

PEEL – Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Thames Valley Police



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Thames Valley Police

England and Wales

475

350

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

Thames Valley Police

England and Wales

18.5

15.8



Crime

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

Thames Valley Police

England and Wales

51.8

61.6

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

Thames Valley Police

England and Wales

-4.9%

+2.2%

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

Thames Valley Police

England and Wales

9.2%

10.7%

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

Thames Valley Police

England and Wales

9.0%

10.0%

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

Thames Valley Police

England and Wales

+5.6%

+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 and 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.

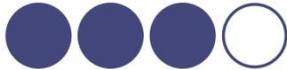
We also worked with the force missing person coordinator (or equivalent) to review cases of missing and absent children, including children considered to be 'repeat absent' and 'repeat missing' and children shown to be at risk of child sexual exploitation.

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 Thames Valley Police.

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

Summary



Good

Protecting vulnerable people is a high priority for Thames Valley Police. It has invested in training, investigative resources and new partnership structures to improve the service it provides. The force provides a good service identifying vulnerable people and generally responds well to them. For these reasons the force is judged to be good at protecting vulnerable people from harm and supporting victims.

Thames Valley Police has worked hard to improve services to some of the most vulnerable members of its community. Officers and staff throughout the force share this commitment and have a good awareness of risk and vulnerability and an understanding of the importance of their role in managing the risks faced by vulnerable victims.

The force is good at identifying those who are vulnerable, making good use of intelligence to assess their risk at the first point of contact so that the most appropriate police response can be deployed. The force generally responds well to vulnerable victims. Frontline officers have a good understanding of their responsibility to provide enhanced levels of service for vulnerable victims to ensure they are supported and protected. The force needs to ensure that all officers comply consistently with the code of practice for victims of crime, so that it always provides victims with the quality of service they have a right to expect.

The force works well with partner organisations to share information and provide a joint response to victims to better protect and support them. HMIC is encouraged that the force is committed to improving the effectiveness of joint working through the roll-out of multi-agency safeguarding hubs across the whole force area.

The force has invested well in specialist resources in its protecting vulnerable people units and takes steps to identify and support vulnerable people. The capacity in the child abuse investigation unit has not kept pace with the increasing workload it has faced. This means that the force may not be able to continue to provide the quality of service it aspires to for this very vulnerable group of victims.

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 and have confidence that this ambition translates into consistent operational practice. This inspection only

considered how well-prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation. The force was also subject to a post-inspection visit of its child protection services. The more detailed findings from that review published in October 2015 should be read in conjunction with this inspection report.¹

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

Thames Valley Police works well to identify those who are vulnerable, making good use of intelligence to assess their risk at the first point of contact so that the most appropriate police response can be deployed. The force's analysis of crime reporting, investigation outcomes, intelligence material and learning points from high-profile investigations has identified underreporting of crime from parts of their community, specifically black and minority ethnic groups. To tackle this, community safety partnerships² deliver tailored services which reflect local needs, and promote access to the police for all people.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

Thames Valley Police is generally good at identifying vulnerable victims. Front desk staff at police stations, and the staff in the public enquiry centres (PECs) where all 999 and 101 calls are received, have been trained to spot whether someone may be vulnerable, including those involved in domestic abuse or at risk of child sexual exploitation. They are able to access all the police record systems to check for any previous history or background information to help with their initial assessment.

Forces define vulnerability in different ways. The majority of forces use either the definition from the government's Code of Practice for Victims of Crime³ or that referred to in ACPO guidance.⁴ Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions.

¹ 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/

² A community safety partnership consists of representatives from the responsible authorities who work together to protect their local communities from crime and to help people feel safer. The responsible authorities are organisations with statutory roles including the police, local authorities, fire and rescue authorities, the probation service, and health services.

