

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2015 (Vulnerability)

An inspection of Leicestershire Police



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Vulnerability in numbers



Calls for assistance

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

Leicestershire Police England and Wales

213

350

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

Leicestershire Police England and Wales

15.1

15.8



Crime

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

Leicestershire Police England and Wales

56.7

61.6

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

Leicestershire Police England and Wales

-2.7%

+2.2%

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

Leicestershire Police England and Wales

16.2%

10.7%

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

Leicestershire Police England and Wales

10.3%

10.0%

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

Leicestershire Police England and Wales

+2.3%

+20.8%



Domestic abuse arrest rate

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

Leicestershire Police

England and Wales

43

66



Charge rate

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

Leicestershire Police

England and Wales

15.8%

16.6%

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

Leicestershire Police

England and Wales

25.0%

27.3%



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction rate 12 months to 31 March 2015

Leicestershire Police

England and Wales

81.8%

83.8%

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 Leicestershire Police.

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

Summary



Requires improvement

Leicestershire Police generally provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and responds well initially to meet the needs of victims who are vulnerable. However, there are important areas where improvement is needed to ensure the service is consistent and vulnerable people are properly protected, particularly in relation to some victims of domestic abuse and the investigating of online child sexual exploitation. We found that there are sometimes delays in conducting investigations which potentially places vulnerable victims at greater risk. Given the risk that these weaknesses pose to some of the most vulnerable people, HMIC judges that overall the force requires improvement.

Protecting vulnerable people from harm is a high priority for Leicestershire Police. It has invested in specialist teams and constructive partnership arrangements to improve the service it provides to vulnerable victims. It has also provided a progressive and ongoing training package to staff covering a wide range of vulnerability issues. However more work is needed by the force to ensure that vulnerable victims get a consistent quality of service from the police to meet their needs. The force has strong and constructive relations with partner organisations, and is active in engaging with the diverse local communities and their representative groups. The force needs to improve its understanding of the scale and nature of crime against vulnerable people so that it can be sure that its services best meet their needs. It has recognised this gap and is conducting an assessment using a problem profile.¹

The force is generally good at identifying and responding to those who are vulnerable, and properly assessing their risk at the first point of contact so that the most appropriate police response can be deployed. However, there are significant delays in the allocation of investigations, including those involving vulnerable victims. This means that investigative opportunities and, importantly, the provision of safeguards to protect victims may, on occasions, be lost, putting at risk both the safety of the victim and the ability to bring the offender to justice.

¹ A problem profile is intended to provide the force greater understanding of established and emerging

The force also needs to ensure that officers consistently comply with the code of practice for victims of crime, so that victims always get the quality of service they have a right to expect.

The management of missing children has improved and the force has set up a dedicated missing person team. The service provided to the highest-risk victims of domestic abuse is good; however the force is applying an enhanced risk assessment to those cases initially graded as high-risk which has led to a large number of cases being downgraded. This may either indicate that the initial assessments are incorrect or it may be an indicator that the force is downgrading cases in order to reduce demand on its specialist domestic abuse unit. Some officers and IDVAs we spoke to were concerned about the downgrading of cases initially graded as high risk and we note that the force has one of the lowest proportions of high-risk cases in the country. The force needs to understand why it is downgrading so many high risk cases to reassure itself that the assessment process is working correctly. While the service to highest-risk victims of domestic abuse is good, there are inconsistencies in the quality of safeguarding for other domestic abuse victims.

The force has put in place a team dedicated to dealing with investigations into child sexual exploitation which is staffed by detectives who are well trained and experienced. There is also a small team dedicated to tackling online child sexual exploitation; however its lack of capacity to deal with the increasing workload is undermining its effectiveness. This inspection considered how well prepared the constabulary is to tackle child sexual exploitation.

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

Leicestershire Police works well to identify vulnerable victims with a strong focus on properly assessing the risk they face at the earliest opportunity to ensure the most appropriate police response can be provided. However, there is a need for greater consistency regarding those at risk of child sexual exploitation to ensure that these very vulnerable children are properly protected.

Protecting vulnerable people from harm is a priority in the police and crime commissioner's (PCC's) police and crime plan for Leicestershire. It is clear that both the PCC and the chief constable are committed to ensuring the needs of vulnerable victims are properly assessed and met. Additional resources have been invested in improving services to vulnerable victims, but more work is needed by the force to ensure that all vulnerable groups get a consistent quality of service from the police to meet their needs.

