

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Warwickshire Police



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Warwickshire Police England and Wales

243

350

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

Warwickshire Police England and Wales

11.8

15.8



Crime

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

Warwickshire Police England and Wales

49.5

61.6

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

Warwickshire 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

Warwickshire Police England and Wales

8.5%

10.7%

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

Warwickshire Police England and Wales

8.5%

10.0%

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

Warwickshire Police England and Wales

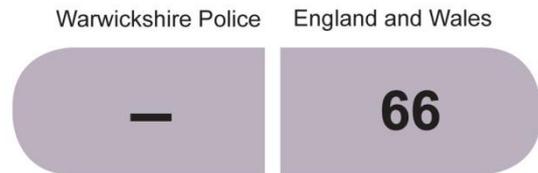
+103.4%

+20.8%



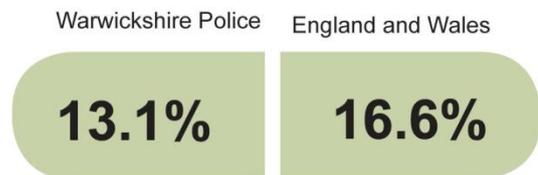
Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

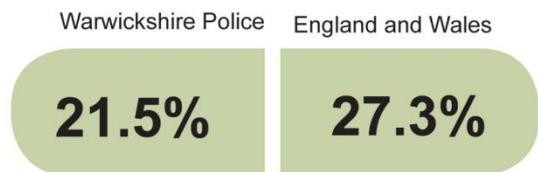


Charge rate

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

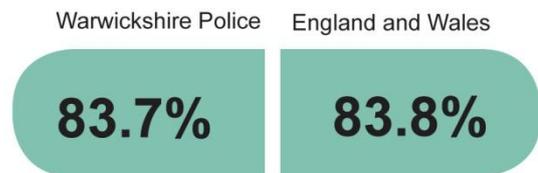


Domestic abuse charge rate as a percentage of all domestic abuse crimes recorded 12 months to 31 March 2015



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015



***Warwickshire Police was not able to provide data for the number of domestic abuse arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes.**

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?

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 Warwickshire Police.

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

Summary



Requires improvement

Warwickshire Police is generally good at identifying vulnerable victims, and works well with partner organisations to respond to their needs appropriately. The public can therefore be confident that many vulnerable victims are well-supported by the force. However, there are some areas where the force needs to improve in order to ensure it is consistently giving the best service to victims and vulnerable people, particularly missing children, and keeping them safe. Given the risk that this represents to some of the most vulnerable people in the county, overall the force requires improvement.

Protecting people from harm is a priority for the force but this is not always translated into good practice at the operational level. There is an inconsistent approach to responding to vulnerable missing children and assessing the risks to domestic abuse victims, which means the force is not always fully addressing the needs of some of the most vulnerable victims. However, where risk and vulnerability have been correctly identified, the police response to victims is good.

Generally, investigations into crimes against victims who are assessed as vulnerable are conducted by specialists to a satisfactory standard, and are supervised effectively. The force works well with partner organisations to share information and safeguard (protect) and support victims. The force plans to develop a multi-agency safeguarding hub for Warwickshire, similar to that already in place in Hereford, West Mercia, which should improve further the quality of joint working across the alliance.

HMIC found some weaknesses in the way the force assesses the risks to children and young people who go missing. This means that the police response may not be consistently providing the right level of safeguarding and protection to missing children, especially children in care, who are already among the most vulnerable people in the county. For example, the force may be missing risks of grooming for sexual exploitation.

This inspection only considered how well-prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation. The force has made an encouraging start in ensuring that it is adequately prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation. However, some of its missing persons processes mean that further work is required if the public can be confident that this preparation is sufficient.

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

The force has clear processes in place to identify repeat and vulnerable victims, but we found inconsistencies in the way it assesses the risks and vulnerabilities of victims, including some domestic abuse victims and children who are missing.

Warwickshire Police and West Mercia Police have formed a strategic alliance in which almost all of their resources are shared, and protecting people from harm is a strategic priority for the two forces. Both chief constables have reinforced this message frequently, and the concept is well-understood across the alliance. The alliance has jointly identified priorities for fighting crime, assessed the key threats and risks and developed a joint strategy to tackle the risks. This enables both forces to target their shared resources effectively to reduce the likelihood of people suffering harm.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

The chief officer team is clear that the strategic alliance must develop a culture of assessing the needs of the victim as a priority over other concerns. However, we found that more work is needed to ensure there is a consistent approach to identifying risks, assessing the needs of victims and responding appropriately in all cases.