³ *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*, Ministry of Justice, 2013, available from www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf

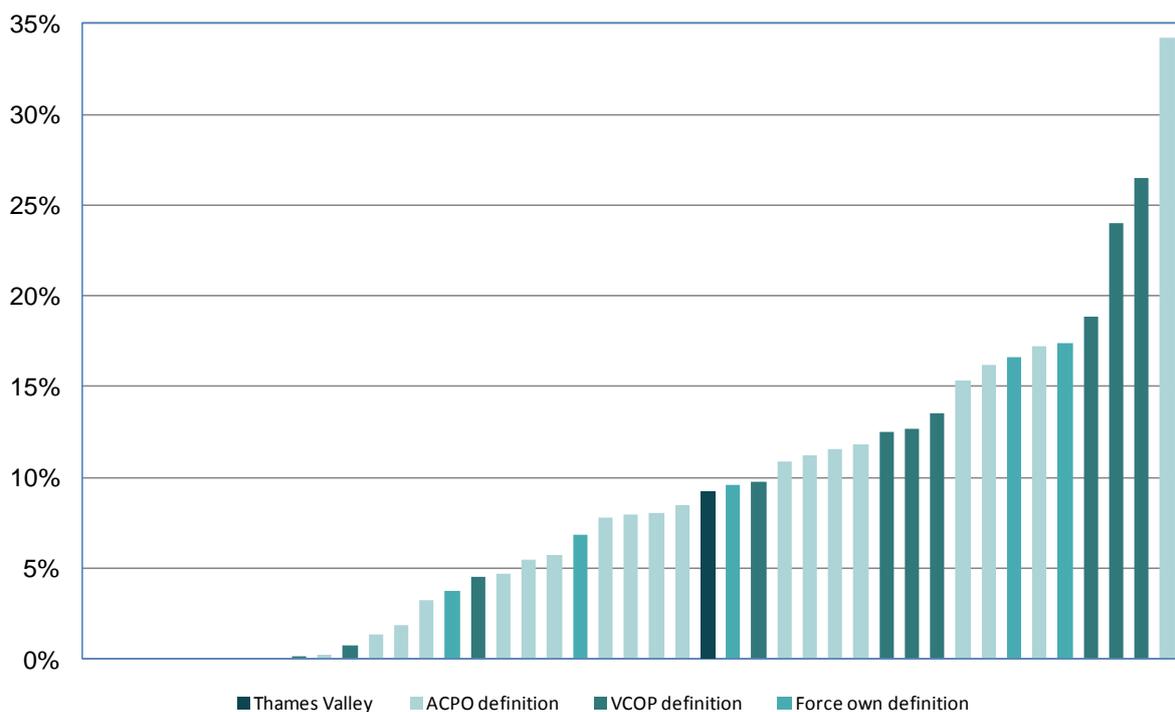
⁴ The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is now the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). *ACPO Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults*, NPCC, 2012, available from www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/

Thames Valley 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, 9.2 percent of all recorded crimes in Thames Valley 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.

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



Source: HMIC data return

Assessing levels of risk and need

HMIC found that call takers in the public enquiry centres (PECs) are well-trained to identify and respond to risk and vulnerable people. They routinely use the national decision model⁵ to guide their assessments. Their knowledge is updated at quarterly training events. Supervisory arrangements in the call centre are robust, reassuring HMIC that the force properly identifies risk factors. Thames Valley PECs include nominated individual supervisors as points of contact for specific themes such as mental health, child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, and missing persons. These supervisors are responsible for the provision of advice, and improving awareness and raising standards in their respective themes.

The IT system that the force currently uses to log calls for service and deploy the police response can identify immediately if a caller has a history of previous contact with the police. This means that repeat victims and those who are already known to be vulnerable will be flagged up straightaway, which helps to ensure that the force properly assesses the risk and provides the right response.

When a call is received in a PEC or reported at a station, the member of staff starts an incident log by recording the specific incident type. This automatically produces an action prompt, which is a screen providing thorough guidance on how to deal with that type of incident and the key questions that should be answered to enable the risk to be properly assessed. HMIC saw action prompts relating to domestic abuse, missing and absent people, child sexual exploitation and many other call types. Again, this helps to ensure that Thames Valley can provide the most appropriate police response. Force computer systems clearly record any child sexual exploitation-related activity with a marker, which can then be viewed by other users.