Identifying those who are vulnerable

The force is generally good at identifying vulnerable victims when they first contact the police and also identifying those who are already known to the police from previous incidents. However, there is some room for improvement. The IT systems used by the force enable markers to be placed on the records to show that an individual is vulnerable in some way. When a 999 or 101 call is received in the force contact centre, and a new incident log is started, the call handler will be alerted to the fact that either this person has previously been a victim or that they have previously been identified as vulnerable. HMIC found that there is currently no such marker being used to identify a child known to be at risk of sexual exploitation which means that the police's initial response may not be as effective as it could be in such 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 Crime² or that referred to in ACPO guidance.³ Nine forces use their own definition or a combination of these definitions. Leicestershire uses the definition from the ACPO guidance and defines a vulnerable adult as:

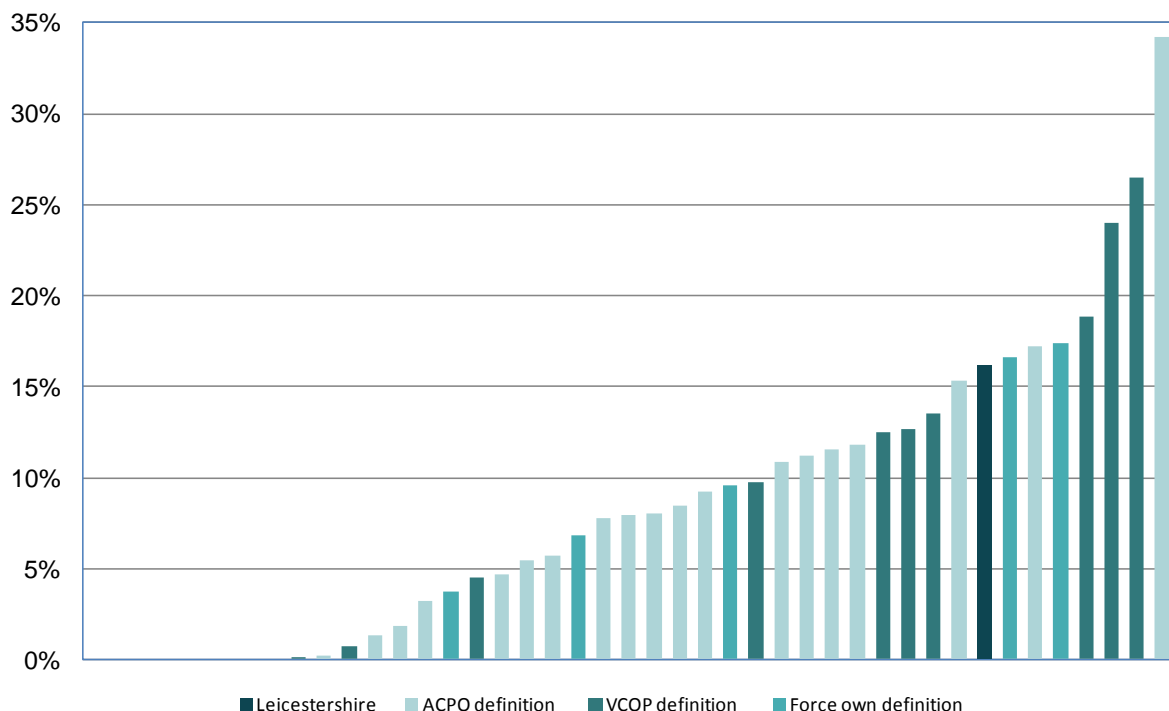
"Any person aged 18 years or over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental, physical, or learning disability, age or illness AND is or may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation."

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, 16.2 percent of all recorded crimes in Leicestershire 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.

