

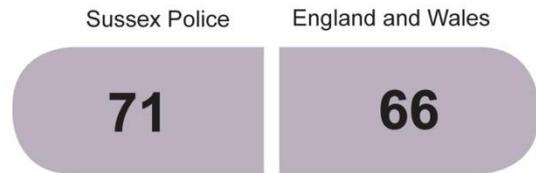
+37%

+20.8%



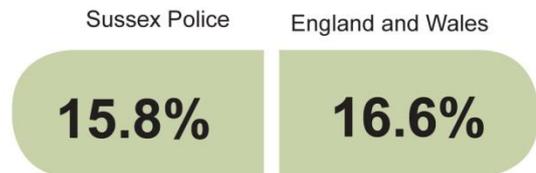
Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

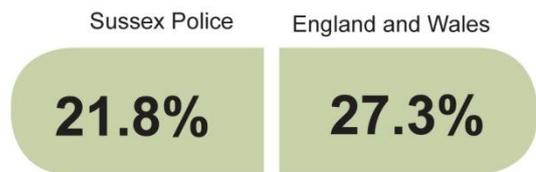


Charge rate

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

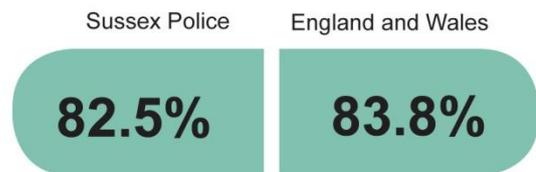


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



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.

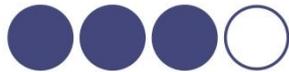
During the in-force inspection, we interviewed chief officers in each force and held focus groups with officers, staff and partners, and made unannounced visits to police stations, force control rooms and specialist teams. We also worked with the force missing person coordinator (or equivalent) to review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

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

Summary



Good

Sussex Police provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and responds well to them. HMIC found a strong commitment to protecting vulnerable people from both the force and the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and this is one of the strategic objectives in the PCC's police and crime plan. The force has sound processes in place to ensure that it identifies those who are vulnerable as soon as possible, it consistently assesses the risks posed to vulnerable victims well and responds well to those at high risk of harm. The force has invested in more staff and resources in its safeguarding investigation units to ensure high-quality investigations and continued improvement of support for vulnerable people. The force has continued to build strong partnerships with other organisations. In respect of protecting vulnerable people from harm and supporting victims, HMIC judges that its performance is good.

Officers attending incidents involving vulnerable people have a good understanding of how to assess risk and keep victims safe. Officers see safeguarding as a priority and understand the importance of their role in properly assessing and managing the risks posed to victims.

Sussex Police takes effective action, and works well with partner organisations, to keep victims safe. The force's investigations of crimes against vulnerable people are well-run, with a strong focus on making sure the risks are properly managed to ensure victims are kept safe. HMIC recognises that the force has committed extra resources and effort through a variety of communications to improve staff awareness and response to missing and absent children and child sexual exploitation. Staff understand well the need for effective and timely risk assessment and response.

The force's commitment to dealing with domestic abuse ensures it responds positively to victims who need safeguarding and continues to use opportunities such as victims' surveys and feedback from agencies to improve its response from initial contact through to investigation and final outcome. The force has made a good start in ensuring it is well-prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation and must now build on this initial approach. This inspection considered how well prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation.

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

Sussex Police identifies vulnerable people well and responds appropriately to them. HMIC found a clear commitment to protecting vulnerable people from both the force and the police and crime commissioner (PCC), which is one of the strategic objectives in the PCC's police and crime plan. Sussex has effective processes to ensure that it identifies vulnerable people as soon as possible and consistently assesses well the risks posed to vulnerable victims.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

Staff in the control room are the first point of contact for 999 and 101 calls. They are very knowledgeable and have a clear understanding of vulnerable people and the need to tailor the police response to meet the needs of vulnerable victims.