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.

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

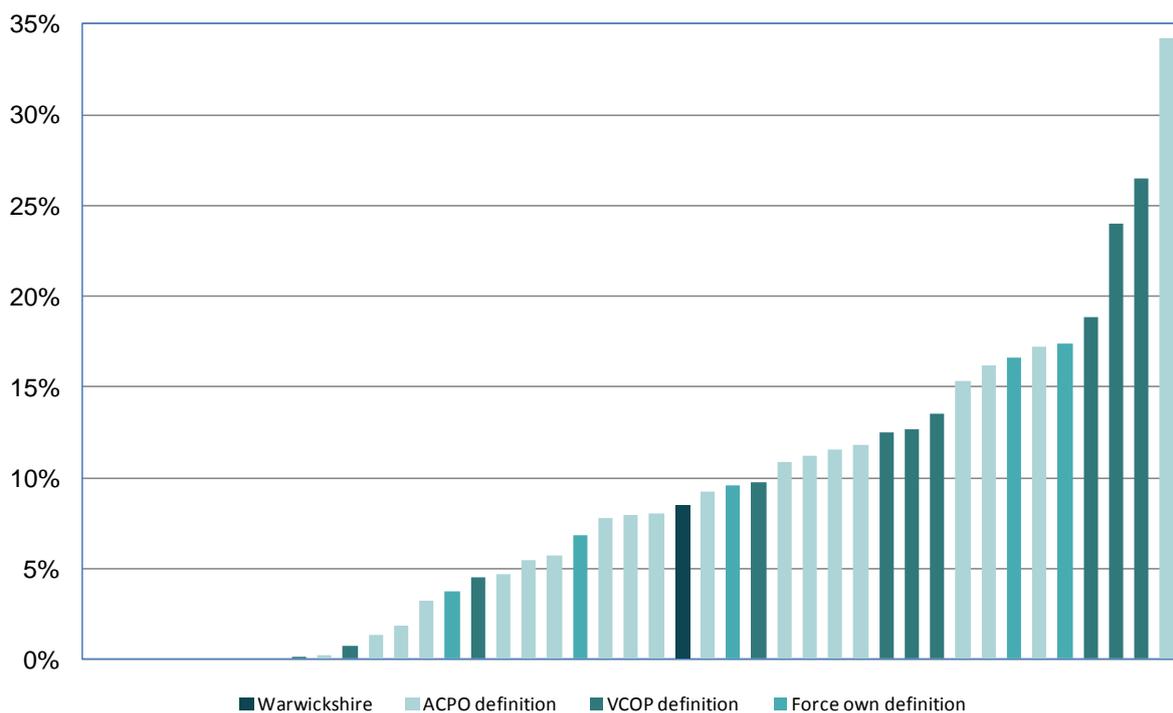
“Any person aged 18 years or over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental, physical, or learning disability, age or illness AND is or may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.”

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/

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, 8.5 percent of all recorded crimes in Warwickshire 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

The systems and processes in place across both forces, both at police station enquiry desks and in the operational control centre (OCC), enable staff easily to identify if someone is a repeat victim at the time when he or she reports a crime. As a further check, once an incident which could lead to vulnerability is recorded by a call-taker, colleagues within the OCC use an additional search. This information is used systematically to check for any previous contact with the police and to check for any risk markers. This frees up the call-taker to concentrate on dealing with the victim and obtaining the best quality of information possible to decide on the response needed.

Call-takers are also provided with sets of questions for specific types of incident, such as domestic abuse and missing persons, to ensure that the right information is obtained to assess the risks properly. For example, the question set for missing children directs the call-taker to ask about any known potential risk of child sexual exploitation.

Although enquiry desk staff have received little training in identifying vulnerability, they routinely demonstrate an approach which put the needs of the victim first. They then use professional judgement to assess the level of risk and the appropriate police response. However, the vast majority of calls for service are received in the OCC, where we found a less consistent response:

- in domestic abuse incidents, call-takers show good empathy and provide a service that meets the needs of victims; but
- in other cases where risks to the victim may not be as immediately obvious, the call-takers gather information in a more mechanical fashion, with less emphasis on the nature of the vulnerability of the victim.