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

HMIC found that across Thames Valley Police there is a good understanding of the risks faced by victims. The force has set up a range of training and tactical activities to support vulnerable people. It has increased the awareness of frontline staff about the importance of protecting vulnerable people by training them to respond to domestic abuse, recognise mental health issues, deal with reports of missing and absent people, and assess the nature of vulnerability in children and adults.

There is a clear force focus in specialist units on keeping the victim safe. We saw the clearest evidence of this from investigators conducting enquires in a major child sexual exploitation investigation, where a comprehensive assessment process is

⁵ 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.

used each time a victim is identified. Investigators combine information from partner agencies along with information about the victim's circumstances to set a unique management plan for each victim to support and protect them.

Under the banner of Operation Safeguard the force has provided child sexual exploitation training and an aide-memoire to all front line staff, including call takers in the PEC. The Operation Safeguard site on the force intranet provides a source of tactical advice about all child sexual exploitation related matters containing both information, and signposts staff to specialist units.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁶

Thames Valley Police responds well to vulnerable victims. Frontline officers understand well their responsibility to provide enhanced levels of service for vulnerable victims to ensure they are supported and protected. The force's supervision is rigorous and effective.

Response officers

Frontline officers who attend incidents involving vulnerable victims have a good understanding of risk and vulnerability and are aware of their responsibility to assess the risks and take appropriate safeguarding action. There is a clear focus on identifying any impact of incidents upon other household members, especially children. The force formally records this on the domestic abuse risk assessment form, which enables it to quickly share the information with partner organisations. Partners commented that there is consistently good performance in this area.

However, some were concerned that frontline officers attending domestic abuse incidents were sometimes more intent upon completing their paperwork than listening to the victim. Given the nature of questions being asked, victims on occasions felt adversely judged by the officer. This can lead to a perception of police insensitivity among the victims and may deter them from reporting any further incidents.

Frontline staff understand that they are expected to take positive action when dealing with vulnerable people particularly at domestic abuse incidents, and we saw examples of arrests being made in the best interests of safeguarding them. This included those who were reluctant to support an investigation at the time of the incident. The force has provided training to staff in respect of the evidence needed to successfully prosecute the offender where the victim does not wish to support the

⁶ 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.

police or withdraws their co-operation before a court trial takes place. This work could be enhanced by the force making more use of domestic violence prevention notices (DVPNs)⁷ which would allow a victim time away from the perpetrator to fully consider their needs.

Frontline staff carry an aide-memoire for dealing with antisocial behaviour incidents to help them to identify vulnerable people. This focuses on victim impact and personal circumstances and it also causes staff to think widely about the incident and the service required from police and partners.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

HMIC found that force supervision of the first point of contact (when a victim asks for police help) is good. Supervisors in the PEC listen to recordings of a sample at least 15 calls per month from each staff member to assess competence, including the accuracy of grading based on threat, risk and vulnerability along with staff attitude and empathy shown towards the caller. Supervisors are directly involved in the assessment of risk in missing children reports. Supervisors check the formal risk assessments of domestic abuse victims, which are then further reviewed by specialist domestic abuse risk assessors. This means that the force can be confident that victims are generally receiving a police response appropriate to their needs.

Staff and supervisors are confident to make professional judgments of risk. We found that those judgments tended to be cautious, with a presumption of high risk in cases of doubt, until lines of enquiry were complete or new information was received to cause a reassessment of risk. This indicates that the steps taken by the force to raise awareness of the importance of identifying risk and vulnerable people have been successful. We are aware that the force intends to build on this with further training to help staff identify vulnerable people amongst those who contact the police in more routine circumstances.

