

# The police response to domestic abuse

An update report

February 2019

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## Foreword

This report is the fourth in a series of thematic reports which consider the response the police service provides to victims of domestic abuse. In March 2014, we published our first report in this series ([\*Everyone's Business: Improving the Police Response to Domestic Abuse\*](#)). Since that time, the service the police give to victims of domestic abuse has improved markedly. Victims are now better supported and better protected.

This report will be different from our previous reports, in that we aren't making any national recommendations. There is work going on across forces and innovative practice being piloted in partnership with the College of Policing which we have described in the report.

The data is from our 2017 PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy) inspection. We will inspect all forces again and report on their progress in 2019.

### **Demand has risen dramatically**

There was an 88 percent increase in recorded levels of domestic abuse in the 12 months to 30 June 2017 when compared to levels reported in our first specialist inspection on the issue (for the 12 months to 31 August 2013).

Some of the reasons for the rise in demand are undoubtedly positive. We think some victims are more confident about reporting these crimes to the police because they know they will be taken seriously. There could be other factors, too: for example, that crimes are being recorded more accurately, and forces are prioritising dealing with this type of crime.

But the reality is that some forces still can't yet fully explain why demand has increased so much, and this is an area in which they need to improve. To plan for the future and protect victims, forces need to understand this complex picture better.

### **The police are prioritising their response to domestic abuse**

We found that forces are still making their response to domestic abuse a priority. As part of this inspection, we carried out a survey of over 350 domestic abuse practitioners (non-police staff who work closely with victims of domestic abuse) to ask for their views on the service to victims. Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of respondents felt the police approach to domestic abuse had improved since the publication of our first report in 2014. A fifth felt there had been a large improvement, which is extremely positive.

Police leaders continue to prioritise tackling domestic abuse within the wider context of supporting vulnerable people and keeping them safe. Protecting vulnerable people, including victims of domestic abuse, is a priority of every police and crime commissioner in England and Wales. The improvements we are seeing have come from the strong commitment and leadership of chief constables, who have made determined efforts to make sure their frontline officers and staff are well equipped to keep vulnerable people safe.

These improvements will be further supported by the new domestic abuse bill, which introduces measures to support and protect victims, promoted by the new role of domestic abuse commissioner. The bill also provides opportunities to address the behaviour of perpetrators. Several forces are already piloting new innovative approaches to deal with perpetrators causing the greatest harm to victims, through schemes aimed at stopping their behaviour once and for all.

We welcome these positive developments.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Zoë Billingham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light blue dotted background behind it.

**Zoë Billingham**

HM Inspector of Constabulary

## About this report

### What we assessed

To understand how effective forces are at protecting and supporting victims of domestic abuse, we inspected how well they:

- identify victims of domestic abuse, particularly repeat victims, when they first contact the police;
- respond to victims of domestic abuse, including assessing risk and vulnerability at the scene of an incident, and taking immediate and longer-term safeguarding action;
- investigate domestic abuse offences and support vulnerable victims during the investigation; and
- work with other organisations to exchange information and safeguard victims.

### Methodology

In 2017, we inspected all 43 police forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police on their effectiveness, as part of our PEEL inspection programme.

We reviewed the findings of our 2015 and 2016 inspections, and assessed the progress that forces had made on implementing their action plans. As in previous years, most of this year's inspection was devoted to carrying out 'reality testing' in forces. This process involved our inspection teams making unannounced visits to departments in police forces, including the control room, intelligence and response teams, investigation units, domestic abuse specialist teams and victim support arrangements. Our inspection teams were supplemented by experts in the field of domestic abuse. These included public protection specialists from police forces.

Our overall approach was as follows:

- we reviewed crime files with vulnerable victims and suspects living with domestic abuse;
- we spoke with frontline officers, force control room staff, supervisors and police leaders;
- we commissioned a practitioners' survey to understand how well practitioners thought the police responded to domestic abuse; and

- for the first time ever, we were able to review all force management statements (FMSs), in which forces set out their current demand, future demand, capacity and capability in relation to domestic abuse.

We have a domestic abuse reference group to advise on and inform our work relating to domestic abuse. This group includes representatives from the police service, police and crime commissioners, the College of Policing, the Home Office and the voluntary sector. Members of the group are listed in Annex B.

## Summary of our main findings

### **Control room response continues to improve**

Overall, the police are getting better at dealing with calls about domestic abuse. Staff who work in police control rooms are generally trained well and effectively supervised. They know how to identify if someone is vulnerable and how to respond to their needs. This includes victims of domestic abuse.

However, some forces still find it hard to establish quickly how long someone has been experiencing abuse and what the nature of that abuse is and has been, whether previously reported or not. It is important to identify patterns of abuse as soon as possible so that victims can receive a response that suits their needs better.

### **Delays in sending officers are exposing victims to risk**

We are concerned that the police are sometimes too slow in getting to domestic abuse incidents. Call handlers decide the speed of response, based on an assessment of vulnerability and risk. When the police get to an incident, they need to keep people safe, gather evidence and investigate what's happened. Delays can be damaging to the victim and the investigation. We found delays in responding to cases in over a quarter of forces. In a small number, the delays are because the forces don't have enough officers available to attend.

If a victim's circumstances change while waiting for police to attend, control room staff should reassess their level of risk. They should then alter the speed of response to fit the new circumstances. In some forces this reassessment is taking place, but not in others. These forces can't always tell which cases need urgent action. In some cases, we were concerned to find that delays were potentially putting victims of domestic abuse at serious risk of harm.

### **The police need to continue to improve their understanding of coercive and controlling behaviour**

Forces are continuing to invest in training and guidance about domestic abuse. This is to help officers and staff recognise and understand the needs of these victims. The training is well embedded and varied. It includes written guidance, such as booklets, as well as face-to-face training. Some forces work with other organisations to develop and/or provide this training. Others are working with the higher education sector and using feedback from victims to make the training more relevant. This is all very positive.

However, forces could improve provision of this training. One aspect in particular they could improve is their training about behaviour that is coercive and controlling. In 2017, we surveyed over 350 people who work closely with victims of domestic abuse. We asked them about their views on the police. They told us the area requiring the most improvement among frontline officers was their understanding of this form of abuse.

A training programme has been developed by the College of Policing with the support of SafeLives. Its aim is to enhance the skills, knowledge and effectiveness of first responders in dealing with domestic abuse, and the programme is called Domestic Abuse Matters. It is now in use in ten forces across the country. An evaluation by the College of Policing showed positive impact on officers' knowledge and attitude following the training and we look forward to reviewing what effect this has on their actual response during future inspections.

## **The quality of initial investigations is improving**

The quality of initial investigation work is now better. Our crime file review found that, where appropriate, officers are taking photos of a victim's injuries at the scene in almost all cases. In most cases, they are also putting measures in place to protect victims in the longer term. However, the statements that officers themselves take from victims could be better. Officers should make a comprehensive statement, giving details of the scene, injuries and demeanour of the victim or suspect. From our crime file review, we found evidence of this in only 55 percent (308 of 556) of the applicable cases), a similar percentage to last year.

Body-worn video cameras can provide excellent evidence. At the time of our inspection only two forces out of 43 didn't have this technology. Of these remaining two, one of these forces has since adopted body-worn video cameras. However, forces don't always use the cameras in the same way. Some forces only have a few cameras available. Others don't have a clear policy on how they should be used. When we looked at cases as part of our file review, over 40 percent of cases when body-worn video would have been applicable showed no evidence of the technology being used.

Forces generally have good processes in place to assess the needs of victims at the scene. But the quality and supervision of risk assessments still isn't consistent. We asked 11 forces to make improvements in this area. The College of Policing is further testing a new frontline risk assessment tool that has been designed to help frontline officers recognise continuing abuse and coercive control. We will follow up those taking part in the pilot scheme as part of our future PEEL inspection activity. Any forces not taking part in the pilot should continue to use their current risk assessment process.



We found that most officers know how important it is to arrest the offender in cases of domestic abuse. But the arrest rate is still falling. This concerns us. In the 12 months to 30 June 2017, 27 forces saw a decrease in their arrest rate for domestic abuse-related offences, when compared to the previous 12 months. Of these, 23 also saw a decrease in the number of arrests for domestic abuse-related offences. Only three of the forces with a decrease in the arrest rate showed an increase in the actual number of arrests for domestic abuse-related offences,<sup>1</sup> despite the overall number of such offences increasing in these forces, when compared to the same period in 2016. There continues to be large variation between forces in the use of arrest. We asked eight forces to improve their understanding concerning the changes in numbers of arrests.

## **Specialist-trained officers generally conduct better investigations of domestic abuse cases**

Some crimes (including domestic abuse cases) carry a higher level of threat, harm and risk to the victim and would normally be investigated by specialist teams. We found that, generally, specialist public protection teams conduct good investigations into crimes. In our review of 2,700 crime files across 43 forces, we looked at 978 files for crimes with a domestic abuse element. These had marginally more effective investigations, better victim care and better supervision, compared with all the cases we reviewed.

During the period 2015/16 to 2016/17, the estimated spending on public protection rose by 22 percent (this was 16 percent between 2013/14 and 2014/15). Most forces have protected their investment in public protection. However, there is a national shortage of detectives, and demand is increasing rapidly in every area, so budgets will need to be kept under close review.

## **Reductions in the use of police bail may be negatively affecting victims of domestic abuse**

We are concerned that changes to the use of bail could be having a detrimental effect on victims of domestic abuse. We will be assessing this in more detail as part of the PEEL 2018/2019 inspections. In more and more cases of domestic abuse, bail conditions are not being used to safeguard victims, with forces opting to release suspects under investigation. This potentially leaves victims feeling unprotected and vulnerable.

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<sup>1</sup> 35 out of 43 forces were able to give us data for the number of arrests for domestic abuse offences in 2016 and 2017.

We found that the number of people being released on bail for domestic abuse crimes has dropped by 65 percent. This figure is for the use of all bail. Different organisations are currently collecting a range of data on the use of bail. Further work is needed to bring this all together to give a clearer picture of how bail is being used in domestic abuse cases following the changes to the Policing and Crime Act 2017 and what this means for victims. Sixteen forces couldn't give us comparable year-on-year data on their use of bail for domestic abuse cases. This suggests that they may not be monitoring the use of bail, which is extremely worrying.

## **The number of occasions when victims don't support police investigations is increasing**

In cases of domestic abuse, it is common for the victim not to support police action. We found over a third of domestic abuse cases were discontinued for this reason. There is huge variation between forces, with between 15 and 58 percent of cases having this outcome. There are different reasons why cases fail. For example, a victim may not support an investigation and there is no other available evidence. Or there is insufficient evidence even with the support of the victim. In order to have a clearer picture of why cases fail, we asked seven forces to improve their understanding of why so many cases are finalised this way.

We found that officers know what is needed to prosecute a case without the victim's support. However, there are still cases where this doesn't appear to be happening. We reviewed 554 cases where the victim withdrew support. Of those cases, 215 were appropriate to continue without victim support. Cases were continued without the support of the victim in 71 percent of applicable cases (152 of 215 applicable cases).

There was a 16 percent increase in the number of domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) granted (data from 32 forces) in the 12 months to 30 June 2017 compared to the 12 months to 30 June 2016. This is good news. However, forces are using them to varying degrees. DVPOs may offer increased protection, but not all forces are considering them when protecting victims. We asked nine forces to consider how they could use these powers to contribute to improved services to victims.

## **Working with other organisations varies between forces**

We were pleased to find that forces are continuing to develop practices for working together. Multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs) are now in place in 41 out of 43 forces. These hubs help staff from police forces work with other organisations to protect vulnerable people.

However, we continue to find large differences in how MASHs operate. This can lead to inconsistencies in how people are protected. The Home Office was due to publish a set of principles for effective multi-agency working. It has become part of a wider consultation on the introduction of a national effective practice domestic abuse toolkit for police, of which these multi-agency principles would be a part. We recommend that this work be completed as a priority.

Forces are continuing to develop how they give information to schools to protect vulnerable children. As at 1 July 2017, 33 services said that they use Operation Encompass, or a similar scheme (an increase from 22 in the previous year). This means, when children are present at a domestic abuse incident, the police tell their school the following day, so that the school can support the child. This has led to improved information-sharing with agencies involved in supporting these children. With the additional focus on children that this scheme brings, it is hard to understand why ten forces have yet to implement this scheme or a similar process.

The police and partner organisations hold multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) to discuss high-risk domestic abuse cases. In the 12 months to 31 March 2017, the number of cases discussed at MARACs increased by 10 percent when compared with the same period in 2016. Once again, this figure varies between forces. An increase in case load at MARAC will need an increase in time available at conferences to hear these cases. Some have seen the number of cases decline but can't always explain why this had happened. In some areas, MARACs are being held daily. But it isn't clear whether this is always the best approach.

## **The police need to do more to seek feedback from victims of domestic abuse**

We asked 12 forces to improve their processes for getting feedback. This was because six weren't surveying victims at all, and six were surveying victims of domestic abuse, but excluding those who don't support police action.

Seeking feedback from these victims is important, if forces are to understand the reasons why some victims are reluctant to engage with them. It may be that previous bad experiences are putting victims off, or that they don't understand the process, and fear they may not be supported. It is important to acknowledge victims' fears that police involvement may escalate perpetrator behaviour and make them less safe, or that victims may also simply not want police involvement. Forces need a detailed understanding of the reasons for victims not supporting police action, so they can act to meet the needs of victims and highlight areas where they need to improve.