The strategic alliance has adopted a grading policy which specifies the speed of response required according to both the type of incident and the level of assessed risk. The policy is well-understood by both front office and OCC staff. However, we found that in some cases the focus was on deciding the level of response based on the perceived seriousness of the crime, rather than on an assessment of the nature of the vulnerability of a victim. In addition, HMIC found that dispatchers, who deploy officers to incidents via radio, sometimes revert to sending the nearest available response unit to an incident, even when a specialist response would have been more appropriate to meet the needs of the victim.

Assessing levels of risk and need

Warwickshire Police's approach to the assessment of risk and vulnerability requires improvement in some cases. We found that staff throughout the force had a varied understanding of vulnerability, resulting in a lack of clarity and an inconsistent approach towards the identification and assessment of risk.

In the case of domestic abuse incidents, we found that some officers do not always appreciate the nature and complexity of abusive relationships and therefore sometimes fail fully to recognise and respond appropriately to risk.

We also found that the standard of completion of the risk assessment when attending domestic abuse incidents is variable. Officers are required to complete a domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence (DASH)³ risk assessment form, and we found that some assessments lack detail, while others are incomplete. All DASH risk assessments are reviewed and graded by the harm assessment unit (HAU).

³ Most forces use the DASH risk identification, assessment and management model: www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/risk-and-vulnerability/#approaches-to-risk-assessment

The inconsistent quality of the initial DASH risk assessment means that the HAU has to do additional work is required by the HAU to assess properly the risk and may mean that the force does not understand fully some vulnerable victims' needs.

HMIC found examples of looked after children who were correctly assessed as being in the missing person category, but the assessment of risk was lower than we would expect. We also found looked after children who had been inappropriately categorised as an unauthorised absence rather than missing. This means they may not get the protection and support they need from the police and other organisations.

The force has started to place an automatic alert on its IT systems to highlight those identified as being at a high-risk of child sexual exploitation. The force has also begun to use 'trigger plans' to assist in regular missing persons cases. Trigger plans provide valuable information based on previous incidents where a child has gone missing to assist with the risk assessment and locating the child quickly. However, Warwickshire Police does not yet routinely use these tools.

This inconsistent approach to responding to looked after missing children and assessing the risks to domestic abuse victims means the force is not always fully addressing the needs of some of the most vulnerable victims.

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

After the force has identified a victim as vulnerable, it must assess his or her risk of harm, so it can provide a service which best meets these needs. HMIC found an improving focus in Warwickshire on identifying the needs of vulnerable victims. For example, the strategic alliance has undertaken detailed analysis of the scale and nature of both domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation across the county. However, it has not carried out similar research into the problem of missing children and young people, although the force has conducted analysis with partners to identify care homes with looked after children who frequently go missing.

The strategic alliance monitors data from all of its areas of business to understand trends in crime, levels of force performance and areas of risk. Quarterly performance meetings consider this information to determine how best to respond where improvement is needed or risk identified. However, the force acknowledges that this work is in its formative stages.

The force has provided some training in identifying vulnerability, most notably to call-handling staff and specialist investigators. In addition to classroom-based training, the force uses online training packages, which provide staff with access to relevant information. However, the force has identified that not all frontline staff are using the same training. This may be resulting in an inconsistent approach.

How well does the force initially respond to vulnerable victims?⁴

In many cases, Warwickshire Police responds well to victims, but this is inconsistent. We found that some officers do not always recognise and respond appropriately to the nature of victims' vulnerability, which undermines the effectiveness of force processes to keep vulnerable victims safe. In particular, we found inconsistencies in the approach to domestic abuse risk assessment and in the way the force deals with missing children. As well as this inconsistent approach to risk assessment, we also found some unsupportive attitudes towards victims and others who are vulnerable.

Response officers

Protecting people from harm is a strategic priority for the alliance. However, we found that some staff are exhibiting unsupportive attitudes towards some vulnerable people, particularly in the case of repeat victims of domestic abuse and repeat missing children cases. We found that in these cases some officers may be providing a less proactive response, as a result of a lack of appreciation of the increased vulnerability and risks faced by such victims.

When vulnerability is recognised, frontline staff show a good awareness of the range of tactics available to safeguard victims. Finding alternative accommodation for victims, the use of bail conditions for suspects and the use of domestic violence prevention notices (DVPNs)⁵ are routinely used to mitigate the risk of further harm to victims. Partners working with the police in the field of domestic abuse recognise the quality of the police response in providing initial safeguarding measures in many cases.