⁷ DVPNs (domestic violence prevention notices) may be issued by an authorised police officer to prevent a suspected perpetrator from returning to a victim's home and/or contacting the victim. Following the issue of the DVPN the police must apply to the magistrates for a domestic violence prevention order (DVPO). The DVPO will be granted for a period of up to 28 days.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁸

Frontline officers are very aware of issues regarding vulnerable people, and their role in helping to keep victims safe. HMIC was impressed by some of the local initiatives that have been put in place, such as a programme in Milton Keynes to manage medium-risk domestic abuse cases, and a scheme in Abingdon providing an enhanced service for vulnerable elderly victims. These are good initiatives and the force would benefit from creating a system by which they could be shared across Thames Valley so that other areas of the force can learn from such initiatives.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

The force has set up a centralised department responsible for protecting vulnerable people. It includes specialist teams for domestic abuse investigation, child abuse investigation and a child sexual exploitation engagement team. Specialist resource is available out of hours for dealing with domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation, and specially-trained officers are available 24 hours a day to support victims of sexual violence. The department is generally well-resourced and staff are well-trained, but has some capacity issues in dealing with child abuse. During the last year, force data showed that demand in the child abuse investigation unit increased by 23 percent in respect of reported crime and by 40 percent in for non-crime referrals. To cope with this, the force recently increased the number of staff in the child abuse investigation unit and has made arrangements for the force CID to provide support for certain cases. Despite this, HMIC found that some staff are struggling to cope with the challenging volume of work and at the time of the inspection officers in this unit were working on average on 22 cases at the same time.

As part of our fieldwork we examined a selection of cases dealt with by Thames Valley Police.⁹ We found that officers involved in investigations demonstrated appropriate skills and training to conduct the investigation. There was consistent evidence that investigative opportunities were followed up in a timely fashion. All cases reviewed had a clear investigation plan, with rationale for why things were or

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

were not done and evidence was presented in a logical fashion that allows easy and concise review.

Overall, the force was good at effectively identifying vulnerability at an early stage of an investigation and there was clear evidence that staff followed up safeguarding enquiries in a timely fashion.

As part of its national child protection inspection, HMIC examined ten investigations into child sexual exploitation cases in Thames Valley. We assessed two as good, one adequate, six requiring improvement and one inadequate. This report found that the quality of child sexual exploitation investigations was inconsistent and largely dependent on the team to which it had been allocated. HMIC made recommendations to the force designed to improve child sexual exploitation investigations which it is acting upon.

Each local policing area (LPA) is routinely provided by the force with a list of the ten most frequently occurring repeat domestic abuse incidents, along with their current and highest level of risk. Local officers target the offenders and engage with the victims to prevent reoffending and keep the victims safe.

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 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,¹⁰ which they can use to explain how the crime has affected them. We found an inconsistent approach to the taking of victim personal statements. In some parts of the force area we found a practice of waiting for a decision about whether a perpetrator will be charged for a crime before this is discussed with the victim. This may mean that the victim's voice in the criminal justice process is not heard as well as it should be, and is contrary to the victim's code of practice.

Victims should also be kept updated about the progress of their case. HMIC found that staff were aware of the requirements to keep victims informed at key points in the investigation. While we saw evidence that many staff complied with this it was not complied with consistently. If victims are not kept updated, they may lose confidence in the police and the criminal justice process. More importantly it may mean they do not have important information about someone who may pose a risk to them.

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

Working with partners

The force shares information well with its partners and has an IT system (MODUS) that it uses to share information about domestic abuse. The force is fully committed to partnership activity that responds to vulnerable victims and is working to improve its attendance and recording of actions at initial child protection case conferences which are inconsistent across the force area. We found evidence of routine contact with children's services, social housing providers, a range of health care providers, local authorities, education services and many charities.

Multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs)¹¹

Thames Valley Police covers a very large geographical area including 18 different local authority areas, nine of which have responsibilities for providing children and adult social services. The force is working to support the establishment of MASHs covering the whole force area with one for each of these nine local authority areas. MASHs are already fully established in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. In areas not already covered by a MASH, a 'protecting vulnerable people' referral centre performs the same function of sharing information with partner organisations to better support and protect vulnerable children and adults. However this is a police-only unit, and does not benefit from the co-location of partner organisations, in the same way as a MASH. HMIC will monitor the roll-out of the MASH approach across the force area and how the force evaluates the benefits of better joint working.