## Domestic abuse in England and Wales in numbers

Table 1: Domestic abuse-related crime in England and Wales in the 12 months to 30 June 2017 and 12 months to 30 June 2016

	12 months to 30 June 2016	12 months to 30 June 2017	Change
<b>Volume police business:</b>			
<b>Domestic abuse-related crimes</b>	434,905	506,890	Up 17%
<b>Domestic abuse-related sexual offences</b>	13,515	16,591	Up 23%
<b>Domestic abuse-related assault with injury crimes</b>	133,891	140,486	Up 5%
<b>Domestic abuse-related harassment crimes</b>	64,670	74,894	Up 16%
<b>Domestic abuse-related crime is:</b>			
<b>of total recorded crime (excluding fraud)</b>	11%	11%	No change
<b>of all recorded sexual offences</b>	13%	13%	No change
<b>of all recorded assault with injury crimes</b>	33%	32%	Down one percentage point
<b>of all recorded harassment crimes</b>	37%	36%	Down one percentage point

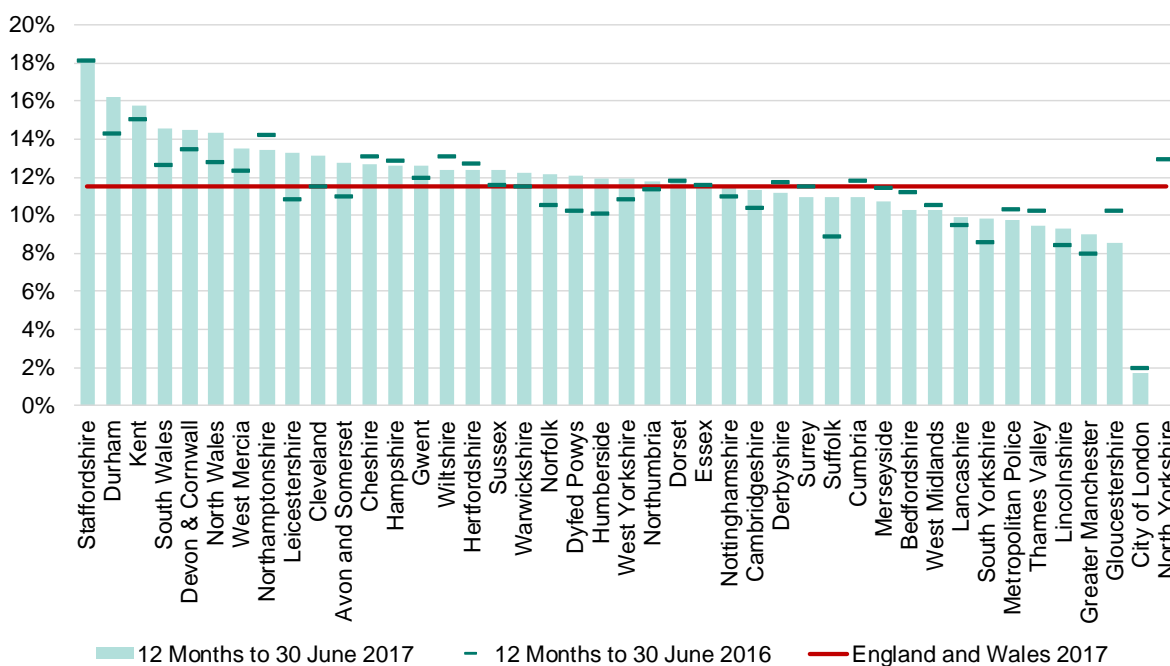
## Our findings

### The scale of domestic abuse in England and Wales

An estimated 1.9 million adults aged 16 to 59 years experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2017, according to the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#). The survey revealed that women were more likely to say they had experienced domestic abuse than men, with an estimated 1.2 million female victims, compared with 713,000 male victims.

Published crime data shows that in the 12 months to 30 June 2017, there were over 4.4 million crimes recorded by police in England and Wales, compared with 3.9 million crimes recorded in the previous year. In both 12-month periods domestic abuse-related crime accounted for 11 percent of the total recorded crime. This is comparable with crimes such as vehicle crime, which accounted for 10 percent of all crime, and shoplifting, which accounted for 8 percent.

**Figure 1: Percentage of police-recorded crime (excluding fraud) with a domestic abuse marker by force, in the 12 months to 30 June 2017, compared with 12 months to 30 June 2016**



Source: HMICFRS data collection, Home Office domestic abuse data

Note: North Yorkshire Police couldn't provide the full number of recorded crimes with a domestic abuse marker for 2017.

## **Recorded levels of domestic abuse – sustained increases**

There has been an 88 percent increase in recorded levels of domestic abuse since our first specialist inspection on the issue in June 2013. In one year alone (in the 12 months to 30 June 2017, compared to the same period in 2016), the police recorded a 17 percent increase (430,095 to 506,890) in domestic abuse-related crimes. This is a dramatic rise, and some of the reasons for it are undoubtedly positive. We share the view of many forces that victims are increasingly confident about reporting these crimes to the police.

However, some forces still don't fully understand the reasons behind the increase. There could be other factors; forces now prioritise dealing with this type of crime and may be recording crimes more accurately. To make plans and put the necessary prevention measures in place to protect victims, forces need to make sure they understand why reporting has risen so much.

The Home Office has collected detailed national data on crime demand for many years. But there has been less of a focus on other aspects of policing demand, such as anti-social behaviour, domestic incidents, missing persons and traffic collisions. All forces record data on these incidents as part of their command and control systems. But few projects have aimed to combine data from different forces and analyse it to support local improvement.

Since 2016, we have been working with a pilot group of 24 police forces to compile a database of all incidents reported to police control rooms. This includes information on how forces respond to these incidents. We analyse and report this data through interactive dashboards. This helps us answer a wide range of questions, such as how demand varies, how different forces respond, and what the effects of these responses are. We ask forces to highlight any incidents that had been flagged on their recording systems as relating to domestic abuse, and 23 of the 24 have done so (accounting for 938,000 out of 13 million total incidents).

The data showed that on average the police flag 24 percent of violent crime incidents as domestic abuse. The rate is over 30 percent in nine forces. Fifty-five percent of the domestic abuse-related calls to police were made via 999, and 37 percent of calls through 101 services.

The peak times for calls relating to domestic abuse are:

- Monday to Friday between 4.00pm and 10.00pm;
- Friday and Saturday between 6.00pm and 1.00am; and
- Sunday between 5.00pm and 11.00pm.

This is when demand for the police more generally is at its highest, and when support services may have closed for the day.

## **Concerns about future demand**

We asked all 43 police forces across the country to submit force management statements (FMSs).<sup>2</sup> These documents set out the current and future demand in all areas of policing. Twenty-seven forces noted that demand related to domestic abuse was going up and told us that they were having to change the way they work, in response to this increased demand.

Many forces said they were worried about their ability to respond without sustainable funding provision. They anticipated further cuts that would impair their ability to prosecute domestic abuse, as well as the availability of prevention programmes aimed at abusers, and their response to the growing incidence and complexity of internet-based stalking and harassment.

## **Identifying victims of domestic abuse at first contact**

Call handlers are often the first point of contact between victims of domestic abuse and the police. They need to be able to recognise when they are speaking to a victim of domestic abuse, to reassure the caller and advise them on how to stay safe until the police arrive. They also need to record domestic abuse calls correctly on the police systems, so that police become aware of repeated calls from the same person or household. Response officers need to have detailed information about any previous incidents to make sure they are as well prepared as possible when they arrive at the scene.

## **Control room approach continues to improve**

Overall, we found that police handling of domestic abuse calls continues to improve. Call handlers and control room staff are generally well trained and supervised. In most forces, officers and staff understand how to recognise vulnerable people, including victims of domestic abuse, and respond to their needs. Most call-handling systems include question prompts or checklists, which help call handlers identify the level of risk to the victim and decide how quickly they need to respond.

During our effectiveness inspections, we saw call handlers questioning callers to find out whether they were vulnerable, even when it wasn't immediately obvious that they were. We found that most forces have quality assurance and supervision in place in the control room to make sure call handlers identify and manage the risk to victims. We saw examples of supervisors reviewing call logs to make sure all relevant information had been recorded, listening to calls as they happened, and giving call handlers individual feedback.

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<sup>2</sup> [For more information on force management statements, see the HMICFRS website.](#)

Forces are continuing to use intelligence staff in control rooms to carry out quick time searches of force information systems. This gives response officers as much information as possible about the history of the victim before they arrive at the scene.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary uses QlikSense in the force control room to calculate the likelihood of risk and harm to victims. The information from this tool helps control room staff complete their risk assessments. Response officers get the information in real time through a visualisation app, which helps them to target safeguarding activity.

In Derbyshire Constabulary, a new incident resolution team made up of experienced officers works alongside call handlers to identify potentially vulnerable people – including victims of domestic abuse – as quickly as possible.

Leicestershire Police has a team of experienced officers in the force control room to triage calls and make sure that staff allocate incidents involving vulnerable people directly to specialist teams whenever possible.

### **Identifying repeat victims**

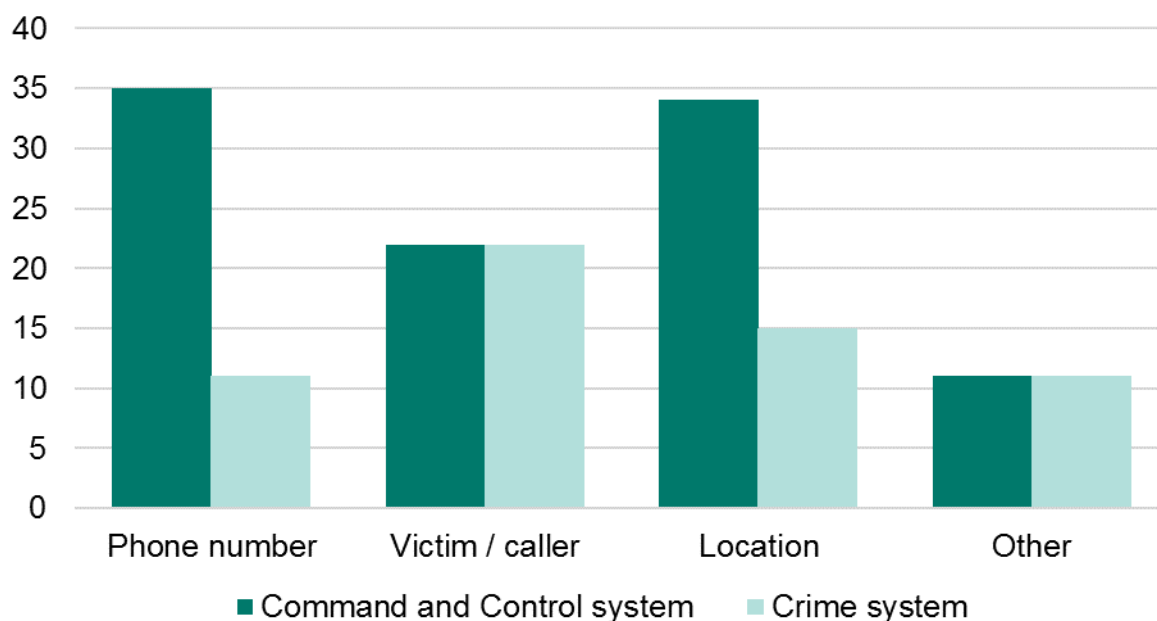
Victims of domestic abuse are more likely to be repeat victims than are victims of any other crime type. Forces need to identify repeat victims as early as possible. This will help them to spot patterns of abuse. This is particularly important in cases where a single incident might not appear to be serious, but where previous reports show a pattern of behaviour (for example coercive control or stalking and harassment). As at 1 July 2017, of the 43 forces we inspected, 15 reported that they now used flags on their call-handling system to help call handlers identify repeat victims of domestic abuse. This is four more forces than in 2016, which is positive. However, 28 forces still don't use repeat domestic abuse flags on their systems. This can mean staff need to search multiple information systems to identify the potential risk to the victim and attending officers.

In previous reports, we have expressed concern about forces' ability to identify repeat victims at the earliest opportunity. Control room systems often identify repeat callers through matching locations, names and/or telephone numbers, but not all forces have systems that do this automatically. Also, the system could fail to identify a repeat victim who calls from a different address or phone number.

As identified in Figure 2, as at 1 July 2017, 35 forces (32 forces in 2016) can identify a repeat caller automatically by their telephone number on their call-handling system, while only 22 forces (17 forces in 2016) can do this by using the victim's or caller's name.



**Figure 2: The number of forces (out of 43) that can automatically identify repeat callers/victims (of all crime) by phone number/name or caller/location/other methods, on their command and control and crime system – as at 1 July 2017**



**Source: HMICFRS data collection**

To make sure they identify repeat victims of domestic abuse as early as possible, many forces are making better use of their intelligence records. When used properly, intelligence databases will indicate whether individuals have been victims before. Some forces also have extra safeguards in place to identify repeat victims.

These include call handlers doing manual checks on the caller and address system, or the system prompting them to ask questions about previous incidents. Despite improvements, there are still forces that are unable to identify repeat victims at an early stage. We are concerned about this, as victims may not always receive the most appropriate response when they contact the police.

Lancashire Constabulary has an early action programme. This assesses the needs and vulnerability of repeat callers and develops a multi-agency trigger plan. The plan is accessible to call handlers and outlines the action they should take to support a caller when they contact the police.

Dorset Police has seen an increase in repeat cases. Force leaders believe this is a consequence of increased confidence in the police, improved recording, a training programme they have run with partner organisations focusing on referrals to multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) and the fact that 96 percent of GPs in the county now have a safeguarding lead.

## **Use of THRIVE**

Most forces now use the threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement (THRIVE) system in their control rooms. This is a structured way for call handlers to assess the threat, harm and risk to the person calling. It also helps the call handler to identify the vulnerability of the victim, the type of response needed, and any action officers should take at the scene to help the investigation. The THRIVE model allows forces to tailor their service to the individual needs of each victim and helps staff decide how best to deal with a call. We support this approach.