The strategic alliance has a well-used and widely-understood system for referring cases to partner organisations who may be better-placed to provide the necessary support to vulnerable victims. When vulnerability is identified, response staff make written referrals to the harm assessment unit (HAU), which reviews the case and makes onward referrals to other organisations. Staff can also make direct referrals where circumstances require a more immediate response from a partner organisation. For example, the health and social care emergency duty team (EDT) is frequently contacted out-of-hours to discuss cases of vulnerable children and adults.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

Supervisors generally play an active role in checking and approving the initial response to vulnerable victims. For instance, they are notified by the control room of all new incidents of domestic abuse. They then check the risk assessment and the quality of the initial investigation conducted by the response officer. When investigations are ongoing, including those conducted by specialist staff, we found that line managers provide some effective supervision with sound investigation plans and regular reviews.

However, we found that some missing and absent persons investigations are not effectively supervised at all stages to quality-assure risk assessment, provide guidance for safeguarding and give clear direction for investigations.

How well does the force investigate offences involving vulnerable victims and work with partners to keep victims safe?⁶

HMIC found that investigations are generally carried out to a good standard, with regular review of the risk to the victim and contact maintained throughout the investigation. The strategic alliance works effectively with a variety of partner organisations which share information and safeguard victims.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

HMIC reviewed 40 investigations,⁷ some of which related to vulnerable victims. We found that investigations are generally carried out to a good standard, with regular review of the risk to the victim and contact maintained throughout the investigation. The strategic alliance works effectively with a variety of agencies and local authorities to share information and safeguard victims.

Investigators competently assess risk and apply a range of safeguarding measures. There was clear evidence of sound investigation plans and reviews by supervisors. We found investigators agreeing the frequency of updates on investigation plans, and evidence that they were keeping to this and providing regular updates to victims.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

The force has specialist staff within its protecting vulnerable people (PVP) unit to provide tailored support to vulnerable victims and investigate offences requiring specialist skills. Accredited and specially-trained investigators are available to interview vulnerable victims, children or victims of domestic abuse. However, we found that refresher training for specialist investigators is limited, and that staff rely mainly on carrying out research themselves to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

Although crimes are generally allocated according to the capacity available in different teams, the complexity of the case and any risk factors are taken into consideration. If a crime is allocated to an officer without the required skills, an investigator with the necessary skills is nominated to support and assist.

We found a continual assessment of risk, vulnerability and safeguarding needs throughout the investigation. This is supervised by a detective sergeant, with high-risk cases also reviewed by the harm assessment unit to ensure safeguarding issues and partnership support is appropriate.

Due to the limited resources available, PVP specialist teams do not routinely work outside of office hours or at the weekend and there is no on-call service. Given that many partner agencies also work primarily the same hours, this may leave a gap in service provision for victims. Out of hours, response and CID officers commence investigations and provide immediate safeguarding, which is then later reviewed and quality-assured by the harm assessment unit.

The force has reviewed the workload and potential future demand of the PVP department and has taken steps to increase the resources available. Staff in the department are currently finding it difficult to deal with the volume of work allocated and work-related stress within the unit is reported to be high. This results in some investigations not being completed in a timely manner.

Compliance with the code of practice for victims of crime

Generally, staff have a good understanding of the requirements of Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. Regular updates are provided to victims at the appropriate times during investigations, and the use of victim personal statements⁸ is encouraged and found to be of a good standard. However staff do not consistently identify at an early stage whether victims require special measures in court to assist them when providing evidence.

⁸ 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.

We found little evidence of officers receiving and acting on feedback from victims. To address this issue, the force is working with the independent domestic violence advocacy (IDVA) service to establish focus groups for victims of domestic abuse, so that feedback from victims can be listened to and acted upon.

Working with partners

The strategic alliance works effectively with a variety of agencies and local authorities who share information and safeguard victims. The HAU acts as the single point of contact for the alliance in all safeguarding cases. We found good partnership working arrangements between the police and partners throughout the strategic alliance, backed by well-established information sharing protocols.

Staff within the PVP department recognise the value of working with partner organisations to ensure that positive outcomes are achieved for vulnerable victims. Partner organisations, including IDVAs, reported that they have excellent working relationships with the police. The care given to victims by police officers and staff is generally viewed as good and improving. Where specialist officers are involved in investigations, partners view the standard as being uniformly high.

There are a number of meeting structures and information-sharing protocols in place to support information exchange and partnership working. There is currently no multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)⁹ covering Warwickshire. The HAUs fulfil a similar function. There are plans in place to develop each of the HAUs across the alliance into a MASH.