² *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

³ The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is now the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). *ACPO Guidance on Safeguarding and Investigating the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults*, NPIA, 2012. Available from www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/vulnerable-adults/

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

Leicestershire Police recognises that its response to calls should be determined by the needs of the victim rather than the type of crime. Staff in the force contact centre use a structured approach to assessing the levels of risk for each call for police help that they receive. The approach is based on the level of threat, harm and risk posed by the incident, known as THRIVE (threat; harm; risk; investigation; vulnerability and engagement). The technique provides the staff receiving calls for police attendance with a way of making a fully-rounded decision about the relative risk to the individual victim, the level of threat, and the opportunities to investigate a crime. This enables the police response to be more proportionate to the risk and threat to the victim, and to make better judgments on whether police attendance should be immediate and what type of resource needs to be sent, or whether a later follow-up service is preferable. Call-handling staff are trained in the use of careful questioning techniques to enable them to properly assess the risk and identify any vulnerability that the attending officer would need to be aware of.

Furthermore, calls we listened to from those reporting domestic abuse demonstrated an effective and empathetic response from call-handlers. Other domestic abuse professionals from partner organisations also confirmed that victims who called the police consider that the response from the call-takers to be helpful and supportive.

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

In terms of the police then providing services that best meet the victim's needs, HMIC found that across Leicestershire there is a mixed picture. The force has invested additional resources in specialist teams dealing with vulnerable victims. There are some areas for improvement in how well the force understands the risks faced by some vulnerable groups which leads to inconsistencies in the support provided by the police in some cases.

For example, the force has created a specialist domestic abuse investigation unit. The service provided by the unit to high-risk domestic abuse victims is good. Highly-trained detectives work alongside other domestic abuse professionals who safeguard victims from further harm. However where domestic abuse victims are assessed as at lower risk, and are not dealt with by the specialist unit, the quality of safeguarding provided is inconsistent.

The force has provided additional resource to create a dedicated team to oversee the investigation of persons who are reported missing. This has led to a recent improvement in the force's management of missing persons investigations which gives greater confidence that cases of missing children and young people are investigated effectively and supervised well.

We found some commendable work to commit resources to reinvestigate historic child sexual abuse cases. However, HMIC is less confident that the force has the capacity to manage effectively the growing demand for services to children at risk of online sexual exploitation. The workload in the specialist team dealing with this area is outstripping its capacity to maintain an effective response.

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

The initial response Leicestershire Police provides to vulnerable victims is generally effective. Officers who attend first have a good understanding of risk and vulnerability. However there are a number of areas for improvement. Most notably HMIC is concerned at the significant delays in allocating cases for investigation, which not only limit the subsequent ability to gather the best evidence, it also means that vulnerable victims may be left at risk of harm.

Response officers

Frontline officers who attend incidents in the first instance have a good understanding of risk and vulnerability, and are aware of both the force commitment and their responsibility to assess the risks and take appropriate safeguarding action. The initial response to domestic abuse is generally of a good standard with effective initial safeguarding and investigations taking place. Officers routinely complete risk assessments of domestic abuse victims, known as DASH risk identifications,⁵ which enable a systematic assessment of the risk factors and inform the development of a plan to safeguard the victim. Officers are encouraged to combine this formal risk assessment with professional judgment to determine the level of risk and respond accordingly. The force's consistent approach to the assessment of risk provides a firm platform to consider the needs of victims.

Leicestershire police is to be commended for being one of only a few forces that issue body worn video cameras to its officers and is in the process of allocating cameras to all front line officers and PCSOs as personal issue. National good practice shows that video evidence captured at the initial attendance can represent compelling evidence of domestic abuse, capturing the demeanour of the victim and the perpetrator, as well as any physical injuries or damage to property. In many cases this type of police evidence can mean that a reluctant victim does not need to give evidence in court, and the prosecution is more likely to secure a guilty plea. However, although Leicestershire Police is issuing body-worn video cameras to officers, some were unclear on the force policy relating to body-worn video cameras when attending domestic abuse investigations.

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

⁵ Most forces use the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence risk identification, assessment and management model (DASH): www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/risk-and-vulnerability/#approaches-to-risk-assessment

The force should make clear to officers its expectations on the deployment and use of this equipment in domestic abuse cases.

As the use of body-worn video becomes more established in the force, it should also consider reviewing video evidence from domestic abuse incidents as a means of monitoring the quality of police investigations. HMIC dip-sampled the video footage of three domestic abuse cases. In two of the three cases we assessed officers as being too tolerant towards the abusive behaviour of offenders, although arrests were made. The force should reassure itself that this is not more widespread.