Forces define vulnerability in different ways. The majority of forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime¹ or that referred to in ACPO guidance.² Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

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

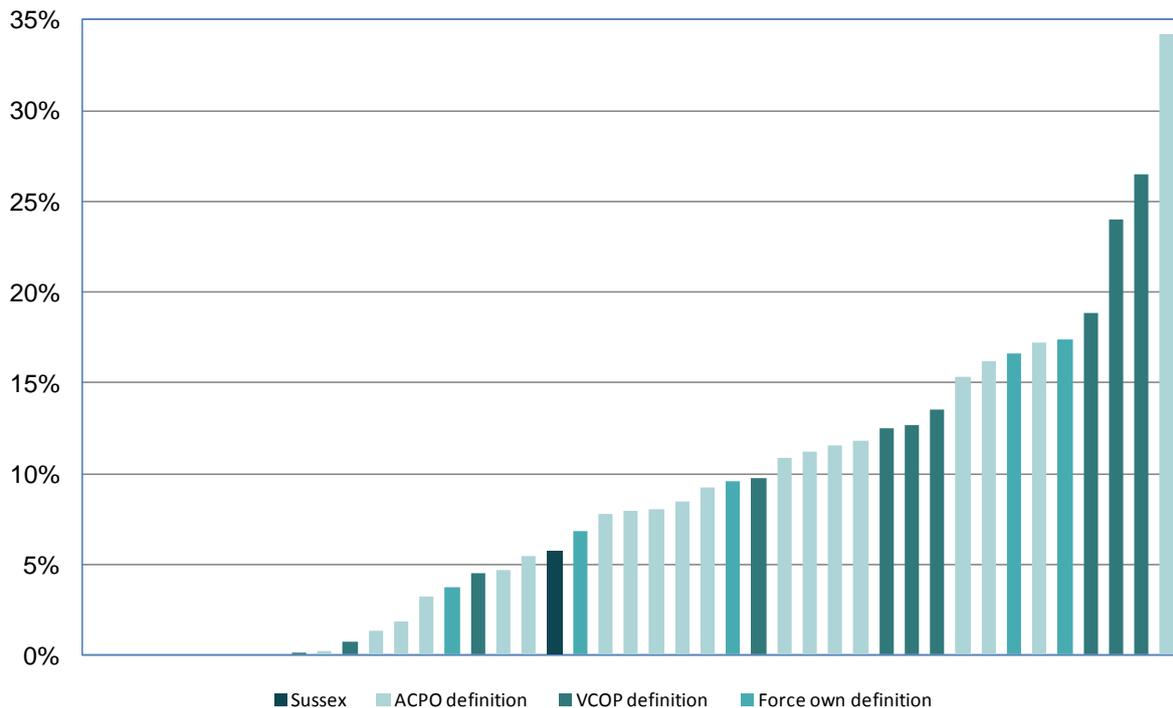
“Any person aged 18 years or over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental, physical, or learning disability, age or illness AND is or may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.”

The proportion of crime recorded which involves a vulnerable victim varies considerably between forces, from 0.03 percent to 34.3 percent. For the 12 months to 31 March 2015, 5.7 percent of all recorded crimes in Sussex Police were identified as involving a vulnerable victim. Eight forces were unable to provide this data at the time of data collection. There is no standard way in which forces are required to record on crime recording systems whether a victim is vulnerable and forces do this differently.

¹ *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*, Ministry of Justice, 2013. Available from www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf

² The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is now the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). *ACPO Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults*, NPIA, 2012, 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

The computer system used by call-handlers in the force control room automatically provides prepared question sets designed to elicit the right information from callers to properly assess risks and needs. We found that these question sets are routinely completed. The force regularly reviews the question sets to ensure they are effective and appropriate in length. Call-handlers and the controllers who deploy the police response, receive regular training which includes identifying vulnerable people and is a mix of computer-based self-learning and classroom sessions.

The force makes good use of shift overlaps in the control room to give regular short updates to staff to maintain awareness and knowledge. We found a strong level of supervision in the control room. Supervisors are knowledgeable and clearly understand their roles, especially overseeing high-risk incidents. There are processes in place for supervisors to check the quality of call-handling, although HMIC found there has been some recent inconsistency in carrying out these checks.

Assessing levels of risk and need

The force’s IT systems support effective and consistent processes to identify repeat callers and victims. The systems readily identify all previous incidents associated with an address and have the facility to search and easily identify repeat incidents by the name of either the victim or caller. Staff also cross-reference these details with the records management system, which enables the attending officer to be fully aware of any background information so that they can make appropriate risk assessments.

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

HMIC found that Sussex Police understands the requirements of some vulnerable groups better than other vulnerable groups.

The force has carried out a comprehensive analysis of the problems of child sexual exploitation in Sussex, taking into account information from partner organisations as well as police data.