The processes used by each of the HAUs to safeguard victims are generally consistent; however variations in working practices exist to accommodate the requirements of the different agencies and local authority areas across the alliance, principally due to variations that exist in the different local authority areas.

Warwickshire Police participates actively in multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)¹⁰ with professionals from other bodies in order to safeguard those considered to be at the highest risk of harm from domestic abuse. As part of the inspection, HMIC observed a conference and found good participation by those present, with clear evidence that the conference was enabling effective safeguarding of victims and children through information-sharing and joint safety-planning.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ MARACs (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) – local meetings where information about high risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies.

The force is good at using its specialist functions to safeguard and protect victims. There are 25 domestic abuse risk officers (DAROs) within the domestic abuse units and they are supervised by detective sergeants. High-risk domestic abuse cases go to the HAU and then to a DARO who creates a risk management plan and puts in place safeguarding measures (such as referral to MARAC).

DAROs have a very good understanding of domestic abuse issues. They regularly consult with IDVAs and carry out joint visits to domestic abuse victims and both attend the MARAC in order to safeguard victims.

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

The first three questions have explained how the force identifies those that are vulnerable, the response that is provided to them and what action the force takes to investigate crimes and to work with partners to keep them 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

Finding and protecting missing children is a clear priority for the force. Investigations are discussed at daily management meetings and care is taken to ensure that supervisors pass on all appropriate details in handover meetings between shifts until the missing young person is found. The force employs three missing person coordinators who are responsible for the management and monitoring of missing persons, with a particular focus on high-risk missing children.

The strategic alliance's missing person policy sets out the expectation of officers who are conducting missing person investigations. Risks are assessed and the case graded in accordance with the policy. However, HMIC found evidence that vulnerabilities of missing persons (particularly in repeat cases involving children) are not fully recognised, and therefore risks are not consistently being accurately assessed. This means that the police response at this first contact may not provide the right level of safeguarding and protection to missing children.

In certain circumstances, national guidance permits young people to be categorised by the police as absent rather than missing. A child or young person is classified as absent if they are not where they are expected to be but they are not considered to be 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.

The police response for children categorised as absent is very much downscaled and no immediate investigation begins unless the child fails to return some time later. It is positive that the policy within the strategic alliance states that looked after children should never be classified as 'absent', in recognition that they are already a vulnerable group who need to be properly supported and protected.

However, force policy allows an additional category for looked after children of 'unauthorised absence'. The police response to unauthorised absence is very similar to that of absent. In practice, the policy means that looked after children can be missing from their homes for up to six hours without the force being informed and without any police investigation to determine their whereabouts.

HMIC also found that cases of looked after children with identified risks are categorised as 'unauthorised absence'. This means that some looked after children may not get the proper protection and safeguarding. In addition the risks to looked after children with regular unauthorised absences may not be properly identified. For example, they may be at risk of sexual exploitation, which could be missed.

We also found examples of looked after children that had been categorised correctly as missing but where the assessment of risk was lower than we would expect. In some cases supervisors are intervening to adjust the assessment but in other cases the supervisors' input serves only to reinforce the inappropriate assessment of risk. The consequence of the force understating the risk to potentially vulnerable children is that investigations are not being progressed with sufficient vigour to keep children and young people safe. Furthermore, the force does not then have an opportunity to assess any additional risks relevant to such children, or to gather intelligence to assist with managing the risk.

Initial missing and absent investigations are carried out by response teams with an expectation of periodic reviews by inspectors. Further reviews by detective inspectors and senior investigating officers are completed based on the level of risk and the circumstances of the case. If missing children are categorised as a medium or low-risk and remain missing for more than 24 hours, then the investigation is conducted by safer neighbourhood teams. The force always has a specially-trained police search advisor available to assist with missing person investigations on a call-out basis.

There is a statutory requirement for local authorities to conduct interviews with all missing children when they return home. The purpose of these interviews is to check that the child is safe, to identify any safeguarding actions and to understand the reasons why they went missing. They are also a useful source of intelligence about where the child went and who they were with, which can be helpful if they go missing again. However, we found that the processes in place for the police to receive and record intelligence arising from these interviews are inconsistent. In Warwickshire, not all returning home children are interviewed, due to high demand and limited

capacity among local council social workers. Visits are instead limited to those children perceived as at greater risk. This practice is restricting information available to assist the force in resolving future incidents or intervening to prevent re-occurrence.