HMIC is concerned that the force's ability to respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable people in a timely manner is hampered on occasions by a significant backlog of cases in the force's Investigation Management Unit (IMU). This unit is responsible for assessing reported crimes and allocating them to officers for investigation. The backlog includes crimes relating to domestic abuse as well as child sexual exploitation allegations. This may mean that investigative opportunities and importantly the provision of safeguards to protect victims could be lost, putting at risk both the safety of the victim and the ability to bring the offender to justice. It is noteworthy that the force had already recognised this backlog as a critical threat at the time of the inspection and had appointed a senior officer to implement new procedures to improve the management of cases within the system.

In the meantime the force needs to review all cases pending allocation in the IMU and ensure that those involving high risk and vulnerable victims are dealt with as a priority.

Supervision of the response to vulnerable victims

Supervision at the first point of contact in the force contact centre, when somebody calls for police help is effective. Supervisors check the quality of risk assessments by call handlers, making changes where necessary and monitor the quality of call handing.

There is intrusive supervision of the initial contact with domestic abuse victims, risk assessments are reviewed by sergeants who are responsible for authorising them and amending the assessment as appropriate. Similarly with investigations into missing persons, the initial risk assessment is undertaken by a sergeant and if the case is perceived to be higher risk, a more senior officer will oversee the case and direct the investigation.

In addition specialist supervisors from the missing persons' team (MPT) are available to provide support and guidance to investigations. HMIC is encouraged to see that this included challenging previous decisions on the level of risk and insisting that particular lines of enquiry are pursued.

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

While Leicestershire Police has increased its capacity to improve the investigation of crimes committed against vulnerable people, HMIC found that subsequent safeguarding activity is an area where the force needs to improve its service to the public. The challenge for the force is to provide its services consistently to support and protect all victims, with appropriate additional measures to safeguard vulnerable victims. The quality of victim safeguarding provided by the specialist teams is good, with officers showing a sound understanding of the needs of vulnerable victims. However, the safeguarding activity undertaken by non-specialist investigators is not consistently as good. Given that the non-specialist teams investigate the vast majority of crimes, this means that a potentially significant number of victims may not be getting the protection and support they need from the police in Leicestershire.

Investigation of crimes involving vulnerable people

Investigations carried out by staff in the domestic abuse investigation unit are of a consistently good quality, characterised by detailed investigation plans and timely interventions on behalf of victims. Staff within the unit are highly trained investigators, nationally accredited to advanced levels. The force is working hard to professionalise investigations, with a programme to encourage staff throughout the force to undertake training and professional accreditation. The unit deals with all high risk and some medium risk domestic abuse cases, the force can be confident that these victims are getting a good service to keep them safe and bring their abusers to justice. However, most medium-risk and all standard-risk domestic abuse cases are dealt with by the force investigation unit. Here, although the quality of investigation is again good, we found that officers have limited understanding of their role and responsibilities for safeguarding victims. We found officers are unsure who has responsibility for putting measures in place to safeguard victims. The force sets as a minimum requirement that all victims should be provided with contact information for domestic violence victims' services, who can offer additional support to victims. However, this is not happening in all cases.

After the initial investigation by the force investigation unit, staff from the neighbourhood teams are expected to follow-up with visits to the victim to ensure all necessary safeguarding action is undertaken to keep the victim and their family safe.

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.

We found that this is not happening consistently. Staff are being given these tasks without the full case history and in some cases do not have sufficient knowledge of safeguarding. This means that some victims may not be getting the support and protection they need from the police.

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,⁷ at the earliest opportunity which they can use to explain how the crime has affected them. However, HMIC found that in Leicestershire not all victims were offered this opportunity at the appropriate time. This may mean that the victim's voice in the criminal justice process may not be heard as well as it should, and is contrary to the victim's code of practice.

We did find that officers recognise the importance of victim care and we found that staff were good at offering special measures to vulnerable victims, to support them through the court process; which can be very traumatic for a vulnerable witness. For example domestic abuse victims are frequently offered the option to give evidence via a video link rather than attending court. This can often make the difference between victims being prepared to support the police in a prosecution or withdrawing their support.

Working with partners

Leicestershire Police has developed strong and constructive relationships with local partner organisations. Effective partnership working is enabling better information sharing and joined-up approaches to support and protect vulnerable victims and their families.

Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)⁸ are held bringing together the police with professionals from the local authorities and other Leicestershire organisations in order to safeguard those considered to be at the highest risk of harm. HMIC observed two MARAC meetings, which were well-attended by the relevant agencies.