As part of our fieldwork we observed a number of multi-agency risk assessment conferences. The force is a key part of this process supplying over 50 percent of all referrals and responsible for coordinating the personal safety plans agreed. The meetings we observed were chaired well and all attendees contributed and were held to account for previously agreed actions. Arrangements are in place to update victims with the results of the meeting.

¹¹ 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.

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

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

Missing and absent children

In its annual assessment of the key threats facing the public in Thames Valley, the force has identified the potential for missing and absent children¹² to be at risk of sexual exploitation. As a consequence the force has reviewed the way it deals with missing children and updated its standard operating procedures.

The force conducts an initial risk assessment on reports of missing or absent children using a standardised set of questions. The decision to record a child as either missing or absent is made by the control room supervisor.

Missing and absent person investigations are subject to frequent supervisory review and are effectively managed through the daily management meeting (DMM) or the wider force daily meeting dependent on the level of risk. Once a missing or absent child has been located, an initial safe and well check is carried out by police officers. Following this a return interview arranged by the relevant local authority takes place.

Each local policing area (LPA) holds a panel every month to review repeat and high-risk missing or absent children cases. These facilitate the sharing of information between partners to support decision making about how each case should be managed, identifies individual cases for referral to the force level multi-agency child sexual exploitation group.¹³

¹² 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. In Thames Valley, force policy is that no child under the age of 14 will be treated as 'absent'

¹³ The CSE Operational Group is an internal police group, chaired by the detective superintendent head of PVP and provides oversight of CSE investigations, and reviews complex abuse cases and provides trend information to the force and its partners.

Missing person co-ordinators review all missing and absent reports to check they have been accurately classified and properly risk assessed. In addition they can provide guidance to the investigation by identifying and directing lines of enquiry. The co-ordinators will also supply additional or background information, where it is known, to the missing person panels.

In Milton Keynes LPA, neighbourhood police officers attend schools and care homes following a child or young person having been reported missing or absent. Feedback from those organisations is that the quality of the force's response to reports of this type has improved since the follow-up visits have started and rapport has grown with the nominated officer.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

The force has made a good start in ensuring it is prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. In May 2013, following a joint police and local authority investigation in Oxfordshire (Operation Bullfinch), seven men were convicted of child sexual exploitation. Thames Valley responded positively to the learning from this case, working collaboratively with the local authority and its partners, to improve how they provide services to protect and support vulnerable children and young people in Oxfordshire. This has included setting up the dedicated Kingfisher Multi-Agency child sexual exploitation team in November 2012, and creating a wider awareness about young people who are victims of sexual exploitation. A similar team now operates in Buckinghamshire and the force intends to further extend this cross the rest of the force. 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 which has already been referred to.

Child sexual exploitation is one of the force's highest priorities and it has developed an action plan designed to improve services to tackle this issue. There is a strong focus on child sexual exploitation and a clear recognition of the need to identify and investigate organised crime groups who may be involved in child sexual exploitation. The force has analysed comprehensively the nature of child sexual exploitation across Thames Valley so has a good insight into where the gaps in its intelligence, and has made recommendations about how it needs to improve.

The force systematically gathers (from a range of police and partnership sources) intelligence about children and young people who may be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. This is shared with partner agencies at the multi-agency child sexual exploitation operational sub-group, which forms part of the local safeguarding children's board. This enables joined-up working between police and social care to reduce the risk to vulnerable children. Feedback from partners has been positive about the force's approach to handling child sexual exploitation.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is also a force priority, included in both the police and crime commissioner's and the force's strategic objectives and featuring in the annual strategic threat assessment. Thames Valley has a domestic abuse action plan created after HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014. The force has taken steps to address all of the recommendations. In addition the force continues to measure the improvements brought about by the new MASH process.

The force's domestic abuse policy sets out the service victims of domestic abuse can expect from the force. This is easily accessible on the force internet site. The force has produced a DVD highlighting the importance of domestic abuse which has been used to raise general awareness levels in staff.