Student police officers receive initial training on the investigation of missing persons and the risks posed due to the nature of their vulnerability. However there is no additional training or refresher training provision beyond the computer-based online learning packages. The force intranet contains guidance information for officers who are investigating missing persons and the force is looking to develop an external web based guidance package for members of the public on the force website.

Preparedness to tackle child sexual exploitation

This inspection has focused on actions and activities that 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 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.

Warwickshire Police has made an encouraging start in preparing to tackle child sexual exploitation. However, further work is required to ensure that the processes and procedures are sufficiently robust to ensure that young people at risk are consistently protected and supported.

Tackling child sexual exploitation is identified as a strategic priority for the alliance. The forces undertook a comprehensive joint analysis in September 2014, to better understand the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation across the two force areas. This is currently being updated. This better understanding is enabling the force to develop services and processes to identify offenders and protect victims. There is a strong focus on identifying and tackling organised crime groups which may be involved in child sexual exploitation.

The force has information-sharing protocols in place with partner organisations and all available information is used to ensure a more thorough understanding of the problem. The force is working constructively with care homes better to protect looked after children. However, the policy of categorising incidents of young people going missing from children's homes as 'unauthorised absence' is potentially limiting the force's understanding of the true extent of child sexual exploitation.

The senior leadership team demonstrates a clear commitment to tackling child sexual exploitation. Across the alliance's two force areas there are three separately-located specialist child sexual exploitation teams, each led by a detective inspector, focusing upon child sexual exploitation issues at a local level.

In some parts of the strategic alliance these teams share offices with partner organisations, which assists with information-sharing and joint working.

Warwickshire has a large number of both local authority and private care homes, many of which accommodate vulnerable children from other localities. The child sexual exploitation teams, missing person coordinators and safer neighbourhood teams engage well with local care homes to monitor and support young people at a high risk of child sexual exploitation. They work together to develop individual risk management plans to ensure their collective response is coordinated and effective. This approach is supported by police community support officers (PCSOs) and neighbourhood officers who work in schools where the potential risk of child sexual exploitation has been identified.

The provision of training across the strategic alliance in relation to child sexual exploitation, and vulnerability generally, is inconsistent and the force acknowledges that there is a skills gap. In order to enhance staff understanding of vulnerability, the force is currently developing 'professional curiosity' training¹¹ with Warwick University, with the aim of improving the identification of child sexual exploitation risks and other vulnerabilities. The force has produced its own computer-based training material, although not all staff have accessed this.

Domestic abuse

Tackling domestic abuse is also a priority for the strategic alliance. The force is addressing all of the issues raised in HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014 and has improved the service it provides to victims. Most of the recommendations made by HMIC have been fully implemented and the action plan to complete the remainder is subject to regular oversight by the head of PVP.

The analysis of the nature and scale of the problem across the alliance is kept up to date. HMIC is encouraged to find that in most cases a quality service is delivered. However, there are some areas for improvement in the way risk is assessed and vulnerability is understood.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by 103 percent against the previous 12 months and accounted for 9 percent of all police recorded crime. The force attributes this large increase to victims feeling more confident to report domestic abuse and improvements in the accuracy of police crime recording. 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.

¹¹ Training which seeks to enhance officers' inquisitiveness with a view to improving their ability to recognise vulnerability and/or suspicious behaviour.

Initial safeguarding measures are effectively put in place following the first attendance at the scene. Risk assessments are completed by the attending officer and then reviewed by the HAU and specialist domestic abuse risk officers (DAROs) to ensure the assessment is accurate. Incidents cannot be closed until the risk assessment form has been completed.

Feedback via partner organisations shows generally positive feedback from victims about the service they get from the police. However, on occasions it shows that some officers do not always appreciate fully the dynamics of domestic abuse incidents and are failing to recognise and respond appropriately to risks posed.