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 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.

⁸ 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.

We found that all agencies had knowledge of the cases ahead of the meeting and that extensive activity and communication had already occurred prior to the meeting. We saw evidence that the MARAC is effectively safeguarding victims and children through information-sharing and joint action-planning.

HMIC noted that only eight percent of its domestic abuse cases are assessed as high risk, and this is one of the lowest percentages in the country. The force needs to ensure that it is not inadvertently denying high-risk victims access to the MARAC service.

There is also effective partnership working in tackling child sexual exploitation as well as dealing with missing children and young people. The force has set up a joint team with police staff working alongside staff from Leicestershire County Council. Increasingly, local authority staff are also supporting the work of the force's missing persons team (MPT). This enables better information sharing to examine any potential links between vulnerable children and young people who go missing and sexual exploitation. This means that risks can be spotted early and action taken to support these very vulnerable young people.

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 Leicestershire Police identifies those that are vulnerable, the response that is provided to them and what action the force takes to investigate crimes and to work with partners to keep 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.

The force does not yet have a comprehensive understanding of the scale and nature of these important issues across Leicestershire. Some analysis has been undertaken but it relies only on police data, there has been no thorough analysis which includes valuable information held by partner organisations about missing children, child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse. This is limiting the force's ability to develop the most effective services to tackle these problems. The development of a more detailed analysis and a comprehensive understanding would leave the force better placed to prioritise resources, determine training requirements and drive operational activity.

Missing and absent children

The force responds effectively to missing and absent children and young people.⁹ It has set up a dedicated missing persons team (MPT) to co-ordinate activity. All reports of missing and absent children received by the force are reviewed by specialist officers in the MPT. They are available to provide advice, assistance and support to response teams who are responsible for the investigations. They also maintain strong relationships with relevant children's care homes.

HMIC found some good examples of thorough and timely investigations, with clear oversight and supervision from both the investigating officer's supervisor and input from the MPT sergeant. The MPT sergeant is able to reassess the risk and can increase the grading if they feel it is necessary.

Staff in the MPT have a good understanding of the nature and scale of missing and absent children in Leicestershire and are developing effective working relationships with staff from the local authorities. In particular, information from the 'safe and well checks' carried out by patrol officers and 'return home interviews' carried out by the local authority, when children are found are of good quality and provide vital intelligence especially in relation to potential child sexual exploitation offences. There is a good understanding and awareness in the MPT of the potential risk of sexual exploitation faced by children and young people who go missing. However, we found some inconsistencies in the force's assessment of the risk of sexual exploitation when missing children are first reported to the police and we found cases of missing teenagers where, in our view, the risk should have been assessed as greater. The force is working to widen the understanding of child sexual exploitation throughout the force by making training mandatory for all staff.

The MPT is co-located with the child sexual exploitation investigation team and this enables close and constructive joint work in cases where missing young people are identified as potentially at risk of sexual exploitation. It also provides ready access to, and good information sharing with, the local authority social services staff who work in the child sexual exploitation team.

⁹ 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.

Child sexual exploitation preparedness

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 complex investigations with other agencies such as children's services as these issues are covered in HMIC's rolling programme of child protection inspections.

Leicestershire Police's child sexual exploitation investigation team has the capacity to investigate allegations of child sexual exploitation, to target offenders proactively, to manage and develop intelligence and to engage with vulnerable children and young people. Its creation is undoubtedly a positive step and detectives working in the team are well-trained and highly-experienced. This ensures investigations are of high quality and many have resulted in successful prosecutions.

The force is working to raise awareness of the risks and warning signs of child sexual exploitation throughout the force and with partner organisations. This has led to an increase in referrals to the new child sexual exploitation investigation team. Most referrals come from frontline officers who have identified a child potentially at risk of sexual exploitation. However this process is not yet sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the force is consistently identifying those at risk. The force briefing system is not being used to best effect to raise awareness of victims who are vulnerable. The force has already recognised that daily briefings to front line officers and staff were not updated regularly leading to inconsistency and a reliance on outdated information and that this may undermine the force's ability to protect those at most risk of harm. The force is currently reviewing the whole process and provision of briefings to officers and staff across the force to improve both efficiency and effectiveness.