In our last effectiveness inspection in 2016, we found however that staff in some forces saw the THRIVE model as a way of rationing police services. They were using it to delay sending officers to incidents, or not send them at all. In this inspection, we found this was less of a problem. Our main concern was that in some forces, despite call handlers correctly identifying that a caller was vulnerable, there weren't always enough officers to respond as quickly as they should. We found in a small number of forces there simply weren't enough police officers available to send to incidents. Also, where there was a delay in sending officers, supervisors in some of the forces didn't routinely reassess the risk to the caller in case it had changed.

### **Delays in sending officers – victims exposed to risks**

A call handler's assessment of levels of vulnerability and risk should determine the speed of police response. Response officers should keep the victim and any other vulnerable people at the scene safe and assess future risk to develop longer-term safety plans. They also have a responsibility to investigate the incident and start to gather evidence to support a prosecution. Delays in attendance can have an effect on the victim and the investigation. This is particularly true in domestic abuse cases, when the opportunity to take positive action – including arresting the perpetrator – may have passed by the time officers arrive at the scene.

During this inspection, we found delays to response in just over a quarter of forces (12 forces). In some cases, we found that delays were putting victims of domestic abuse at serious risk of harm. Examples of failing to meet or appropriately manage the demand include:

- In two forces, we found considerable delays in allocating calls for assistance. As a result, some members of the public – including victims of domestic abuse – didn't receive the response they needed.
- In four forces, we found that police couldn't respond to calls immediately (including emergency calls), and calls awaiting allocation to officers were not always reassessed for a change in risk, particularly at times of high demand.

- In one force, where a scheduled appointment<sup>3</sup> had been identified as the appropriate response, there were delays of up to 16 days between the original appointment and attendance of a police officer.
- One force was scheduling appointments for a large number of domestic abuse incidents that it had classed as low risk. It used scheduled appointments in nearly one-third of all its domestic abuse cases.
- Another had delayed its response to some non-emergency incidents for several days. These included a small number of domestic abuse incidents that the force had risk-assessed and partially, but not fully, responded to.

If a victim's circumstances change while they are awaiting a response from the police, the force should reassess its target response time and reduce it if necessary. Some of the forces where there were delayed responses were aware of the level of vulnerability within these backlogs and were reassessing risk at regular intervals. Others were only rarely reassessing the backlog of calls to identify which cases needed most urgent attention. During our 2017 inspection, we assessed nine of 43 forces as having an area for improvement relating to their response times. We assessed three forces as having a cause for concern on this issue and recommended immediate action.

Some of these forces were unaware of the scale of the problem until we highlighted it at the time of the inspection. They are now acting to address the delays. For example, some have plans to:

- recruit more officers;
- introduce new resourcing models;
- roll out new IT systems;
- improve supervision; or
- review policies and procedures in the force control room to improve effectiveness.

We are examining if the problem of delayed response times continues, as part of the PEEL inspections taking place in 2018/19.

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<sup>3</sup> Police and caller arrange a mutually acceptable time for police to attend to take details for a report or for caller to attend and speak to police.

In Northamptonshire Police, an inspector must make any decision to downgrade the risk level of a domestic abuse incident so that officers can deal with it via a scheduled appointment. This is to make sure such decisions receive the appropriate level of scrutiny.

### **Telephone-based first response to domestic abuse**

Forces are testing alternative approaches to responding to domestic abuse. One example is telephone-based initial response to cases that don't need an immediate or priority response. Extreme caution is required when adopting such an approach, which is still to be tested and evaluated. It is our view that forces should not adopt this practice beyond the strict parameters of the College of Policing-led pilot (see below).

Several forces have identified a problem with making multiple attempts to visit victims who wanted to speak with somebody at a time convenient to them. Although forces generally haven't used a telephone-based initial response for domestic abuse cases in the past, some have experimented with the method for 'grade 3' incidents (those not needing an immediate or priority response<sup>4</sup>). Hampshire Constabulary adopted the approach in 2016. It used a triage process to identify 'grade 3' domestic abuse cases that were suitable for a telephone-based initial response, which included a domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence (DASH) risk assessment, and didn't need an officer to attend.

The approach was paused at the end of 2016 to allow an evaluation, which was initially carried out by Cardiff University. It is important to note that this is the only existing evaluation, and sample sizes were relatively small, so the College of Policing is now leading further testing of the approach in a small number of forces.

These criteria are strict due to the high-risk nature of domestic abuse and the need to make sure any changes to force processes don't place victims at greater risk of harm. The criteria require that forces only use a telephone-based initial response for incidents that they assess as having no immediate threat, harm or vulnerability, and to which all the following apply:

- no significant domestic history – either between the parties, or between the perpetrator and previous partners;
- minor offences, or no crime (providing there is no indication of controlling or coercive behaviour);

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<sup>4</sup> A priority or immediate response is required where a suspect is still at the scene or nearby and the caller needs immediate help.

- no immediate safeguarding concerns, or safeguarding advice can be given effectively over the telephone; and
- parties aren't cohabiting.

We have raised concerns in our previous domestic abuse reports about the use of a telephone-based initial response in domestic abuse cases. While we recognise the need for forces to test this approach, they should only do so using the strict criteria above, and with oversight from the College of Policing. It is important that the College encourages forces to build the experience of victims into the evaluation of this scheme and shouldn't use the approach to manage demand. Forces should use it in the best interests of the victim.

In summary, forces not involved in the pilot scheme shouldn't use a telephone-based initial response for domestic abuse cases until there is enough evidence to support its use and national guidance to support its implementation. We will monitor the progress of this pilot scheme through our domestic abuse reference group<sup>5</sup> and as part of our future inspections.

## **Providing the right response when the police arrive**

The way officers behave when they arrive at the scene of domestic abuse is vital. It can be the first face-to-face contact the victim has had with the police, even if the abuse has been going on for some time. On average, high-risk victims live with domestic abuse for 2.3 years,<sup>6</sup> and medium-risk victims for three years, before receiving help. It is crucial that the first contact a victim of domestic abuse has with the police is supportive and empathetic to gain their trust. A negative experience can result in the victim losing confidence in the police and failing to report future crimes.

During this inspection, we generally found the officers and staff that we spoke to understand the different types of vulnerability and how to protect vulnerable people. Forces are continuing to invest in training to improve the knowledge and awareness staff have of different vulnerable groups, including victims of domestic abuse. We found examples of forces giving response officers vulnerability handbooks and guidance booklets to ensure the approach at the scene is appropriate.

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<sup>5</sup> HMICFRS has a domestic abuse reference group to advise on and inform our work relating to domestic abuse. This group includes representatives from the police service, police and crime commissioners, the College of Policing, the Home Office and the voluntary sector.

<sup>6</sup> *Insights IDVA National Dataset 2013-14*, SafeLives, 2015.

Humberside Police has produced an 80-page booklet, *Your Guide to Vulnerability – Advice for Daily Decision Making*, which it distributes to all officers and staff. It contains information and practical guidance on a range of vulnerabilities, including domestic abuse, child abuse, female genital mutilation, prostitution, forced marriage, human trafficking, modern slavery and mental health.

Cumbria Constabulary has developed 'Keep me safe' guidance. This outlines the expected standards of safeguarding and investigation, and methods of recording decisions, and is easily accessible for officers on their handheld devices.

### **Domestic abuse training for officers**

All forces continue to invest in training and professional development for their workforce about vulnerability, including domestic abuse. As reflected in our last domestic abuse report, this training is well embedded, with mandatory training provided face-to-face with staff and officers in some forces. Other forces are working with academic institutions and using victim feedback to make sure that training is relevant and well informed. Some forces also involve other organisations in developing and/or providing their training sessions.

As part of this inspection, we surveyed over 350 non-police staff who work closely with victims of domestic abuse. We measured their views on the service given to victims. They told us that frontline officers most needed to improve their understanding of techniques of coercive and controlling behaviour. This was also the area identified as requiring the most improvement in 2016.

In the case of specialist officers, understanding coercive and controlling behaviour had fallen from first place in 2016 to second place in 2017. The area these officers now most need to improve is responding effectively to breaches of orders and bail. However, their understanding of techniques of coercive and controlling behaviour remains a priority area requiring improvement.

**Table 2: The top five competencies identified by domestic abuse practitioners as requiring a lot of improvement among frontline officers in 2016 and 2017**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>1</b>	Understanding of victim/perpetrator dynamics (techniques of coercive and controlling behaviour)	Understanding of victim/perpetrator dynamics (techniques of coercive and controlling behaviour)
<b>2</b>	Responds effectively to breaches of orders and bail	Appropriate use of DVPNs and DVPOs
<b>3</b>	Taking allegations of domestic abuse seriously	Information/increased awareness of support organisations and their services for victims
<b>4</b>	Appropriate use of DVPNs and DVPOs	Initial evidence gathering from social media sites
<b>5</b>	Understanding how the evidence gathered in such cases is used in court [and that all evidence is important to avoid the 'one person's word against another' situation]	Awareness of victim questioning techniques (interviewing skills)

**Source: HMICFRS survey of domestic abuse practitioners**

**Table 3: The top five competencies identified by domestic abuse practitioners as requiring a lot of improvement among specialist officers/investigators in 2016 and 2017**

Rank	2017	2016
1	Responds effectively to breaches of orders and bail	Understanding of victim/perpetrator dynamics (techniques of coercive and controlling behaviour)
2	Understanding of victim/perpetrator dynamics (techniques of coercive and controlling behaviour)	Appropriate use of DVPNs and DVPOs
3	Engagement with the MARAC process at appropriate level	Access to interpreters when English not victim's first language and not using family or friends to interpret
4	Referring/signposting victims to domestic abuse support services	Initial evidence gathering of social media sites
5	Appropriate use of DVPNs and DVPOs AND Initial evidence gathering of computer use and files	Initial evidence gathering of telephone calls and text messages AND Understanding that their primary concern should be victim's immediate and continuing safety

**Source: HMICFRS survey of domestic abuse practitioners**

SafeLives recently conducted a research project examining psychological violence. The aim was to establish a clear definition of psychological violence and amplify the voices of survivors who experience this form of non-physical domestic abuse. Some 470 survivors of domestic abuse and 654 practitioners completed a survey on non-physical abuse.

Researchers asked survivors to comment on the non-physical abuse they had experienced. Of the 377 comments made, 18 percent were about the difficulty of recognising this type of abuse (both for themselves and for professionals) and 5 percent were about the difficulty of proving the abuse to professionals.

Researchers asked practitioners to explain if legislation on psychological violence had made a difference to protecting victims. Some 203 commented that they didn't feel legislation had made a difference. Just under half (43 percent) thought this was because of a lack of awareness and understanding of the legislation. Twenty-five percent said this was due to the burden of proof on the victim to give



evidence about the abuse and 14 percent because of the lack of convictions made under the legislation.

The College of Policing has developed a training programme with the support of SafeLives, called Domestic Abuse Matters. This provides interactive classroom-based training for officers. The training focuses on several outcomes:

- understanding coercive and controlling behaviour;
- perpetrator tactics for keeping victims in relationships;
- understanding victims and why they may not wish to leave a relationship or support police action;
- questioning victims and perpetrators;
- evidence-gathering;
- safeguarding; and
- perpetrator manipulation of police responders.

The programme also involves having a workshop for local champions and senior managers, to make sure forces keep improving.

The success of the programme relies on at least 75 percent of frontline officers receiving training within a force. Ten forces undertook the new training programme throughout late 2016, 2017 and 2018. First responders were asked to consider their level of knowledge prior to and post-training in all the areas listed above. Analysis was carried out on feedback forms from 3,657 first responders and 361 Domestic Abuse Matters champions across four forces. Across all learning outcomes, respondents reported large increases in knowledge and understanding.

SafeLives conducted follow-up evaluation after six months to assess how useful the training had been. Again, the feedback was positive with 87 percent of first responders reporting positive changes in their work with victims. When asked to highlight specific areas of improvement or change, respondents highlighted a greater connection with the victim: giving reassurance, empathising more, and working harder to determine if other forms of abuse, or previous incidents had taken place. Officers more frequently told victims about specialist services, and responders made sure they kept victims informed and supported after the initial incident.

Fourteen forces have now adopted the domestic abuse matters change programme. By the end of September 2018, forces had trained 10,450 officers and staff, with an additional 1,575 trained as domestic abuse matters champions/mentors. We will continue to monitor what effect this has had during our 2018/19 PEEL inspections.

Surrey Police has invested in the development of bespoke training for all frontline officers and staff on domestic abuse. This training includes input from a survivor of domestic abuse. It also includes input from the person who developed the DASH risk assessment.

In West Yorkshire Police, officers receive training through the DASH i-learning programme. Face-to-face training has included controlling and coercive behaviour, better engagement with victims, and the importance of collating enough evidence to support an evidence-led prosecution, including use of body-worn video cameras. The force has based this training on the findings from domestic homicide reviews.

### **Quality of initial investigation: building the case for the victim**

It is crucial that officers start a thorough and professional investigation as soon as they arrive at the scene of a domestic abuse incident. They must gather evidence as early as possible. We reviewed crime files to check whether officers were completing the main elements of an effective investigation. In each case, we reviewed whether an officer had taken a statement from the victim, whether they made house-to-house enquiries, and whether they secured photographic or video evidence of the victim or the scene.

In 83 percent of these cases (816 of 978), there was evidence that officers had taken all appropriate investigative opportunities in a suitable timescale. As we've already said, we found response delays in just over a quarter of forces, with some incidents left outstanding for days. In these cases, it is likely that forces missed opportunities to gather evidence at an early stage to help the investigation.