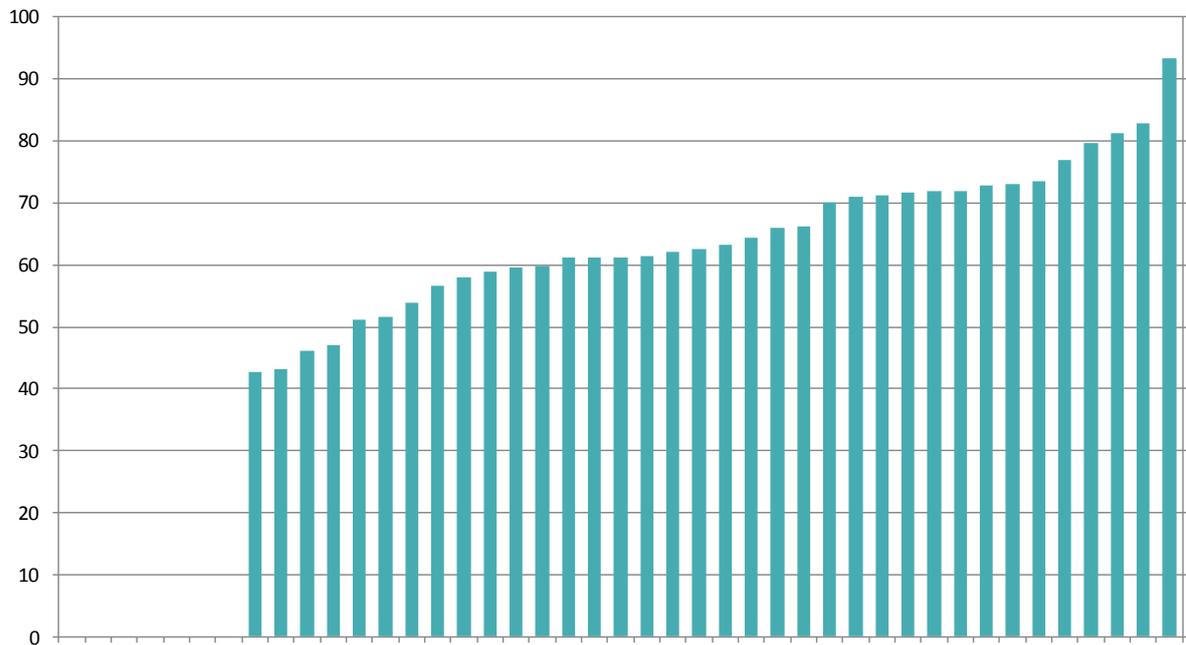
The alliance works effectively with partners in relation to the management of domestic abuse cases, readily sharing information with partners to assist with safeguarding and taking action to support victims. There is a strong partnership commitment and a well understood referral mechanism. The force has good engagement with the MARAC process for cases assessed as high risk, and the provision and availability of independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) across the alliance is good.

Domestic abuse risk officers (DAROs) deal with the high-risk cases and safer neighbourhood teams deal with medium and standard-risk cases. The DAROs are based across the alliance area and conduct follow-up safeguarding activity after the initial response, often working closely with other organisations.

Partners generally hold the police in high regard for their overall victim-centred approach towards domestic abuse, particularly praising the professionalism, knowledge and skills that DAROs demonstrate. DAROs have undergone joint training with partner agencies and it is evident that this assists in building relationships and a shared understanding of roles to assist and support victims of domestic abuse.

The way Warwickshire Police records data on its crime and custody systems does not allow the force to provide data on arrest rates for domestic abuse offences. Warwickshire Police was one of seven forces which could not provide this data, so it is not shown below in figure 2.