The force has recognised the need to improve its capacity to analyse and better understand the risks involved. In particular, it has identified a clear need for the child sexual exploitation investigation team to be provided with analytical support, to enable it to better identify vulnerability and assess the risks in the referrals it receives. The force had submitted a business case to the value of £1.23m to the police and crime commissioner at the time of the inspection, including funding for an analyst's post. This has subsequently been approved.

The force has recognised the growing threat from online grooming and sexual exploitation. It has established a small team dedicated to the investigation of online child sexual exploitation, the majority of the team's work is responding to referrals from the national child exploitation and online protection centre (CEOP). However, some key weaknesses are undermining the effectiveness of this important work. The team has access to limited technology and has an increasing workload, but HMIC is encouraged that the force is in the process of purchasing additional equipment which will improve the unit's effectiveness.

HMIC is impressed by the force's thoroughness in reviewing historic unsolved cases of child sexual exploitation, in the wake of the wide-scale abuse uncovered in Rotherham. The force set up Operation Sepia to review all allegations over the past twenty years where it may have overlooked evidence of child sexual exploitation. The force comprehensively reviewed 866 archived cases which resulted in five separate cases of suspected historic child sexual abuse cases being re-investigated.

Domestic abuse

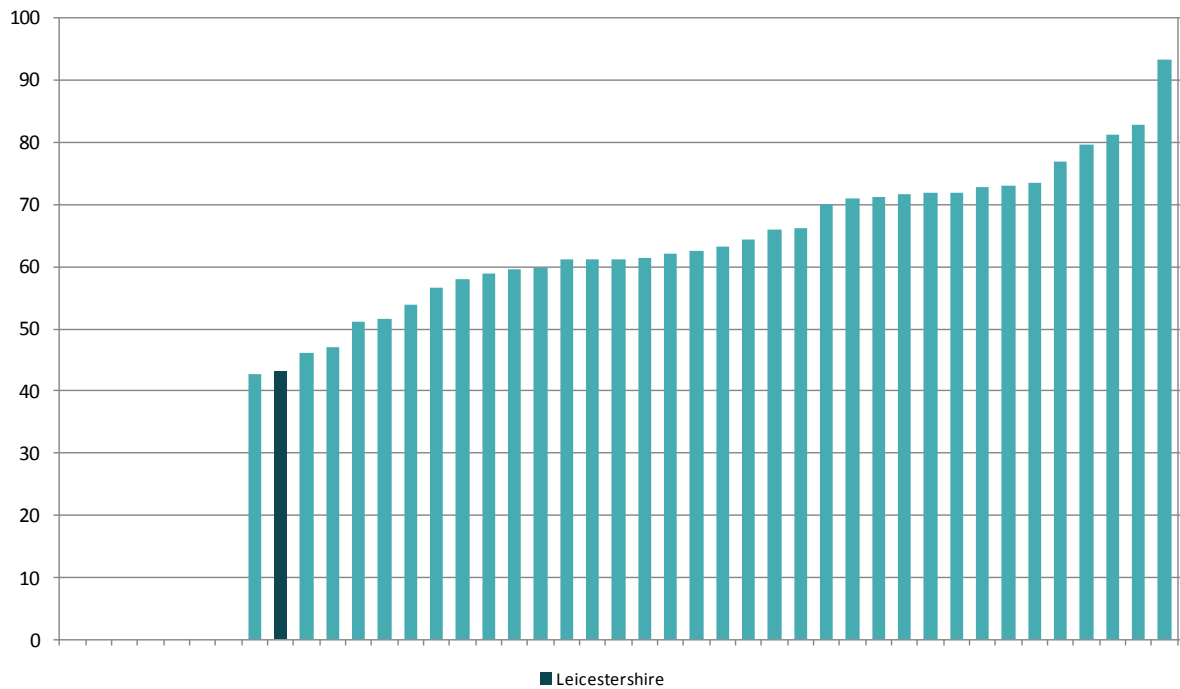
In the year to 31 March 2015, recorded domestic abuse increased by two percent against the previous year and accounted for ten percent of all police recorded crime in Leicestershire. This is a smaller increase than that seen across England and Wales during the same period where there was a 21 percent increase, with domestic abuse accounting for ten percent of all police recorded crime.