Last year, we expressed concern that in over half the cases we reviewed, there was no evidence that officers had taken photographs of the victim's injuries. This year we found that in 92 percent of applicable cases (235 of 255), officers had taken photographs at the scene. This is much better. We also found an improvement in the way forces are putting in place safety measures beyond initial safeguarding. There was evidence of this in 84 percent of applicable cases (477 of 565), in contrast with only 46 percent (402 of 874 cases) last year.

We still have concerns about the quality of police officer statements in cases of domestic abuse. Officers should make a comprehensive statement, giving details of the scene, injuries and demeanour of the victim/suspect. We only found evidence of this in 55 percent of the applicable cases (308 of 556). This is a similar percentage to last year, when it was 53 percent (300 of 565 cases).

**Table 4: Crime review of 978 domestic abuse-related files**

	<b>Number of applicable cases (out of 978)</b>	<b>Proportion of case files where activity was completed</b>	<b>Number of case files where activity was completed</b>
<b>Victim statement taken at an appropriate time</b>	481	92%	442
<b>Photographs of injuries taken at the time of the incident</b>	255	92%	235
<b>House to house enquiries completed</b>	243	79%	193
<b>Comprehensive police officers statement, providing details of scene, injuries, demeanour of victim / suspect</b>	556	55%	308
<b>Body-worn camera used to capture evidence from the victim and scene</b>	328	59%	193

Source: HMICFRS crime file review

### **Body-worn video cameras – essential for evidence-gathering but further guidance is needed to maximise benefits**

Footage from body-worn video cameras can provide excellent evidence, particularly in criminal proceedings. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has shown that body-worn video footage has helped them successfully prosecute domestic abuse cases. This is even the case when victims feel unable to take part in a criminal prosecution or give evidence in court.<sup>7</sup>

Body-worn video cameras record the scene exactly as it is, including the behaviour and significant comments made by the perpetrator and victim. As at 1 July 2017, 35 forces told us that they now use body-worn video cameras on a force-wide basis and an additional six forces as part of a pilot scheme. Only two forces didn't use body-worn video camera at the time of our 2017 inspection. Only one force now

<sup>7</sup> [International Women's Day – Body-worn police cameras helping domestic abuse prosecutions](#), CPS, 2018.

doesn't use body-worn camera.<sup>8</sup> This is an improvement since our 2016 inspection, when 11 forces reported that they didn't use them.

However, we found that in a number of forces there were only a limited number of cameras available, so not all response officers had access to them. We also found that not all forces have a clear policy on how and when to use body-worn video cameras. For example, it wasn't always clear if it was mandatory for an officer to switch on their camera when they arrived at the scene of an incident, or if this was down to their professional judgment.

Our inspection showed that investigators could have used body-worn video footage to improve the quality of the investigation in 328 of the 978 domestic abuse files reviewed. However, they only used it in 59 percent of these cases (193 of 328). This could have been because the officer didn't have access to the technology or had a camera but didn't use it to record any footage at the scene.

We found that seven forces could improve their use of body-worn video cameras. We asked four forces to improve their initial investigations involving vulnerable victims, by giving responding officers access to this equipment. The other areas for improvement related to:

- clarifying the deployment of body-worn video equipment for officers attending domestic abuse incidents;
- reviewing the effectiveness of the use of body-worn video equipment; and
- making the cameras the force has bought available for officers to use.

In our last domestic abuse report,<sup>9</sup> we recommended that the College of Policing should give clearer guidance to forces about when body-worn cameras should be used at domestic abuse incidents. This work has yet to be completed. The guidance, which the College should work on with the national policing lead on domestic abuse, should cover how forces can use this tool as effectively as possible.

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<sup>8</sup> South Yorkshire Police does not use body-worn video equipment.

<sup>9</sup> [A progress report on the police response to domestic abuse](#), HMICFRS, 2017.

## **Assessing the needs of victims at the scene – overall forces have effective processes in place**

In 2016, we found that forces generally had effective processes in place to assess the needs of victims at the scene. This was still the case in 2017. Officers complete an assessment of risk and identify immediate safety concerns. This sets out any action needed to protect the victim and other vulnerable people in the household. Officers have a range of immediate and longer-term safeguarding options available to them to protect victims. During this inspection, we were pleased to find that officers are aware of the safeguarding options available – including the support available from local organisations – and are signposting victims to these services.

Most forces use the DASH model of risk identification, assessment and management in cases of domestic abuse and stalking and harassment. We found that the quality and supervision of DASH risk assessments is still inconsistent. Not all forces require officers to complete DASH forms in every case of domestic abuse: for example, for those incidents not involving a crime. We found cases in which officers had submitted DASH forms with limited or incomplete information. In some forces, the initial risk assessment is subject to a secondary review by the central referral unit (CRU) or multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Due to problems with the quality of DASH forms in some forces, these teams need to complete extra work as part of this secondary review.

Generally, we saw some improvement in terms of the supervision of risk assessments. However, this is still an area for improvement in 11 out of 43 forces. For example, in a small number of forces, sergeants aren't always reviewing risk assessments before they are submitted to the CRU or MASH – despite this being force policy. One force forwards all risk assessments to the MASH without having a supervisor check them first. As a result, the force hadn't completed a quick time assessment of the actions taken at the scene or the risk rating applied. In another force, we are concerned that supervisors only oversee high-risk cases. We recommended that these 11 forces train frontline officers to complete DASH risk assessments properly and increase the level of supervision, so they don't miss opportunities to safeguard victims.

However, we did find some good practice in this area. In some forces, the initial risk assessment is subject to a secondary review by the CRU or MASH, who give officers feedback if forms aren't completed to the necessary standard. In others, managers receive performance data about the submission and quality of DASH forms.

## **A new approach to risk assessment**

The College of Policing has designed a revised risk assessment tool for frontline officers. They have done this with input from survivors of domestic abuse, police practitioners, national support services, and leading academics. It aims to help responding officers recognise continuing abuse, and in particular, coercive control.

The revised tool records a clear picture of the nature and intensity of the abuse by asking victims how often specific behaviours occur, on a scale from 'never' to 'all the time'. It asks officers to complete a free-text section at the end of the process. This sets out why they have assigned the level of risk and considers aggravating factors (such as substance abuse and mental health), and anything that increases the victim's vulnerability (such as pregnancy).

Three forces – Sussex Police, West Midlands Police and Humberside Police – piloted the revised risk assessment over a three-month period. The College of Policing evaluated it using multiple methods: case file analysis, in-depth interviews, and direct observations of officers using the revised tool. The most important measure for the evaluation was their assessment of whether the responding officer had made an appropriate initial assessment of risk. The evaluation found that when using the piloted risk assessment tool, officers' initial assessments of risk were less likely to be regraded during a post-incident review than assessments made using DASH. Response officers also recorded proportionately more crimes of coercive control during the pilot scheme, though numbers overall were still small.

The College is now planning to test the new risk assessment form in a larger number of forces. We will follow up those taking part in the pilot scheme as part of our PEEL 2018/19 inspection activity. Any forces not taking part in the pilot should continue to use their current risk assessment process.

In Kent Police, responding officers contact the CRU domestic abuse pod team if they attend an incident where children or other vulnerable adults are present. The team can give officers safeguarding advice and make immediate interventions if needed. Officers have access to a domestic abuse application on their mobile devices, which gives them access to information about local advice and support services for victims.

Staffordshire Police uses a standardised tool called the domestic abuse incident log. During the inspection, we saw a number of examples of sergeants adjusting the risk rating – a process referred to as ‘stepping up’. They can step up a case into partnership hubs if they feel it needs this type of approach to resolve wider problems. Or they can step up a case into the MASH if concern is at a higher level.

West Yorkshire Police has invested in independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs), who go out on patrol with officers. They help to complete DASH forms and have been successful in engaging victims with complex needs and those who have previously not supported police action.

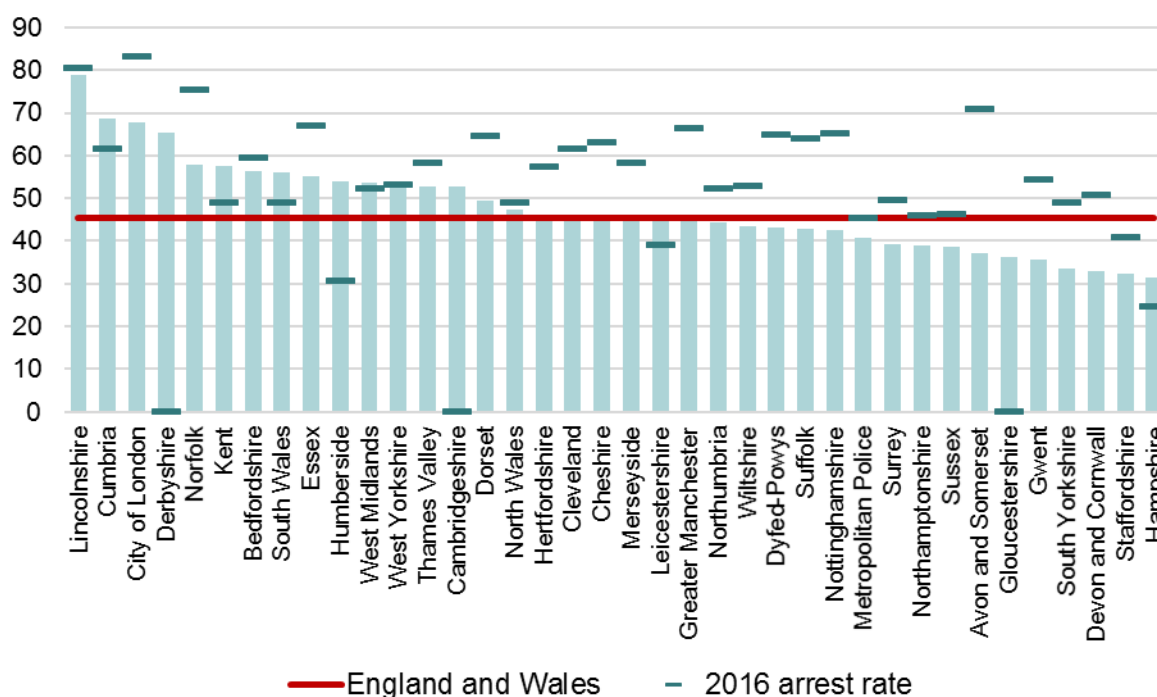
### **Domestic abuse arrest rates – still variable across forces**

Police officers have a duty to take positive action when they deal with incidents of domestic abuse. This often means arresting the perpetrator, if the grounds exist and it is a necessary and proportionate response.

We continue to be concerned that the rate of arrests in domestic abuse cases is falling. This relates to 35 forces who could provide data for both years for crimes and arrests. In this inspection, we found that officers in most forces recognise the importance of taking positive action in domestic abuse cases. This includes arresting the perpetrator. Despite this, in many forces the number of arrests continues to fall. Overall, the domestic abuse arrest rate in England and Wales has fallen from 52 arrests per 100 domestic abuse-related offences (in the 12 months to 30 June 2016), to 45 arrests per 100 (in the 12 months to 30 June 2017).

Another concern is the variation between forces. Lincolnshire Police has an arrest rate of 79 per 100 domestic abuse-related crimes. This compares with Hampshire Constabulary where the arrest rate is 31 per 100 (although the force is taking steps to improve its performance).

**Figure 3: Domestic abuse arrest rate (per 100 domestic abuse-related offences) by force in the 12 months to 30 June 2017, compared with 12 months to 30 June 2016**



Source: HMICFRS data collection, Home Office domestic abuse data

Note: Durham Constabulary, Lancashire Constabulary, North Yorkshire Police, Warwickshire Police and West Mercia Police couldn't give us data on domestic abuse arrests. North Yorkshire Police couldn't provide the full number of recorded crimes with a domestic abuse marker to the Home Office for 2017. So, we haven't included them in this graph, as an arrest rate couldn't be calculated.

For the 35 forces that provided data for both 2016 and 2017, the number of arrests for domestic abuse-related crimes has increased by 2 percent (from 201,659 in the 12 months to 30 June 2016, to 205,757 in the 12 months to 30 June 2017), but this is in the context of a 17 percent increase (from 388,020 to 455,395 domestic abuse-related crimes over the same time periods) in the number of domestic abuse-related offences in these forces. So, we are still concerned that the number of arrests is not increasing in line with the number of domestic abuse-related crimes.

In 2017, the number of arrests for domestic abuse-related crimes fell in 23 forces, despite the overall number of such offences increasing in these forces. This is worse than it was in 2016, when the figure was 15 forces. Even more worryingly, four forces could not tell us how many domestic abuse arrests they had made in the 12 months to 30 June 2017. It is crucial that force leaders understand the use of arrest to determine whether their officers are using this power appropriately. We asked eight forces to improve their understanding of the reasons for the declining arrest rate in domestic abuse cases and take appropriate action to address this.



## Investigating domestic abuse

We found that, generally, specialist public protection teams are good at investigating crimes that carry a higher level of threat, harm and risk to the victim (this would include domestic abuse cases).

In our review of 2,700 crime files across 43 forces, we examined 978 files for crimes with a domestic abuse element. These had slightly more effective investigations, better victim care and better supervision, compared with all the other cases we reviewed.

**Table 5: File review for evidence of effective investigation, victim care and supervision in domestic abuse-related files compared with all files**

	<b>Proportion of domestic abuse-related files</b>	<b>Proportion of all files</b>
<b>Evidence found of effective investigation</b>	83%	77%
<b>Evidence found of good victim care</b>	87%	84%
<b>Evidence found of a focus on identifying and bringing justice to those who committed the offence</b>	84%	78%
<b>Evidence found of effective, or limited but appropriate, supervision</b>	72%	62%

Source: HMICFRS case file review

We found that forces are improving the support they give investigators with their workloads and wellbeing. This includes measures such as:

- training from a mental health charity to help staff manage their own mental health;
- regular wellbeing checks by the occupational health department;
- the use of wellbeing screening tools; and
- a two-day conference on ‘safeguarding the safe guarder’, to which partner organisations were also invited.