Although Sussex Police has done some work to understand the scale and nature of domestic abuse it has not carried out a force-wide analysis. The force is experiencing very high levels of missing and absent children but has not analysed this problem across the whole force. A better understanding would enable the force to ensure the right resources are in the right place to tackle the problems.

In order to deal with increased demand and provide the most appropriate support to vulnerable victims, the force and the PCC have invested more resources in the certain areas. For example, extra staff have been placed in the safeguarding and investigating units across the force area, with standardised approaches and service levels in each team. In addition, the PCC has funded an extra 36 sexual offender liaison officers.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?³

Sussex Police responds well to vulnerable victims. Those attending incidents involving vulnerable people have a good understanding of how to assess risk and keep victims safe. Officers see safeguarding as a priority and understand the importance of their role in properly assessing and managing the risks posed to victims.

Response officers

Staff who respond to vulnerable victims are sympathetic and knowledgeable. HMIC found a good level of understanding among staff of the importance of providing the right response to victims who are vulnerable. Officers nominated as force domestic abuse champions in each division offer support and guidance to colleagues. Staff who provide the initial response are aware of the immediate safeguarding options available to them for victims and the availability of safety kits purchased by the force.

³ The question within the PEEL inspection methodology asks “How well does the force respond to vulnerable victims?” HMIC has amended the heading in this report to make it clear to the reader that this section focuses on the initial police response to vulnerable victims, rather than the overall police response to vulnerable victims.

These include installation of panic alarms, allocation of quick response mobile phones, and the facility to immediately relocate vulnerable victims.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

Supervisors actively monitor and review the response to vulnerable victims. Supervision of risk assessments is robust ensuring greater consistency and accuracy, giving HMIC confidence that victims receive the right support at the right time to keep them safe. Following the initial risk assessment carried out when the call is first received by police, the attending officer carries out a formal risk assessment. Duty sergeants check the risk assessment conducted by the officer and undertake a further assessment for accuracy and to confirm the level of risk. The forms are then submitted to the local Safeguarding Investigation Unit for further review and for high risk cases, investigation. The risk assessment is then shared with relevant partner agencies such as the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)⁴ for further review.

In the case of missing children and child sexual exploitation, the force's specialist staff oversee the assessment of risk, with access to the full range of partner organisations' information, and have the authority either to escalate or decrease the risk assessment.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁵

Sussex Police takes effective action, and works well with partner organisations, to keep victims safe. The force investigates and responds well to crimes committed against vulnerable people with a strong focus on making sure the risks are properly managed to ensure victims are kept safe.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

Force investigations are of a good standard with clear direction and oversight provided by supervisors. Prior to the field work inspection HMIC undertook a file review⁶ of 40 files to inform its inspections and over half identified victims who were vulnerable. The force is aware that its officers could make greater use of body-worn video cameras to capture evidence at the initial attendance at a crime scene and intends to promote the use of video evidence.

The force has five safeguarding investigating units (SIUs) covering the force area. Each unit has specialist detectives who have received training in investigating child abuse, achieving best evidence and multi-agency working. Daily public protection management meetings are held within the SIU to review continuing investigations. The teams undertake specialist investigations and respond to medium and high-risk safeguarding requirements.

In October 2015, the force plans to standardise the SIUs across the force and take on responsibility to provide a comprehensive service to vulnerable people across the county.

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,⁷ which they can use to explain how the crime has affected them. We found in Sussex that victim personal statements are not always being taken at the earliest opportunity. The force needs to make sure that officers understand the importance of offering the opportunity to make a victim personal statement as soon as possible after the incident.

Victims should also be kept updated about the progress of their case. Sussex Police has put in place an improved system to ensure that this happens more consistently, by putting an electronic marker on the case to remind officers when updates are due. These are emphasised by being coloured red or amber depending on the number of outstanding days to contact being due. Victim contracts are agreed between the

⁶ 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.

⁷ The victim personal statement (VPS) gives victims an opportunity to describe the wider effects of the crime upon them, express their concerns and indicate whether or not they require any support. Provisions relating to the making of a VPS and its use in criminal proceedings are included in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code), which was published on 29 October 2013 and came into force on 10 December 2013.

officer in charge of the case and the victim. It formally sets out how the victim will be contacted and the frequency of updates they require. The force monitors closely how well officers comply with the code of practice. This monitoring shows that in 92 percent of cases officers fulfil their responsibilities to keep victims updated and in 72 percent of cases victim's personal statements are taken.