Increases in recorded domestic abuse nationally are generally attributed to people having greater confidence in the police's ability to respond effectively when incidents are reported. It is not clear to us that the force understands the reasons why Leicestershire has seen a much smaller increase in reports than elsewhere in the country.

Leicestershire is an ethnically diverse area. The force has traditionally very strong partnership links working with in its different communities, including using neighbourhood officers and staff with cultural and linguistic skills to identify and target those most at risk. In this way it ensures it is providing an effective service for the most vulnerable. At the same time the force acknowledges that in relation to domestic abuse there is an identified lack of reporting from BME communities and it needs to do more to better understand and respond to the needs and risks faced by these victims. The force hopes that the appointment of dedicated IDVAs and the development of support services such as the innovative multi-agency 'safe project' mentioned later in this report will improve its response. Equally, it has recently commissioned a comprehensive analysis to be undertaken with other partner organisations to improve its understanding of the scale and nature of domestic abuse across the force area.

As shown in figure 2, for every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded Leicestershire made 43 arrests. This has fallen slightly from previous levels and is low when compared to the arrest rate in other forces across England and Wales. The force should take steps to ensure that it fully understands the reason for this fluctuation in outcomes.

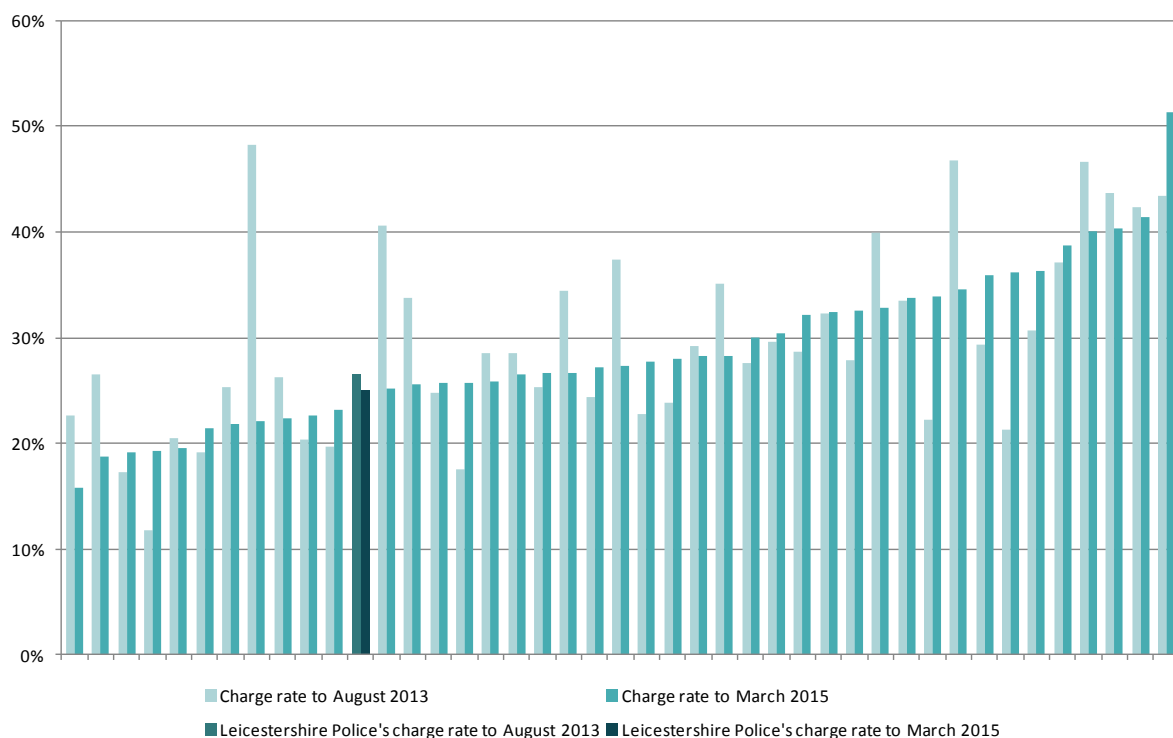
Figure 2: The number of arrests per 100 domestic abuse crimes by force, for the 12 months to 31 March 2015