However, a small number of forces allocate some of their domestic abuse investigations – even high-risk cases – to non-specialist, local response teams. As we have already said, response officers deal with high levels of demand. This can have a negative effect on the timeliness and quality of an investigation, and on the

service they give the victim. Also, they don't always have the appropriate experience and training to investigate such cases.

Our crime file review found evidence of better supervision of investigations in cases managed by specialist teams. We reviewed 270 domestic abuse investigations managed by a specialist unit and 457 managed by local officers. Some 82 percent (222 of 270) of those managed by specialist teams had effective, or limited but appropriate, supervision. This compared with 63 percent (289) of those managed by local neighbourhood/response teams.

The review also found evidence of more effective investigations in cases managed by specialist teams. Some 90 percent (242 of 270 domestic abuse cases) of investigations managed by a specialist unit showed evidence of an effective investigation, compared to 76 percent (349 of 457 domestic abuse cases) managed by neighbourhood/response teams.

### **Concerns about supervision**

In 2016, we found that the workloads of specialist investigators were sometimes too high. This continues to be the case. We are also still concerned about the supervision of investigations. Our crime file review found that crimes with a domestic abuse element generally had evidence of slightly better supervision than all files reviewed. But even so, in 24 percent (230) of the 978 domestic abuse cases we couldn't find enough evidence of effective supervision.

We assessed 15 forces as needing to improve their investigation processes for crimes involving vulnerable victims. This covered a range of areas, including:

- training for investigators;
- supervision of investigation; and
- making sure that the officers and staff who investigate offences have the appropriate professional skills.

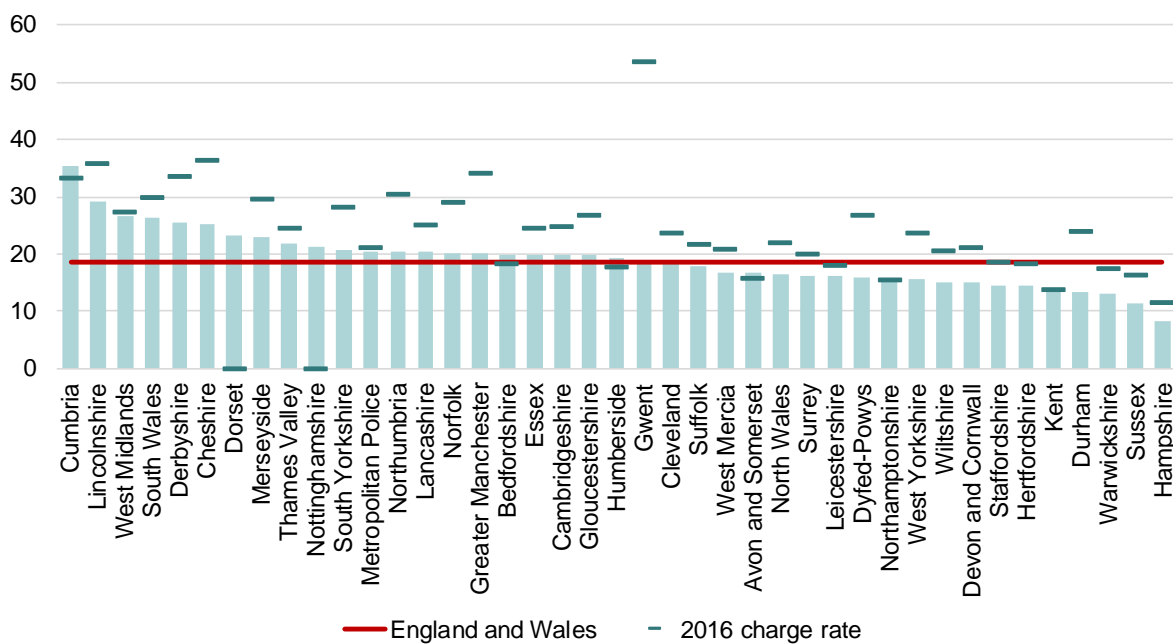
Most forces have continued to protect their investment in public protection teams. This is despite the difficult financial situation. Estimated spending in this area rose by 22 percent between 2015/16 and 2016/17. Between 2013/14 and 2014/15 it only rose by 16 percent. Although this increase is encouraging, it is worth noting that demand is also increasing, both in terms of the number of domestic abuse crimes and other kinds of offending involving vulnerable people (for instance, related to reports of child abuse). So, forces need to continue to keep their budgets in this area under close review.

## Outcomes for victims of domestic abuse crimes

The charge rate for domestic abuse crimes in England and Wales has continued to fall. This is despite forces increasing their focus on victims. In the 12 months to June 2016, the rate was 23.2 percent. This compares with only 18.6 percent in the 12 months to June 2017. We assessed three forces as needing to improve their understanding of charge rates.

More positively, the rate at which the police issue formal cautions to domestic abuse perpetrators also continues to decline. We are now confident that the police do not consider the use of cautions appropriate for the finalisation of domestic abuse cases.

**Figure 4: Domestic abuse charge rate (per 100 domestic abuse-related offences) by force in the 12 months to 30 June 2017, compared with 12 months to 30 June 2016**



Source: HMICFRS data collection, Home Office domestic abuse data

Note: For the 12 months to 30 June 2017, City of London and North Yorkshire couldn't provide domestic abuse outcomes data. For the 12 months to 30 June 2016, Dorset and Nottinghamshire couldn't provide domestic abuse outcomes data.

**Table 6: Outcome rates for domestic abuse-related offences for the 12 months to 30 June 2017, and 12 months to 30 June 2016**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>12 months to 30 June 2017</b>	<b>12 months to 31 March 2016</b>
<b>Charged/Summoned</b>	18.6%	23.2%
<b>Caution – adults</b>	3.8%	5.6%
<b>Caution – youths</b>	0.3%	0.3%
<b>Community resolution</b>	1.1%	1.4%
<b>Evidential difficulties prevent further action; victim supports police action</b>	23.7%	24.1%
<b>Evidential difficulties prevent further action; victim does not support police action</b>	43.0%	35.4%

Source: HMICFRS data collection, Home Office domestic abuse data

Note: For the 12 months to 30 June 2017, City of London Police and North Yorkshire Police weren't able to provide domestic abuse outcomes data. For the 12 months to 30 June 2016, Dorset Police and Nottinghamshire Police couldn't provide domestic abuse outcomes data. So, these forces' data isn't included in the calculation of the England and Wales rates.

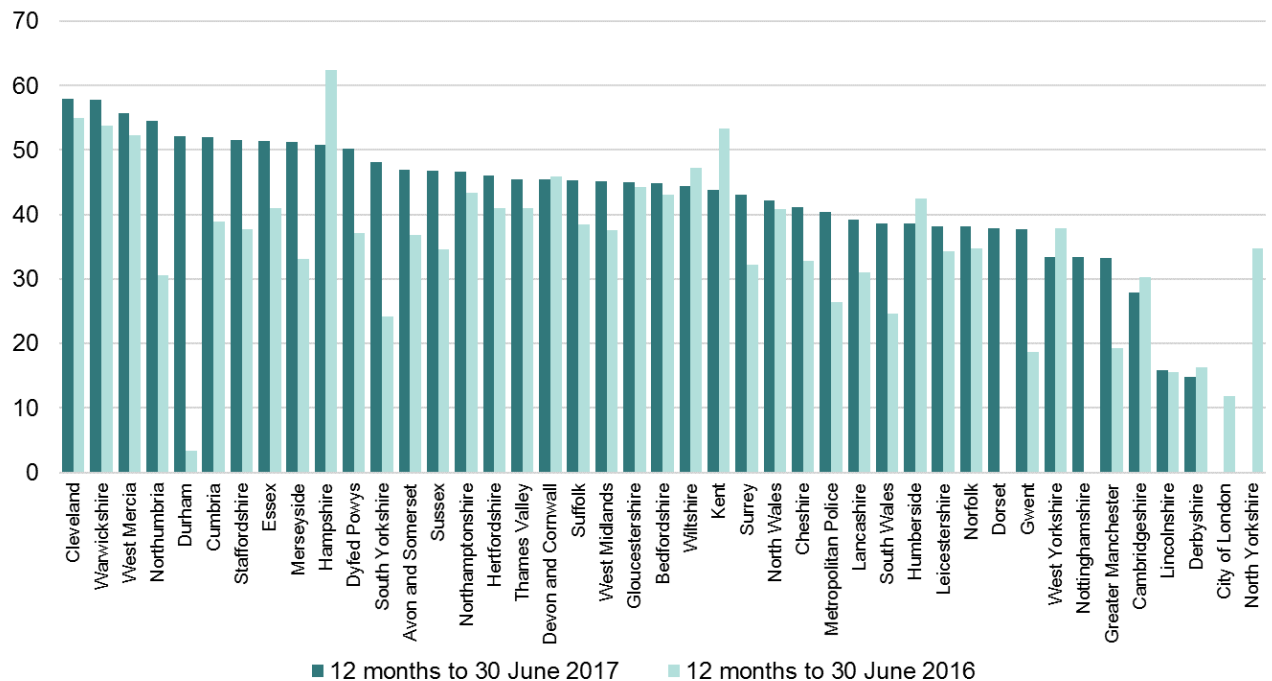
### **Investigative outcomes – the number of occasions when victims do not support police investigations is increasing**

In 2016, we found that the police were discontinuing about a third of domestic abuse prosecutions in cases where the victim didn't support or withdrew support for police action. It is not uncommon for domestic abuse victims to be reluctant to give evidence, due to fear of having to relive their experiences, or reprisals from the perpetrator and/or their family. It is important that forces collect and understand their data in this area to identify cases that are unlikely to progress and whether more needs to be done to engage victims who are particularly scared or vulnerable.

We are still concerned that, in the 12 months to 30 June 2017, in over a third of all reported domestic abuse crimes (43 of every 100 crimes) the victim didn't support any further police action. Some 33 forces have seen an increase in the proportion of cases with evidential difficulties where the victim did not support further action. In many cases, this was despite the victim knowing the identity of the perpetrator (known as outcome 16). In eight forces, more than half of all domestic abuse cases were closed with this outcome. Nine forces have seen a decrease and one force couldn't provide this data.

There is still huge variation in the use of outcome 16 across the country. We found the percentage of cases in this category varied from 15 to 57 percent per 100 domestic abuse-related offences in the 12 months to 30 June March 2017.

**Figure 5: Evidential difficulties – victim does not support police action per 100 domestic abuse-related offences, by force in the 12 months to 30 June 2016 and 12 months to 30 June 2017**



Source: HMICFRS data collection, Home Office domestic abuse data

Note: For the 12 months to 30 June 2017, City of London Police and North Yorkshire Police were unable to provide domestic abuse outcomes data. For the 12 months to 30 June 2016, Dorset Police and Nottinghamshire Police were unable to provide domestic abuse outcomes data.

In our crime file review, we found that forces had pursued cases that were suitable for progression without the support of the victim in 71 percent (152 of 215) of cases in which the victim withdrew support. Although officers appear to have a working knowledge of what is needed to prosecute without a victim’s support, there is evidence that there are some cases which could be progressed without victim support which are being closed. This is potentially putting victims at risk.

Twenty-two forces referred to outcome 16 in their FMS and two described in detail the action they had taken to reduce the use of this outcome.

The Norfolk Domestic Abuse Task and Finish Group was set up in 2017 to improve arrest rates and increase the number of case files going to the CPS. As a result of this group's work, the force has changed the way it deals with outstanding domestic abuse incidents. It has created an arrest matrix for outstanding arrests within each district, which prioritises those at highest risk of causing harm.

Northumbria Police has set up a domestic abuse investigation working group to support improvement in performance and consider matters to do with outcome 16 and coercive control investigations.

We are still concerned by both the considerable variation between forces in how they use this outcome and the unacceptably high level of use overall. It is important that all forces set clear standards and expectations for building the best possible case for the victim. This should include engaging victims with specialist domestic abuse services, which increases the likelihood of them co-operating with the criminal justice process and giving evidence at trial.

It is clear that forces still do not fully understand the fall in arrest rates and the use of outcome 16 to conclude cases.<sup>10</sup> We assessed 11 forces as needing to improve their understanding of the use of outcome 16. As a result, we are not confident that every force understands the problem properly or is doing all it can to encourage victims to support prosecutions.

### **Improving the outcomes for victims of domestic abuse**

One example of the criminal justice system's continued efforts to improve the approach to domestic abuse is the work by the National Criminal Justice Board. The Justice Secretary chairs this board. The board oversaw a project – called the domestic abuse 'deep-dive' project – which involved the police, CPS and Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). The project developed and tested a best practice framework for use across all magistrates' court systems. It visited high-performing magistrates' court systems (in terms of high conviction rates for domestic abuse-related offences) to identify the main reasons behind their performance and how these practices could be extended to other courts.

The board found several factors that were important in achieving successful results in domestic abuse cases. The main ones were:

- a clear multi-agency and community approach which addresses risk management and safeguarding procedures;
- support from IDVAs;

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<sup>10</sup> This data is from 35 forces that could provide both years' data.

- trained and consistently deployed staff across all organisations; and
- in-court services: proactive witness services/pre-trial familiarisation visits/appropriate use of special measures.

The findings led to the development of the best practice framework, which three magistrates' court systems – Bradford, Highbury and Nottingham – then tested. The police, CPS and HMCTS worked closely within these three magistrates' court systems to implement the domestic abuse best practice framework. At the end of the test phase, all three of the sites had improved their domestic abuse performance. They were able to improve from being low-performing areas, to being in line with or above the national average for domestic abuse performance.