Working with partners

Sussex Police works constructively with a number of partner organisations in order to protect those who are vulnerable and support victims. This includes local authority services, including children's services, and also the voluntary sector, including independent domestic violence advocates and Victim Support. This enables information to be shared about vulnerable people, so that risks can be fully understood and comprehensive and co-ordinated plans put in place to keep vulnerable victims and their families safe.

Specific joint working arrangements have been set up across the force area to enable a co-ordinated multi-agency response, to provide high-level oversight of missing and absent children and to tackle child sexual exploitation. These groups have developed action plans and provide regular updates on progress to the local safeguarding children's board.⁸ The force itself has robust systems in place to audit and review activities in relation to missing and absent children and child sexual exploitation. HMIC is encouraged that progress is being made and there is evidence of positive action being taken to protect children, for example through Operation Kite, the Sussex Police response to child sexual exploitation and the establishment of a dedicated child sexual exploitation SOLO (sexual offence liaison officer)

Sussex Police has worked in consultation with partners to design and introduce a comprehensive risk assessment tool to better understand and manage the risks faced by victims. The single continuous assessment of risk form (SCARF) enables the use of a single form and provides a tool to undertake a more detailed risk assessment and is used extensively by police staff and partner organisations.

⁸ Local safeguarding children boards have a statutory duty to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)

A separate MASH has been established within each geographical policing division, although they are currently at different stages of development with varying involvement from partner organisations. The force works effectively through the MASH structures to share information and safeguard victims. It has effective information-sharing protocols with partner organisations which are regularly reviewed. Referrals are received from various organisations, members of the public and police utilising the SCARFs. The process is consistently used to ensure that relevant information is shared in a timely way between organisations, so that those who are vulnerable receive the right support, quickly enough.

However, the exception to this is in the cases of missing children; the staff in the MASH do not assess the information on the police system about missing children reports and therefore the information is not shared with children's services or other organisations who might need to be involved in safeguarding.

Sussex provides a good service for victims of domestic abuse and actively contributes to multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)⁹ along with professionals from other bodies in order to safeguard those considered to be at the highest risk of harm. There are currently seven separate MARACs, meeting weekly covering the county with work underway to develop a consistent approach for Sussex.

HMIC observed a so-called MARAC-plus conference which deals with complex and repeated domestic abuse cases, involving the whole family (victim, children and perpetrator). We saw good participation by those present with clear evidence that the process is effective in safeguarding victims and children, through information-sharing and joint action-planning.

A multi-agency child sexual exploitation group has been established in all three force divisions. Referrals are made by police and partner organisations using a specially-designed sexual exploitation risk assessment form. The group collectively reviews the risk and allocates lead responsibility, agreeing actions to reduce risk.

⁹ MARACs (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) are local meetings at which information about high-risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between police and partner organisations.

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

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

Missing and absent children

When the force receives a call reporting a missing child in the contact and control centre, it undertakes a robust risk assessment and initiates an appropriate response. Risk assessment of missing children is consistent, reviewed frequently and handovers between officers or departments is clear and well-documented. HMIC found a good level of knowledge among frontline staff with rigorous, well thought-out risk assessment and investigations. We found that staff understand their roles and responsibilities with investigations subject of an appropriate level of review by supervisors.

Continuing cases are routinely and thoroughly scrutinised at the divisional daily management meetings. At these meetings staff take care to discuss the details, understand the cases and ensure that the risks are fully understood. We found effective continuous reviews and that the investigation is appropriately stepped-up if the levels of risk are assessed as increasing to ensure that necessary steps can be taken to locate and protect the child.

Sussex Police applies the definitions contained in the national policy on missing and absent persons.¹⁰ A child, who is not in a place where they are expected to be, but which is not out of character or poses a risk of harm, can be categorised as absent. However, this will not trigger an immediate police investigation and no other record is kept of the incident. The force system for recording and monitoring children who go absent does not include any further analysis or assessment of the risk or support that individuals might need. The force does not have a full understanding of 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.

¹⁰ 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.

Without the full intelligence picture, the risks may not be routinely recognised and the child may not be properly safeguarded. The force should take steps to ensure that repeatedly absent children are routinely identifiable and the risks they face properly assessed.