Source: HMIC data return

The force’s charge rate for domestic abuse recorded crimes for the 12 months to 31 March 2015 was 25 percent, compared with 27 percent for England and Wales. This is a decrease since HMIC's domestic abuse inspection in 2014 when the force rate was 27 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 61 applications to magistrates' courts for their use, of which all were granted. Eight DVPOs have been breached. Breaches occur when the offender fails to comply with the condition of the order and is taken back before the magistrates' court. This represents a DVPO breach rate of 13 percent compared with the England and Wales rate of 17 percent.¹⁰

The services provided by the specialist domestic abuse investigation unit are good, bringing together specialist, skilled investigators with safeguarding specialists to provide effective support and protection for victims. However the unit deals only with the higher risk cases. The majority of victims of domestic abuse are dealt with by the force investigation unit, where although the quality of investigation is sound, there is a lack of understanding and knowledge of safeguarding among the officers. In HMIC's domestic abuse in 2014 we found that Leicestershire Police's response to

¹⁰ The England and Wales figure is based on data provided by 35 forces.

victims of high-risk victims of domestic abuse was good but the service to medium and standard risk victims was inconsistent. It is disappointing to find that this is still the case in 2015, despite action on most of our other recommendations.

When high and medium-risk cases are referred to the domestic abuse investigation unit, the specialist staff apply a further risk assessment, in addition to that carried out by the initial investigating officer. HMIC is concerned to note that a large number of these cases are subsequently downgraded from high to medium risk as a result of this additional assessment. Only those cases that are high risk are then referred for joint action through the MARAC process. The force has one of the lowest rates of high-risk cases in the country and the number of cases being considered by MARAC in Leicestershire is comparatively low. The force needs to assure itself that risk is being properly assessed and that some victims of domestic abuse are not being denied access to the multi-agency process which may manage the risks they face.

The force has shown a willingness to work innovatively with partner organisations to support and protect vulnerable victims of domestic abuse. We found some excellent examples of the force developing programmes to support repeat victims, such as the Safe project, a highly-publicised partnership initiative within the city of Leicester actively supported by Leicestershire Police, which provides a range of services for those whose lives are affected by domestic abuse.

In addition, Project 360 is a collaboration between Leicestershire Police, the University of Leicester, Leicester City Council and Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils. This is an innovative project run by police staff together with staff from other organisations. It provides an enhanced support service to people who have been repeat victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence, including a free telephone helpline, outreach workers as well as training and awareness raising for the public and professionals. An initial evaluation by the force indicates that the service increases victims' satisfaction with police action and makes victims more likely to report future incidents.

HMIC also noted that the force is one of the few forces nationally that is asking victims of domestic abuse for feedback to understand how it can improve the service it provides.

Summary of findings



Requires improvement

Leicestershire Police generally provides a good service in identifying vulnerable people and responds well to them. It works well to provide more effective joined-up services with partner organisations with some excellent examples of innovative joint projects to support vulnerable victims. However, there are several areas where improvement is needed to ensure the service is consistent and vulnerable people are properly protected, particularly victims of domestic abuse and investigating online child sexual exploitation.

The force needs to improve its process for allocating investigations including on occasions those involving vulnerable victims, to ensure that investigative opportunities, and importantly opportunities to protect victims are not lost, putting at risk both the safety of the victim and the ability to bring the offender to justice.

The force is committed strongly to improving its services to protect vulnerable people but needs to review its understanding of the scale and nature of crimes against vulnerable people so that it can be sure that the services it has designed and implemented with partner agencies best meet their needs.

The force's management of missing children and services to the highest risk victims of domestic abuse have improved. However, the lack of capacity in the unit dealing with online child sexual exploitation is undermining its effectiveness.

Areas for improvement

- The force should improve its compliance with its duties under the code of practice for victims of crime specifically in relation to victim personal statements.
- The force should improve its response to children at risk of sexual exploitation by ensuring that the unit with responsibility for investigating online child sexual exploitation is able to manage its increasing workload effectively and has the appropriate tools to maximise its performance.
- The force should improve its response to domestic abuse by taking steps to ensure it:
 - allocates cases for investigation in a timely and effective manner through its Investigation Management Unit;
 - clarifies the roles and responsibilities for safeguarding victims of domestic abuse who have been assessed as at medium or standard risk, and puts in place a process to supervise the safety plans;
 - reviews the process to reassess high risk cases within the domestic abuse investigation unit to ensure it is being correctly applied; and
 - clarifies the deployment and use of body-worn video cameras by officers attending incidents of domestic abuse.