The board also oversaw an independent dip-sample of police files within the three test sites, to draw out what factors were important in making the approach effective. They then incorporated the findings into the best practice framework.

In March 2018, the CPS approved the national rollout of the domestic abuse best practice framework. A national group is overseeing the implementation. It will assist regional co-ordinators across the police, CPS and HMCTS to draw up their local implementation plans.

### **Best practice examples from the magistrates' court systems**

Officer and IDVAs car service (Bradford): an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) car initiative has led to increased levels of victim attendance at court, and improved police understanding of the role of IDVAs in domestic abuse cases. The IDVA officer travel together to find out the history and background of the case, assess victim needs and go through the DASH risk assessment. They can take a statement from the victim, give practical advice, emotional support and make referrals to support agencies.

Pre-trial visit (PTV) form (Highbury): the CPS and Witness Service drafted a PTV form, which they now complete during every PTV. It is another means of recording whether they have offered a victim special measures and given them the opportunity to make a victim personal statement. They feed the answers back to the witness care unit who in turn refer any problems raised to the police officer in the case.

Police training (Nottingham): Nottinghamshire Police provides vulnerability training to officers covering coercion and control, and effective DASH risk-assessment training to all frontline staff. It also sends a series of bite-size revision videos to every employee within the organisation.

## **Use of police bail to keep victims safe**

This year, as part of our effectiveness inspection, we started to examine the effect of changes to pre-charge bail introduced as a result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. These changes came into force on 3 April 2017. Their aim is to end the police practice of keeping people on pre-charge bail for long periods without independent judicial scrutiny. Where bail is now used, the circumstances of the investigation must fully justify it. When bail can't be justified, accused persons are 'released under investigation' (RUI). In these cases, the police can't place restrictions on the person's release, for example to prevent them from contacting the victim, witnesses or otherwise interfering with an investigation.

We found that the number of people the police release on all types of bail for domestic abuse crimes has dropped considerably. Overall, the use of bail for domestic abuse cases has reduced by 65 percent. It has dropped from an average of 119 cases per day in the nine months to 31 March 2017, to 42 cases per day in the three months to 30 June 2017.

Since the 2017 PEEL inspections, we have wanted to gain a greater understanding of the use of bail for domestic abuse-related offences. So, we asked for more detailed data from forces and changed the question we asked slightly. When comparing the data collected in 2017 to the more detailed data collected in 2018, some forces show a huge increase and others show a large decrease in the proportion of cases where bail was used. What we have yet to uncover is why these changes have occurred. We will be working with forces through our inspection programme and with our technical advisory group to understand this data better. We will also be working with the 16 forces which were unable to provide data for 2018 to understand why this was the case, and how they are monitoring the use of bail in force.

Several organisations are currently collecting data on the use of bail, including the Home Office, College of Policing, Ministry of Justice and HMCTS. This all needs to be brought together to give us a clearer picture of how bail is being used in domestic abuse cases following the changes brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 and the effect of this for victims. In terms of next steps, we have established a working group with the national policing lead on bail, the College of Policing, the Home Office and representatives from forces. We will work to understand this data better and agree how we can collect more reliable data in the future.



We are concerned that the change to bail may be having a detrimental effect on victims. To explore this further, we held a focus group with nine practitioners from Women's Aid. They were concerned the victims they were working with hadn't been made aware of the changes to the use of bail. They gave examples of other ways the changes were negatively affecting the victims they supported:

- Some police officers have been advising victims to apply for non-molestation orders in cases where they haven't used bail, thereby placing the responsibility on the victim to protect themselves.
- Without bail conditions it is extremely hard to justify keeping the suspect away from the home they share with the victim. Some suspects have been released with no bail conditions and have returned to the family home, as they shared a joint tenancy with the victim. Victims and their children have then had to leave their home, as the suspect had the right to be there (according to the police and housing agencies).
- Housing departments are now asking for proof that a victim needs emergency housing – previously bail conditions would have assisted in providing this evidence.
- Victims are now finding it harder to evidence the need for a protection order – such as a restraining order – without information on bail history/breaches of bail.

The NPCC has produced national guidelines to help officers and staff make clear and timely risk-based decisions on the use of pre-charge bail and RUI. It also gives officers direction on risk assessing the threat to and from suspects who are subject to pre-charge bail or RUI.

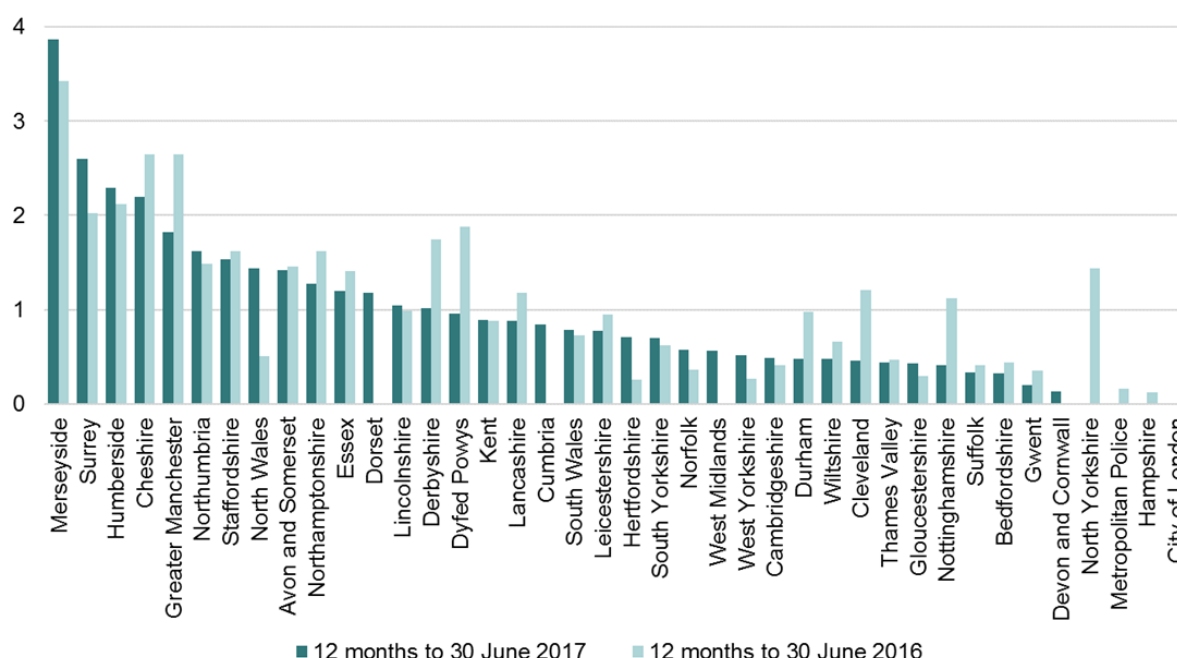
It is important that an unintended consequence of this legislation shouldn't be less protection for vulnerable victims, nor a feeling on their part that they are less supported and protected by the police. In our PEEL: police effectiveness 2017 report, we were so concerned about the use of pre-charge bail that we made a national recommendation requiring all forces to review how they implemented changes to pre-charge police bail by September 2018. Forces should now make any necessary changes to make sure they are using bail effectively, and make sure that vulnerable victims get the protection that bail conditions can give them. We will be following up progress against this recommendation during the PEEL 2018/19 inspections.

## Use of court orders to keep victims safe

The police and magistrates' courts use domestic violence protection notices (DVPNs) and domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) to protect victims from further harm by restricting the activities of the perpetrator. The police can issue DVPNs immediately following a domestic abuse incident. A magistrates' court then hears an application for a DVPO within 48 hours.

As with other areas of positive action and proactive safeguarding, there is still an extremely varied use of DVPOs throughout England and Wales. This was something we highlighted in our last domestic abuse thematic report, [A progress report on the police response to domestic abuse](#).

**Figure 6: Number of domestic violence prevention orders granted per 100 domestic abuse-related offences, by force, in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 and 12 months to 30 June 2017**



**Source: HMICFRS data collection, Home Office domestic abuse data**

**Note: Sussex Police, Warwickshire Police and West Mercia Police couldn't provide DVPO data for 2016 or 2017, so we have removed them from the graph. Cumbria Constabulary, Dorset Police and West Midlands Police couldn't provide DVPO figures for 2016. North Yorkshire Police couldn't provide domestic abuse data to the Home Office for 2017, so we couldn't calculate a DVPO granted rate.**

Overall, the picture is positive. There was a 14 percent increase in the number of DVPOs granted (data from 33 forces that were able to provide comparable year-on-year data) in the 12 months to 30 June 2017 compared with the 12 months to 30 June 2016. However, 13 forces have decreased the number of DVPOs applied for and granted. Over a third of forces (33) who gave DVPO data say they are using them less.

A further three forces couldn't provide data on the number of DVPOs applied for, and five on the number of DVPOs granted. This is a concern, as it suggests forces aren't monitoring their data to understand what is or isn't changing in their policing of domestic abuse.

We assessed nine out of the 43 forces as needing to improve their use of powers. We recommended that they should review their use, to make sure they are making the best use of these powers to safeguard victims of domestic abuse. Given the protection that these orders can give victims and their children, we recommend that all forces review their use as a priority. Forces need to have monitoring processes in place, supported by accurate data, to make sure they are using these powers effectively.

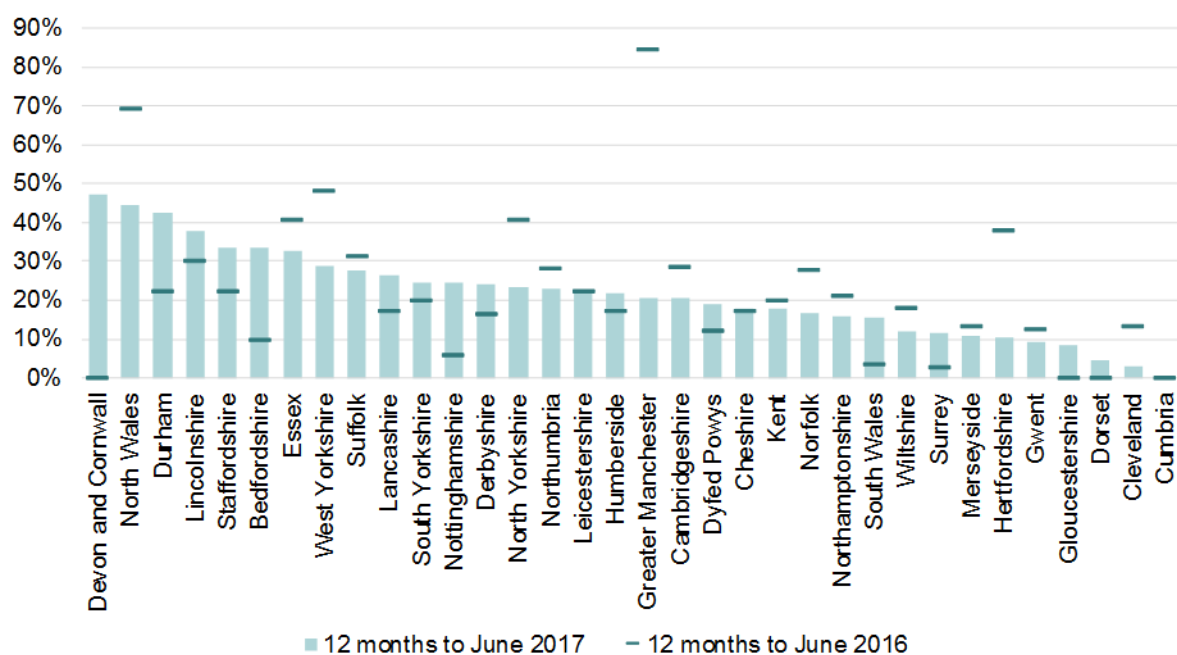
Three forces flagged up their own areas for improvement in their FMSs. They told us they did not understand why the use of DVPOs and DVPNs was falling.

Humbeside Police is addressing this through new domestic abuse criminal justice liaison officers, who work with investigators. Devon and Cornwall Police has also recruited vulnerability lawyers to progress their performance on DVPO/DVFN submissions.

### **Breaches of DVPOs**

There continues to be wide variation across forces in the percentage of DVPOs breached. Of the 31 forces that provided this data for the 12 months to June 2016 and the same period in 2017, 15 saw an increase in the DVPO breach rate, while 16 had a decrease.

**Figure 7: Proportion of DVPOs breached in the 12 months to 30 June 2017 and 12 months to 30 June 2016**



Source: HMICFRS data collection, Home Office domestic abuse data

Note: City of London, Hampshire, Avon and Somerset, Sussex, Thames Valley, Warwickshire, West Mercia, West Midlands and Metropolitan Police Service couldn't provide DVPO breach data for 2017, so we haven't included them in the graph. Cumbria, Dorset and Devon & Cornwall couldn't provide DVPO breach data for 2016.

Dealing with breaches of orders was a priority for the domestic abuse practitioners that completed our survey. They told us the area requiring the most improvement among specialist officers was the need to respond effectively to breaches of orders and bail. For frontline officers, this was the second area requiring the most improvement. When there are delays in the response to breaches, or if the response is not as robust as it should be, victims can lose confidence in the police and the criminal justice process. This may prevent those victims reporting further incidents of domestic abuse. Breaches of DVPOs and other orders can increase the risk that the perpetrator poses and compromise the safety of the victim. If the police apply for these orders, and if the courts grant them, then they should be enforced.