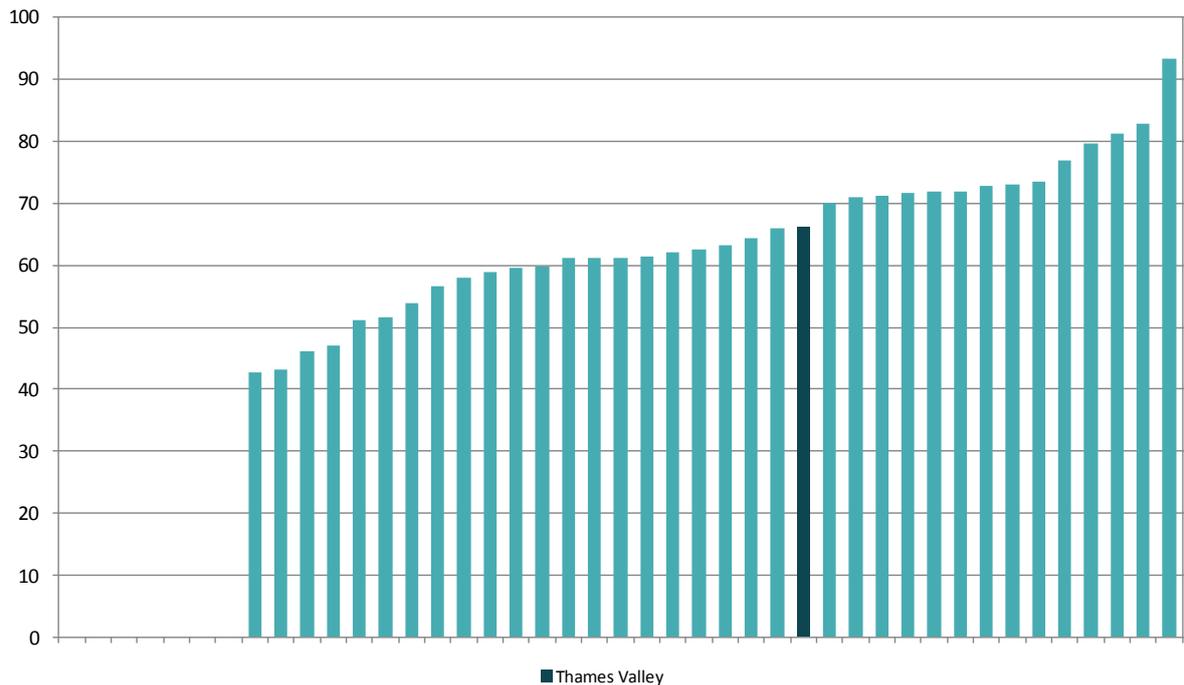
All staff who may be involved at some point with a report of domestic abuse must complete a mandatory on-line training package about abusive relationships. More specialist courses such as those dealing with vulnerable and intimidated witnesses and specialist domestic abuse investigations are provided to specialist investigators. The force plans to roll-out the College of Policing course dealing with controlling and coercive behaviour to frontline staff when it becomes available.

The force takes immediate steps to protect victims of domestic abuse. Officers attending are required to undertake a formal risk assessment in all cases. The risk assessment process is well understood by frontline staff. It provides a systematic mechanism through which the risks to victims (or others present) can be identified, and immediate protection plans formulated and recorded. The force has a positive intervention policy for domestic abuse incidents.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 6 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 9 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 Thames Valley Police made 66 arrests.

Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 201



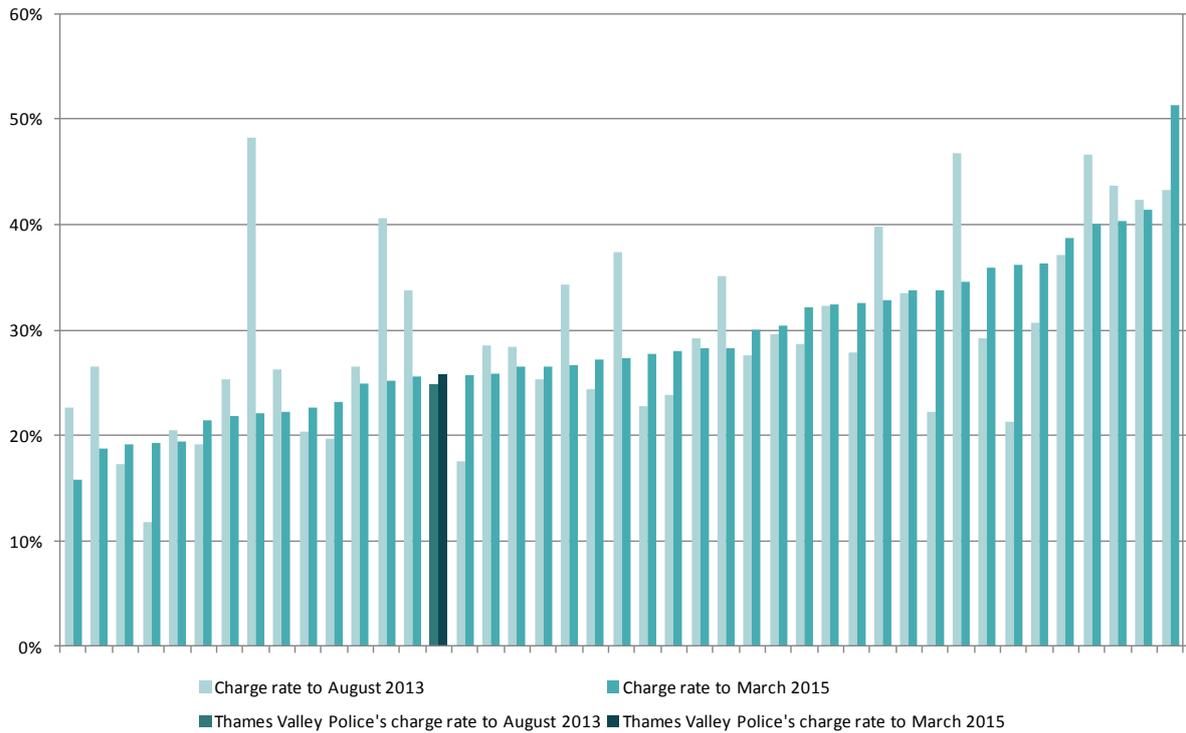
Source: HMIC data return

The risk assessment and any actions taken are initially reviewed by a supervisor prior to submission to the relevant MASH or referral centre. All cases where a child was present or are assessed as high or medium risk, along with sample of standard risk cases, are then further reviewed by specialist risk assessment officers. Cases graded as medium or high risk go to the DAIU who create a protection plan. Additionally all victims assessed as high risk are referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) so that all partner organisations can share information and agree a joint approach to protecting and supporting the victim. These victim protection plans are subject to regular reviews, and are coordinated by the DAIU. Protection plans created in respect of victims assessed as medium risk, are passed to local officers for ongoing management.

HMIC found that Thames Valley robustly identifies repeat victims of domestic abuse, recognising that they face increased risk and escalating the police response. We also found that the standard of domestic abuse investigations is satisfactory, with appropriate levels of supervision evident

The force’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 26 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 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 11 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which 11 were granted. Four DVPOs have been breached. Breaches occur when the offender fails to comply with the condition of the order and is taken back before the magistrates' court. This represents a DVPO breach rate of 36 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹⁴

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

Summary of findings



Good

Thames Valley Police provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and generally responds well to them. The force has made good progress since last year and has improved how it tackles domestic abuse. It is working hard to set up multi-agency safeguarding hubs covering the whole force area to provide more effective joined-up services with partner organisations to better safeguard children and vulnerable adults.

We found a strong commitment in Thames Valley to improving its services to protect vulnerable people and police officers and staff understand and share this commitment. The force has invested extra resource in its specialist services that identify and support those who are vulnerable and keep them safe. However we found some lack of capacity in the child abuse investigation team which means that the force may not be able to continue to provide the quality of service it aspires to for this very vulnerable group of victims.

The force has made a good start in ensuring that it is well-prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation and is building on this initial approach with its partners.