As a force, Sussex Police receives a comparatively high number of missing children reports.¹¹ West Sussex has a large number of children's homes based within the area and the force established a dedicated missing person and child sexual exploitation team for West Sussex in early 2014 with dedicated police resources to respond to the increase in demand. The service provided to safeguard missing children is effective and the unit is well-regarded. The force is currently reviewing the unit before making a decision on the future force structure for responding to missing and absent people.

HMIC found that the force's investigations of missing children are thorough and well-supervised with a strong focus on assessing and managing risks. The emphasis given to missing and absent people as part of the handover and allocation of tasks is good, with routine scrutiny being provided at the daily management meetings.

The force recognises the risks of sexual exploitation faced by children who go missing. Each division has a missing person's coordinator co-located within safeguarding investigation units who undertake multi-agency work in relation to missing children and those at risk of sexual exploitation, providing safeguarding support and guidance.

When a missing child is found and returned home, the police carry out safe and well checks. Local authority children's services also visit to assess the situation and identify if there are any safeguarding needs. Currently there is no such interview service commissioned by Brighton and Hove City Council, although this has now been commissioned by the local authority to commence in April 2016. In East and West Sussex local authorities there is a service, but HMIC found inconsistencies in the force receiving or recording the feedback from these visits, which means that important information that may help in any future occurrences, may not be captured. The force is aware of this and has provided additional training to officers along with bringing in a pan-Sussex commissioned service, for return home interviews, to commence in April 2016.

¹¹ Missing Persons Bureau annual data, 2013

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

Sussex Police has made a good start in ensuring that 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 and practices it is putting in place to tackle this. It did not test the quality of how the force conducted these complex investigations with other agencies such as children's services, as these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.

The force has demonstrated strong leadership in developing its response to child sexual exploitation and has undertaken preventive and investigative activity under Operation Kite (the force's internal and external communications plan to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation). This was well-received across the force and has made a positive impact, leading to the development of a multi-agency approach to tackling child sexual exploitation, agreed by external partners.

Sussex Police has provided training for staff and produced a comprehensive guide for senior and frontline officers as part of the programme of work to improve the response to child sexual exploitation with a dedicated intranet page under Operation Kite. This is designed to provide staff with the information they need to make informed decisions in recognising and dealing with vulnerable people and to support them in accessing specialist advice if needed. While training has been limited in some areas, frontline staff demonstrated a good awareness of child sexual exploitation and the links to missing children.

The force has actively developed its relationship with partner organisations in order to prevent child sexual exploitation and identify and support those who may be vulnerable. The governance and accountability under the multi-agency child sexual exploitation¹² meetings is positive. This means through divisional action plans, targeting under operation kite and communication, the force has raised staff awareness and has resulted in a large increase in intelligence reports from officers throughout the force area.

The force has analysed comprehensively the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation across Sussex. This information is being used to inform the development of the force's response. It is a developing area of work and the force needs to continue to build on this good work. HMIC acknowledges the investment in a dedicated child sexual exploitation analyst within public protection. This will help the force to close gaps in intelligence in respect of children that are missing or absent and the identification of those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

¹² Multi-agency child sexual exploitation partnerships (MACSEs) safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation in accordance with the policies, procedures and guidance of the Safeguarding Children Board (SCB) and the Sussex Child Protection & Safeguarding Procedures.

Domestic abuse

The force's response to victims of domestic abuse is improving. It is clear and well understood by officers and staff across the force that effectively tackling domestic abuse is a force priority. There is a good level of supervision and staff have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in relation to supporting victims and investigating incidents of domestic abuse.