## Working with other organisations to safeguard victims

To protect victims of domestic abuse, it is crucial that the police work with other organisations, such as local authorities and specialist domestic abuse support services. We were pleased to find that forces continue to develop practices for working together. Multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs) and central referral units (CRUs) bring together staff from police forces and partner organisations. These include adult social care, children's social care, probation, health and housing. They work from the same location (in some instances) to exchange information and conduct risk assessments and safety planning, to ensure a timely and joined-up approach to protecting vulnerable people.

As at 1 July 2017, there were 146 MASHs in England and Wales, with 41 out of 43 forces having some form of MASH model. In 37 of the 43 forces, the MASHs cover the entire force area. The types of organisations that participate in MASHs vary considerably, depending on local arrangements.

**Table 7: MASH participation percentage by agency as at 1 July 2017**

	<b>Total number of MASHs attended</b>	<b>Proportion of MASHs attended</b>
<b>Police</b>	144	99%
<b>Children's social care</b>	141	97%
<b>Health</b>	127	87%
<b>Education</b>	75	51%
<b>Adult social care</b>	61	42%
<b>Probation</b>	55	38%
<b>Housing</b>	38	26%

Source: HMICFRS data collection

In both our 2015 and 2016 inspections, we identified variances in how MASHs function, which led to inconsistent safeguarding between forces. This continues in 2017, with forces across England and Wales using a range of different models. There is even variation within individual force areas. MASHs differ greatly in their remit, scope and capacity. There is no national guidance on what a MASH should do, or what the outcomes for victims should be, which makes the situation worse.

The Home Office has started work to develop a set of principles for effective multi-agency working in this area, which include guidance on information-sharing. This was a recommendation in our thematic report, [Increasingly Everyone's Business](#), published in December 2015. This has been delayed due to consideration

of introduction of a national effective practice toolkit for police on domestic abuse, of which the multi-agency principles would form part. We'd recommend that it be completed as a priority.

Northumbria Police runs a process that identifies the highest-risk serial perpetrators. Five local authorities and their partner organisations are fully engaged in their MATAC (multi-agency tasking and co-ordination) process. Central to this new operating model is the development of MASH arrangements within all six local authority areas. This will enable them to provide an all-round approach to vulnerable children and adults based on their individual needs and the needs of the family. Each local authority will have its own MASH structure, based on three common principles: information-sharing; joint decision-making; and co-ordinated intervention. This whole-family approach is crucial in supporting families and the rehabilitation of the perpetrator.

### **Giving information to schools to support children present at domestic abuse incidents**

Forces are continuing to develop how they give information to schools to protect vulnerable children. Operation Encompass involves forces working with local authorities and nominated 'key adults' or contacts in schools. If the police attend a domestic abuse incident where a child is present, they notify the school before the start of the next school day.

Thirty-three forces now use Operation Encompass or a similar scheme to share information with schools, so that the schools can offer these children additional support. This is a positive development since our 2016 inspection, when only 22 forces reported that they used this or a similar scheme.

### **MARACs – forces exploring alternative arrangements to deal with the increasing demand**

The four aims of multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) are to:

- safeguard victims of domestic abuse;
- manage perpetrators' behaviour;
- safeguard professionals; and
- make links with all other safeguarding processes.

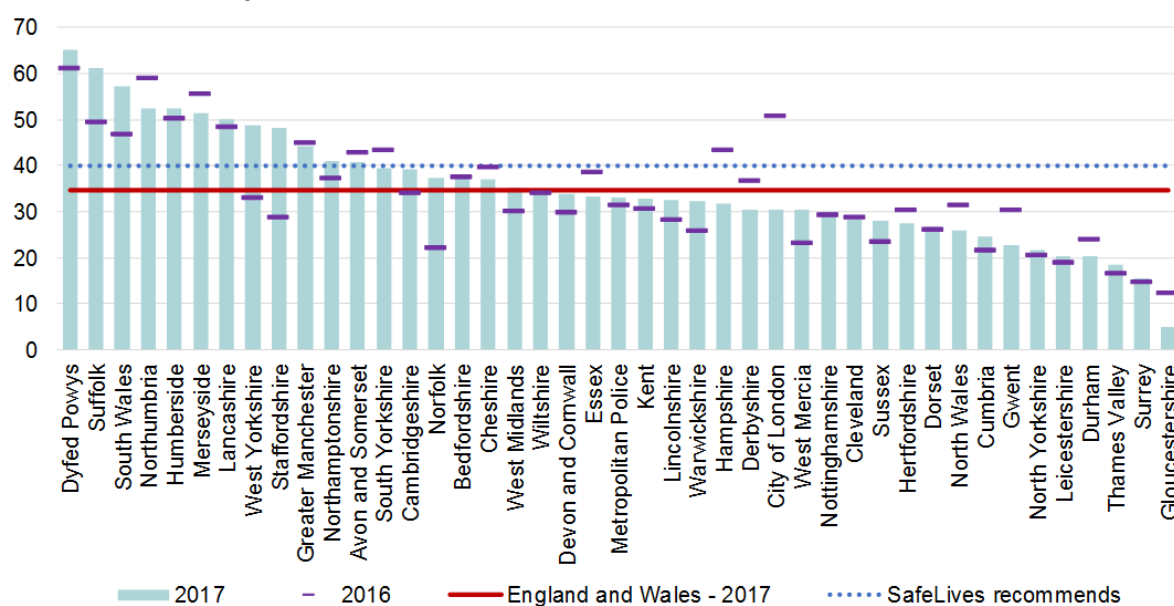
They are meetings at which representatives of statutory and voluntary organisations exchange information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase victim safety. The organisations that attend MARACs vary, but normally include the police, probation service, IDVAs, children's social care and health and housing workers. A MARAC isn't an agency and doesn't

have a case management function. The responsibility to take appropriate action lies with the individual organisations involved.

The most recent data from SafeLives<sup>11</sup> (a national charity dedicated to improving the response to domestic violence in conjunction with partners) indicates that, in the 12 months to 31 March 2017, there were 288 MARACs operating throughout England and Wales, compared with 293 in the same period in 2016. In this 12-month period, 86,893 cases were discussed at MARACs in England and Wales. This is a 10 percent increase in the total number of cases discussed at MARAC when compared to the same period in 2016 and represents a rate of 35 cases for every 10,000 adult females in the population. SafeLives data also shows that there were 109,901 children linked to households discussed at MARAC.

We continue to be concerned about the ability of police forces and wider agencies to cope with the increasing number of cases being referred to MARAC. We found that, in the 12 months to 31 March 2017, 26 forces saw an increase in the number of cases discussed at MARACs per 10,000 adult females when compared with the same period in 2016. Seventeen forces reported a decrease in the number of cases discussed per 10,000 adult females and, more worryingly, not all of these could explain the reasons behind this.

**Figure 8: Number of cases discussed per 10,000 adult females, per force, in the 12 months to 31 March 2017 compared with 12 months to 31 March 2016**



Source: SafeLives

<sup>11</sup> Data is taken from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Data digest.

Some forces are examining different ways to improve how they work with partner organisations and safeguard victims. A small number of forces are now holding daily MARAC meetings in an attempt to manage high volume, or because they believe the risk can be better managed by meeting to share information sooner. At these meetings, agency representatives share all relevant and appropriate information, in relation to the victim, children and perpetrator, and agree multi-agency plans, with the aim of providing a more effective and timely response to all parties.

SafeLives was concerned about the effectiveness of this approach for victims and carried out a review. They found that there can sometimes be a corresponding increase in demand if a daily meeting is combined with a lower threshold for cases, looking at medium-risk cases rather than just high-risk cases as intended. There is evidence to show that daily MARACs have increased the volume of repeat cases too – maybe because it is not possible to accurately assess needs and risk and respond appropriately.

Nationally, there is no clear definition and operating model for a daily MARAC. Although they meet every day, some hear cases from the previous day, whereas some use a delay of one to seven days to hear cases from the previous week. This presents a danger of it becoming just a meeting without having the process and systems normally associated with a MARAC in place. The biggest problem SafeLives found with the effectiveness of the daily MARAC model was that it could present barriers to IDVAs who conduct the risk assessment with the victim, advocate for their wishes at the meeting, and co-ordinate support. They often could not attend, due to their large caseloads. Or due to the tight timelines, victims could not be contacted in time, resulting in their voice being absent from the meeting.

SafeLives recognises the increasing demand faced by MARACs and recommends that MARACs, as a starting point, carry out case audits to ensure that all cases referred to them have met the MARAC threshold. It also stresses the importance of having an effective governance group to monitor performance and manage MARACs in accordance with [10 principles of an effective MARAC](#). If their volume remains high, their governance group may then need to increase the frequency of MARAC meetings to manage the volume.

It is important to remember that a MARAC is not just a meeting. It is a process within which the meeting sits. Reviewing the effectiveness of the MARAC process regularly is crucial to maintain standards and the response to victims and children, SafeLives recommends that areas do this at least every two years.



We found other areas of concern in a small number of forces. These include:

- Backlogs of referrals awaiting a secondary risk assessment in MASHs, meaning the extent of risk may remain hidden until they have done the full assessment.
- Not referring all high-risk cases of domestic abuse to MARAC and using a triage process to decide which cases they should discuss. Although partner organisations are involved in the triage process in some forces, this was not standard practice. We are concerned that this is another way of forces managing demand, which could potentially put victims at risk, particularly where forces are making these decisions without the involvement of partners. Forces need to assure themselves that they are not screening out cases that would benefit from wider discussion at the MARAC.
- Differences in the approach to MARACs – both within counties and across county/city areas – could result in different outcomes for victims.

### **Victim feedback – more victim voices need to be heard**

One of the most valuable sources of information in assessing the quality of a service is feedback from the people who received that service. Our first domestic abuse report, [Everyone's Business](#), highlighted that the views of victims of domestic abuse are vital for monitoring police effectiveness. This report recommended that the Home Office should make sure it incorporated the views of victims of domestic abuse into national monitoring arrangements.

Since June 2016, the Home Office has required forces (as part of its [annual data return](#)) to provide data on the number of victims of domestic abuse they survey. During this inspection, we found that six forces weren't doing these surveys. A further six forces were surveying victims of domestic abuse but excluding those who don't support police action (outcome 16). We have asked these 12 forces to implement a process to obtain feedback from victims of domestic abuse. Seeking feedback from these victims is crucial if forces are to understand what they can do to support those that are reluctant to engage. Without the benefit of this feedback, it is difficult to understand how forces can improve both the service they provide to victims, and their performance.

## Definitions and interpretation

In this report, the following words, phrases and expressions in the left-hand column have the meanings assigned to them in the right-hand column. Sometimes, the definition will be followed by a fuller explanation of the matter in question, with references to sources and other material which may be of assistance to the reader.

bail conditions	terms upon which a defendant has been granted bail pending a court hearing; their purpose is to ensure that the defendant attends the next court hearing, commits no new offences in the meantime, and does not interfere with any witnesses or obstruct the course of justice; they are usually set by the court, which can grant bail without any such conditions or can detain the defendant in custody; before the first court hearing, the police can also detain a defendant in custody or grant bail, with or without conditions attached, but the police's powers to do so are more limited than those of the courts; breach of these conditions may amount to a separate offence under section 7(3) of the Bail Act 1976
body-worn video camera	camera worn on the helmet or upper body of an officer, which records visual and audio footage of an incident

[Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#)

statutory code of practice issued by the Secretary of State for Justice under section 32 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004; the code establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime; its stated objective is to ensure the criminal justice system puts victims first, making the system more responsive to them and easier for them to navigate; it also aims to ensure that victims of crime are treated well and receive appropriate support to help them cope and recover, and to protect them from becoming victims again; the code specifies the services which must be provided to victims of crime in England and Wales, and sets a minimum for the standard of those services; higher entitlements are set for victims of the most serious crime, persistently targeted victims and vulnerable or intimidated victims; the public sector bodies which are obliged to provide services to victims of crime are specified in the code, and include police forces and police and crime commissioners; the Victims' Commissioner has a statutory duty to keep the code under regular review

coercive control

behaviour and actions of a perpetrator which are intended to control the victim through isolation, intimidation, degradation and micro-regulation of everyday life; the term and concept was developed by Evan Stark, seeking to explain the range of tactics used by perpetrators and the effects of those on victims; the concept highlights the continuing nature of the behaviour and the extent to which the actions of the perpetrator control the victim; crucially, the concept sets out that such abuse can be psychological as well as physical; the term is explicitly covered within the definition of domestic abuse; the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour within an intimate or familial relationship is set out in section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 and carries a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment, a fine, or both, for offenders

control room

facility in each police force in which call operators answer telephone calls from the public, determine the circumstances of the call and decide the initial response

domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence (DASH) assessment	risk identification, assessment and management model adopted by United Kingdom police forces and partner agencies in 2009
domestic homicide review	multi-agency review within the local police area following a domestic homicide; aims to identify the lessons that can be learned from homicides where a person is killed because of domestic violence, with a view to preventing future homicides and violence
domestic violence protection notice (DVPN)	made against a suspected perpetrator of domestic violence; its purpose is to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence; this notice, which must be authorised by a police superintendent, contains prohibitions that effectively bar the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim with immediate effect; may be issued to a person aged 18 years and over if the police superintendent has reasonable grounds for believing that the recipient has been violent towards, or has threatened violence towards an associated person, and the DVPN is necessary to protect that person from violence or a threat of violence by the recipient; introduced by sections 24-33 of the Crime and Security Act 2010; it was piloted in three police areas in 2011–12, and was rolled out nationally in 2014
domestic violence protection order (DVPO)	power that enables the police and magistrates' courts to put in place protection in the immediate aftermath of a domestic abuse incident; where there is insufficient evidence to charge a perpetrator and provide protection to a victim via bail conditions, can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days; this gives the victim an opportunity to consider their options and get the support and guidance which he or she needs from a dedicated domestic abuse service