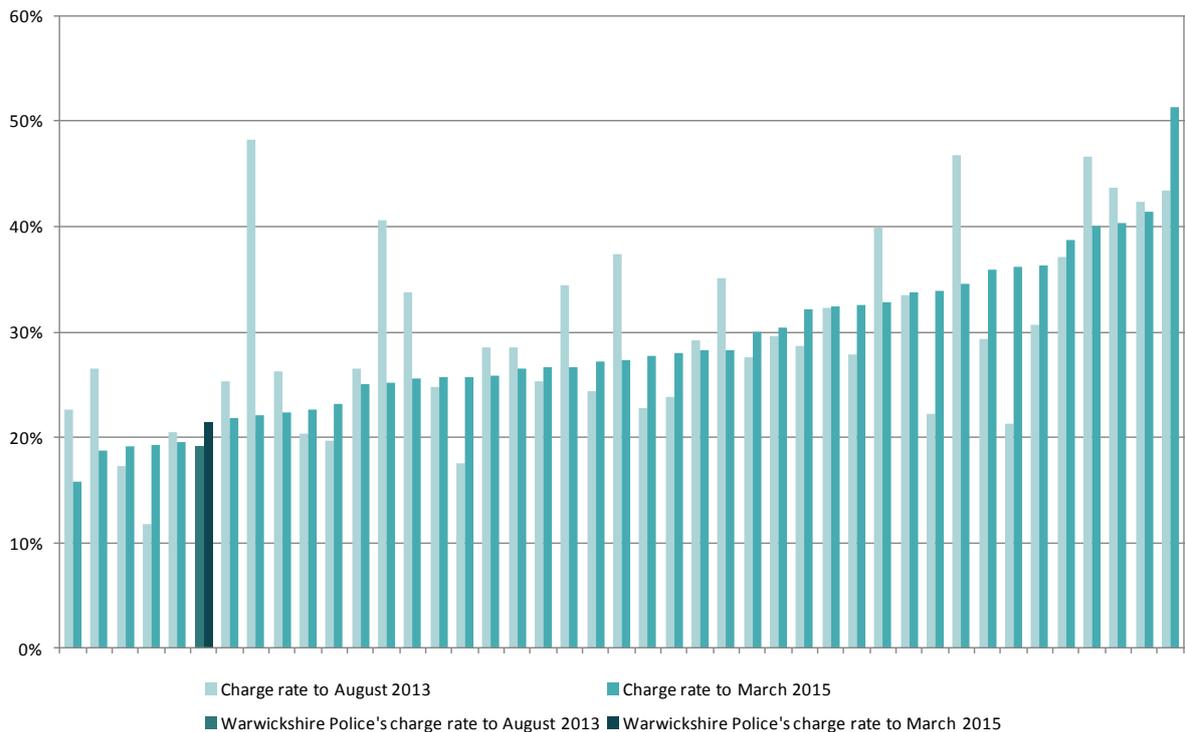
Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015



Source: HMIC data return

The force’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 21 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This represents an increase since HMIC’s domestic abuse inspection in 2014, when the force rate was 19 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 started using DVPOs on the 1st June 2014; it made 24 applications to magistrates’ courts for their use. The force did not provide data on how many DVPOs have been granted or breached. Breaches occur when the offender fails to comply with the condition of the order and is taken back before the magistrates’ court.

Summary of findings



Requires improvement

Warwickshire Police generally provides a good service in identifying vulnerable victims and responds appropriately with its partners, and the public can be confident that many victims are well-supported. However, in some areas improvement is needed to ensure that the force provides a consistent service to victims, and gives vulnerable people (particularly missing children) the response they need and keeps them safe.

HMIC found that the force's approach to responding to vulnerable missing children and assessing the risks to domestic abuse victims is not consistently good enough. This means that the force is not always fully addressing the needs of some of the most vulnerable victims. However, where risk and vulnerability has been correctly identified, the force's response to victims is good.

Generally, investigations into crimes against vulnerable victims and victims assessed as high risk are conducted by specialists to a satisfactory standard with effective supervision. The force works well with partner organisations to share information and jointly safeguard and support victims.

This inspection only considered how well prepared the force is to tackle child sexual exploitation. The force has made an encouraging start in ensuring it is adequately prepared to tackle child sexual exploitation, however some of its missing persons processes mean that further work is required if the public can be confident that this preparation is sufficient.

Causes of concern

The force's response to missing and absent children is a cause of concern for HMIC. HMIC found some weaknesses in the way the force assesses the risks to children and young people who go missing. The force is not identifying factors that should escalate the risk assessment, such as the child being at risk of sexual exploitation. This means that the police response is not consistently providing the right level of safeguarding and protection to missing children, especially children in care, who are already among the most vulnerable in society. Investigations are of a variable quality and there are concerns regarding supervision. Information from previous missing episodes is not consistently used to develop safeguarding and investigation plans.

Recommendation

To address this cause of concern, HMIC recommends the force should immediately take steps to ensure that:

- frontline staff understand and appropriately use the categories 'missing' and 'absent', and identify the factors that escalate the risk of harm to children;
- supervisors provide the correct oversight of missing person investigations and make appropriate decisions in accordance with the risk assessment; and
- it improves its response to persistent and repeat missing children, through effective use of information from previous missing episodes to develop a co-ordinated and prioritised response.

Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its response to vulnerable victims by reviewing the behaviour of staff towards vulnerability and evaluating the effectiveness of its training, learning and development.
- The force should improve its compliance with its duties under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, specifically in relation to the use of special measures.
- The force should improve its response to domestic abuse by ensuring that its frontline staff understand the dynamics of domestic abuse to support victims better. It should also ensure that risk assessments are carried out to the appropriate standard, with effective supervision.