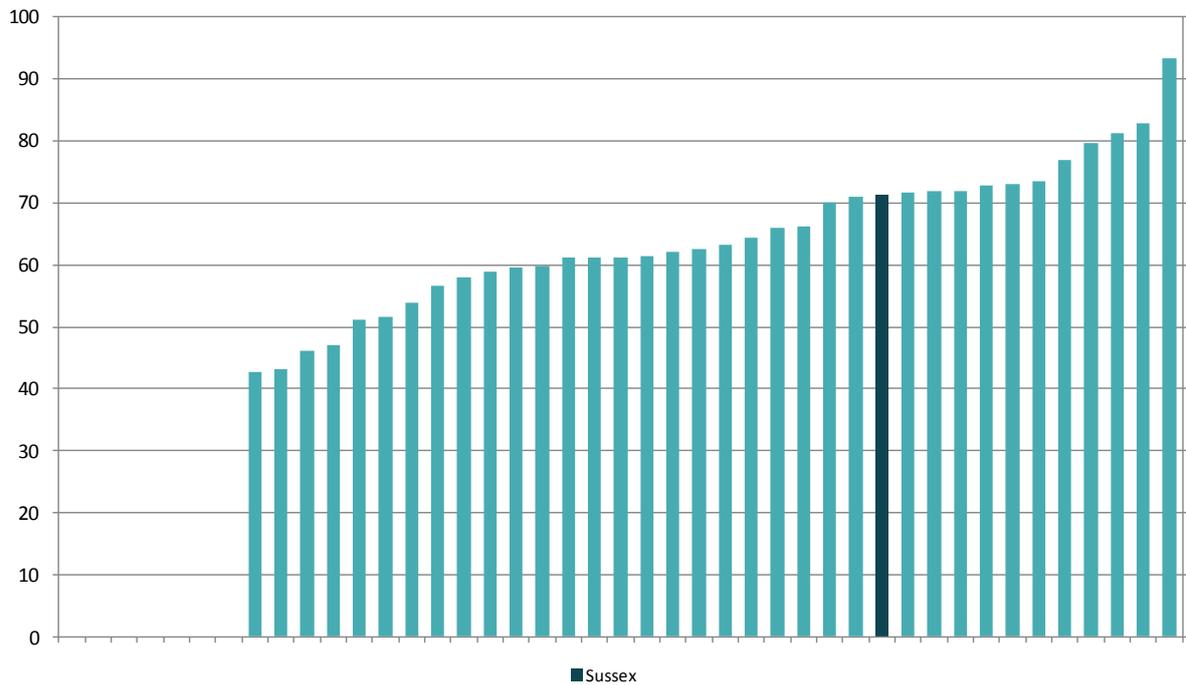
In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 37 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 10 percent of all police recorded crime. Across England and Wales during the same period there was a 21 percent increase, with domestic abuse accounting for 10 percent of all police recorded crime.

We found positive progress since HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014 and the force is implementing all the recommendations arising from the inspection. There is investment to ensure that all opportunities to safeguard victims of domestic abuse are taken. Sussex has seen a greater increase in reports of domestic abuse than the average for England and Wales. The force believes this to be as a result of its response to domestic abuse through Operation Ribbon, which encourages victims to report domestic abuse, as well as new ways of recording crime.

Sussex Police has a policy of taking positive action to deal with domestic abuse incidents. Officers are clear that it is their responsibility to manage the immediate risk to the victim by taking effective steps to safeguard the victim and to deal with the offender appropriately, including a positive approach to arrest where possible.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Sussex Police made 71 arrests.

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

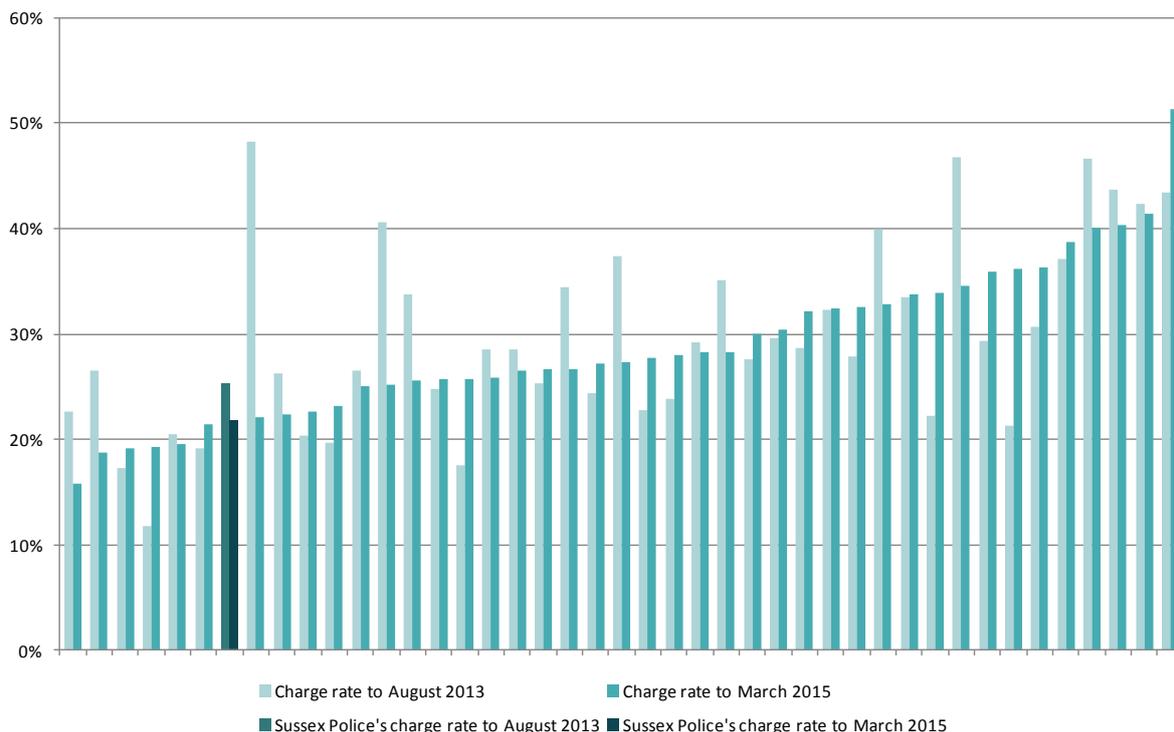


Source: HMIC data return

HMIC is encouraged that the force’s actions taken since the inspection last year have continued to improve the service to vulnerable victims. This includes additional training for staff, more consistent completion of accurate risk assessments, the robust supervision of domestic abuse incidents and the progress in developing multi-agency safeguarding hubs.

The force’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 22 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is a decrease since the last HMIC domestic abuse inspection when the force rate was 25 percent for the 12 months to 31 August 2013, compared with 30 percent for England and Wales.

Figure 3: Domestic abuse charge rate for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 compared to the 12 months to 31 August 2013



Source: HMIC data return

HMIC also examined the force's use of new legal powers to protect victims. Domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) were introduced in England and Wales in 2014 to prevent a suspected offender from returning to a victim's home or contacting the victim.

The force began using DVPOs in June 2014; it made 50 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which all were granted. Eleven¹³ 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 22 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹⁴

However, HMIC found that the force's use of domestic violence protection orders and domestic violence protection notices reduced over the latter part of 2014 but has seen some improvements through the beginning of 2015. The force recognises that it is not always taking opportunities to obtain orders and notices.

In addition, the proportion of charges for domestic abuse related offences has reduced, but the proportion of offenders that are cautioned has increased.

¹³ This figure may also contain breaches of DVPNs.

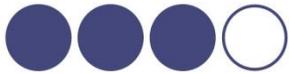
¹⁴ The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

The force needs to understand the reasons for the reduction in charge rates and increase in caution rates, so that it can be confident that it is dealing appropriately with domestic abuse offenders.

Frontline staff have a good knowledge of safeguarding actions. The handover process to other officers or specialist teams is robust and investigations are of a good standard with effective supervision. Standard and medium-risk domestic abuse cases are dealt with by the response investigation teams (RITs). HMIC found that some staff do not understand the less obvious forms of domestic abuse such as controlling and coercive behaviour which could create a gap in the service the force provides to vulnerable victims. The introduction of domestic abuse champions within the RITs is promoting better understanding and processes.

HMIC acknowledges the proactive and challenging work the force has undertaken with partner organisations to better understand the service given to victims of domestic abuse. The exit interview carried out by the independent domestic violence advisors service identified that just over half of victims surveyed stated the service provided was good.

Summary of findings



Good

HMIC found that Sussex Police provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and responds well to them, so the public can be confident that the police in Sussex provide good services that protect and support many victims. We found a clear commitment to protecting vulnerable people from both the force and the police and crime commissioner. The force has effective processes in place to ensure that it identifies vulnerable people as soon as possible and consistently assesses the risks posed to vulnerable victims well.

Sussex Police has invested in more staff and resources in its safeguarding investigation units to ensure high-quality investigations and continued improvement of support to vulnerable people. The force has continued to build strong partnerships with other organisations, and works constructively with them to ensure victims get the services they need to protect and support them.

Officers see keeping people safe as a priority and understand the importance of their role in properly assessing and managing the risks posed to victims, especially with those who are particularly vulnerable such as victims of domestic abuse and children. This inspection has only considered how well-prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation. The force has made a good start in ensuring it is well prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation and must now build on this initial approach.