female genital mutilation	procedure that intentionally alters or causes injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons; sometimes known as 'female circumcision'; sometimes religious, cultural or social reasons are given for inflicting this practice, however it is illegal in the UK; since 2003 it has also been illegal for a UK national or a resident of the UK to take their child abroad to undergo such a procedure
harassment	causing alarm or distress and/or putting people in fear of violence; includes the offence of stalking either in person or through other means of communication; defined under sections 2 and 4 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 as amended; high-risk harassment means it is likely that a victim will be subject to an incident which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible
independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA)	trained specialist who provides a service to victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members, with the aim of securing their safety and the safety of their children; also known as independent domestic violence advocates; serve as a victim's primary point of contact and normally work with their clients from the point of crisis, to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans; can be accessed through voluntary organisations against domestic abuse or local authority services and usually work within a multi-agency framework
multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)	meeting in which information about high-risk domestic abuse victims is shared between local statutory and voluntary agencies; safeguarding agencies and, if possible, the victim as represented by the IDVA, work to produce a risk-focused, co-ordinated safety plan to support the victim

multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)	location in which staff from the police, local authority and other safeguarding agencies share data, research and decision-making in relation to local children and adults who are vulnerable; representatives from agencies are likely to include: police public protection unit, children's social care, health and education providers, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), adult services, substance misuse, the early intervention services, probation and housing, amongst others; the purpose is to ensure a timely and joined-up response for children and vulnerable adults who require protection
partnership	established collaborative working between the police and other public, private or voluntary organisations
Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)	statute under which police forces primarily operate; together with the <a href="#">PACE codes of practice</a> it provides the essential framework of police powers and safeguards; legislates in relation to matters such as stop and search, arrest, detention, investigation, identification and interviewing detainees
positive action	activity conducted at all stages of the police response to ensure effective protection of victims and children, while allowing the criminal justice system to hold the offender to account; often used in the context of arrest policy, i.e. that an arrest will normally be 'necessary' under the terms of PACE to protect a child or vulnerable person, prevent the suspect causing injury and/or to allow for the prompt and effective investigation of the offence
risk assessment	structured professional judgment using a guide/checklist method by which the likelihood of risk is determined; completion is intended to assist police officers in the decision-making process on appropriate levels of intervention for victims of domestic abuse
safeguarding	process of protecting vulnerable people from abuse or neglect

SafeLives	national charity against domestic abuse; its aim is to protect the highest-risk victims and their children, i.e. those at risk of murder or serious harm; its approach is focused on saving lives and public money and supports a strong multi-agency response to domestic abuse; provides practical help to support professionals and organisations working with domestic abuse victims; originally set up in 2005 as the Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) by Diana Barren
victim personal statement	written on behalf of the victim of a crime; gives victims an opportunity to describe the wider effects of the crime upon them, to express their concerns and indicate whether or not they require any support; provisions relating to its preparation for, and use in, criminal proceedings are included in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code), October 2015
vulnerable person	person in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect

## Annex A: About the data

The information presented in this report comes from a range of sources, including data published by the Home Office, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), inspection fieldwork and data collected directly from all 43 geographic police forces in England and Wales.

Where HMICFRS collected data directly from police forces, we took reasonable steps to agree the design of the data collection with forces and with other interested parties such as the Home Office. We gave forces several opportunities to quality assure and validate the data they provided us, to ensure the accuracy of the evidence presented. For instance:

- Data that forces submitted was checked and queried with those forces where data was notably different from that of other forces or was internally inconsistent.
- All forces were asked to check the final data used in the report and correct any errors identified.

The source of the data is presented with each figure in the report and is set out in more detail within this annex. The source of Force in numbers data is also set out below.

## Methodology

### Data in the report

British Transport Police was outside the scope of inspection. Any aggregated totals for England and Wales exclude British Transport Police data, so will differ from those published by the Home Office.

### Population

For all uses of population as a denominator in our calculations, unless otherwise noted, we use ONS mid-2016 population estimates. This was the most recent data available at the time of the inspection.

For the specific case of City of London Police, we include both resident and transient populations within our calculations. This is to account for the unique nature and demographics of this force's responsibility.



## Recorded crime and crime outcomes

This data is obtained from [Home Office police-recorded crime and outcomes data tables](#) for the 12 months to 30 June 2017 and is taken from the October 2017 Home Office data release.

Total police-recorded crime includes all crime, except fraud offences, recorded by all police forces in England and Wales. Home Office publications on the overall volumes and rates of recorded crime and outcomes include British Transport Police, which is outside the scope of this HMICFRS inspection. Therefore, England and Wales rates in this report will differ from those published by the Home Office.

Any data referring to police-recorded crime should be treated with care, as recent increases may be attributed to the renewed focus on the quality and compliance of crime recording since HMICFRS's national inspection of crime data in 2014 and continuing Crime Data Integrity inspection programme.

Suffolk Constabulary was unable to submit 2017 outcomes data to the Home Office due to data quality issues, relating to the changing of its crime recording system to Athena. Therefore, Suffolk Constabulary has been excluded from the England and Wales figure.

Other notable points to consider when interpreting outcomes data are listed below:

- Crime outcome proportions show the percentage of crimes recorded in the 12 months to 30 June 2017 that have been assigned each outcome. This means that each crime is tracked or linked to its outcome. Therefore this data is subject to change, as more crimes are assigned outcomes over time.
- Under the new framework, 37 police forces in England and Wales provide outcomes data through the Home Office data hub (HODH) on a monthly basis. All other forces provide these data via a manual return also occurring on a monthly basis.
- Leicestershire, Staffordshire and West Yorkshire forces participated in the Ministry of Justice's out of court disposals pilot. This means they no longer issued simple cautions or cannabis/khat warnings and they restricted their use of penalty notices for disorder as disposal options for adult offenders, as part of the pilot. These three pilot forces continued to operate in accordance with the pilot conditions after the pilot ended in November 2015. Other forces subsequently also limited their use of some out-of-court disposals. Therefore, the outcomes data should be viewed with this in mind.

- Direct comparisons should not be made between general crime outcomes and domestic abuse-related outcomes. Domestic abuse-related outcomes are based on the number of outcomes for domestic-abuse related offences recorded in the 12 months to 30 June 2017, irrespective of when the crime was recorded. Therefore, the domestic abuse-related crimes and outcomes recorded in the reporting year are not tracked, whereas the general outcomes are tracked.
- For a full commentary and explanation of outcome types, please see [Crime outcomes in England and Wales: year ending March 2017](#), Home Office, July 2017.

### **Review of crime files**

As part of the wider effectiveness inspection work, we reviewed 60 police case files (90 files in the four largest forces) across crime types for:

- rape (including attempts);
- theft from the person;
- harassment;
- stalking;
- common assault;
- wounding or grievous bodily harm; and
- actual bodily harm.

All these cases were assessed to see if there was a domestic abuse element; of the 2,700 cases reviewed, 978 cases were domestic abuse-related. These files were then used to give us a broad overview of:

- forces' identification of vulnerability;
- the effectiveness of their investigations; and
- how forces treat victims.

We selected files randomly from crimes recorded between 1 January 2017 and 31 March 2017. We assessed these files against several criteria. We supplemented our file review assessments with other evidence we gathered, as the small sample size meant file review evidence alone wasn't a robust enough basis for assessing individual force performance.

## **Domestic abuse-related offences**

Data relating to domestic abuse-related offences is obtained through the Home Office for the 12 months to 30 June 2017. The Home Office collects this data regularly and requires all forces to record accurately and flag domestic abuse crimes. Domestic abuse flags should be applied in accordance with the Home Office Counting Rules 58 to ensure consistency across forces, and within published data sets.

Data relating to domestic abuse arrests and outcomes was collected directly from all 43 geographic police forces in England and Wales.

[Further information about the domestic abuse statistics and recent releases is available from ONS.](#)

When viewing this data the reader should be aware that North Yorkshire Police was unable to give the Home Office comparable data on domestic abuse-flagged crimes. The force extracted data for HMICFRS on the powers and outcomes used to deal with these offences by using an enhanced search. This search examined additional factors (such as the victim/suspect relationship) and included a keyword search to identify additional domestic abuse crimes which may not have been flagged. The force used a simpler search, which identified domestic abuse crimes by flagging alone, to extract data it supplied to the Home Office. As North Yorkshire Police's data on domestic abuse is not comparable with other forces, we have excluded the data.

## **Domestic abuse arrest rate (per 100 domestic abuse-related offences) in England and Wales – in the 12 months to 30 June 2017**

The arrest rate is calculated using a common time period for arrests and offences. It is important to note that each arrest is not necessarily directly linked to its specific domestic abuse offence recorded in the 12 months to 30 June 2017 in this calculation. It is also possible to have more than one arrest per offence. In addition, the reader should note the increase in police-recorded crime which affected the majority of forces over the last year. This may mean arrest rates are higher than the figures suggest. Despite this, the calculation still indicates whether the force prioritises arrests for domestic abuse offenders over other potential forms of action. HMICFRS evaluated the arrest rate alongside other measures (such as use of voluntary attendance or body-worn video cameras) during our inspection process to understand how each force deals with domestic abuse overall.

When viewing this data the reader should be aware of the following:

- Durham, Lancashire, Warwickshire and West Mercia forces were unable to provide domestic abuse arrest data. North Yorkshire Police was unable to provide comparable domestic abuse crime and arrest data, so a rate could not be calculated. Therefore, these forces are not included in the figure.
- Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Durham and Gloucestershire forces were unable to provide 2016 domestic abuse arrest data. Therefore, these forces do not have 2016 data included in the figure.

When viewing domestic abuse arrest data for 2016, the reader should be aware of the following:

- Cambridgeshire Constabulary was unable to provide 2016 domestic abuse arrest data due to a recording problem that meant it could only obtain accurate data from a manual audit of its custody records.
- Lancashire Constabulary had difficulty in identifying all domestic abuse flagged arrests. This affected 23 days in the 12 months to 30 June 2016. The force investigated this and confirmed that the impact on the 2016 data provided to HMICFRS would be marginal and that this is the most reliable data it can provide.

## Annex B: Domestic abuse reference group members

Vera Baird QC	Police and Crime Commissioner, Northumbria Police
Hannah Buckley	Home Office
Hilary Fisher	Women's Aid
Charlotte Hickman	Home Office
Suzanne Jacob	SafeLives
Sara Jones	Office for Police and Crime Commissioner for Sussex
Jane Keeper	Refuge
Angie Whittaker	West Midlands Police and Staff Officer to DCC Louisa Rolfe
Ellen Miller	Victim Support
Meena Kumari	Victim Support
Karen Morgan-Read	Crown Prosecution Service
DCC Louise Rolfe	West Midlands Police and the National Policing Lead on Domestic Abuse
Jo Todd	Respect
David Tucker	College of Policing
Sally Steadman	SafeLives
Sian Hawkins	Women's Aid

## **Annex C: Progress against recommendations from ‘A progress report on the police response to domestic abuse’**

### **Recommendation 1: National Oversight Group**

#### **Recommendation 1**

The National Oversight Group, chaired by the Home Secretary, has played a vitally important and successful role in improving the police response to domestic abuse through its public scrutiny of progress against each of HMICFRS’s 2014 and 2015 national recommendations. The group was expanded in 2016 to include representatives from NHS England, Department for Education, Local Government and social care organisations, and in early 2017 the group’s remit was broadened to cover so-called ‘honour-based’ violence, as well as stalking and harassment.

The National Oversight Group should continue to monitor and report on the progress made in implementing this further set of recommendations, as well as those from previous reports that are outstanding.

#### **Update on recommendation 1**

The Home Secretary continues to chair quarterly meetings of the National Oversight Group to monitor and oversee the police response to domestic abuse and report on progress in implementing recommendations from HMICFRS thematic reports into domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and so-called honour-based violence.

## **Recommendation 2: National domestic abuse data monitoring**

### **Recommendation 2**

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published in 2016 a new statistical bulletin and data tool in relation to domestic abuse, bringing together certain data on domestic abuse at a force level. This has started to enable police and crime commissioners, chief police officers, crown prosecutors and other agencies within the criminal justice system to enhance their understanding of how domestic abuse is dealt with in their local areas, and improve the monitoring of performance and setting of priorities.

The Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Crown Prosecution Service, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), the College of Policing, HMICFRS and domestic abuse organisations should continue to work with the Office of National Statistics to expand this data set to enable a more thorough analysis of how domestic abuse is dealt with in a force area.

### **Update on recommendation 2**

The College of Policing was involved with the Home Office and HMICFRS in the development of the dataset. Information continues to feed into and develop this work via the NPCC stakeholder group. The College of Policing is also represented on the ONS domestic abuse statistics steering group.

## **Recommendation 3: Update of forces' domestic abuse action plans**

### **Recommendation 3**

By April 2018, every police force in England and Wales should update its domestic abuse action plan, determine what more it can do to address the areas for further improvement highlighted in this report and specified below, and publish its revised action plan accordingly. This was an ongoing action within the National Stakeholders Group where all forces are represented. DCC Rolfe and COP wrote to forces regarding their DA plans.

### Update on recommendation 3

- **Recording:** There is considerable variation between forces in the proportion of recorded crime identified as relating to domestic abuse. Forces need to ensure that domestic abuse crime including coercive control is being correctly identified and recorded. The next phase of ONS data is being prepared. As part of the National Stakeholders Panel a snap survey was distributed to try and understand how forces use the data set to aid their own performance.
- **Assessing and responding to risk:** Forces should ensure arrangements for assessing and managing risk are well understood by officers and staff, especially at initial point of contact, and decision making about the grading of, and attendance at, domestic abuse incidents is supervised effectively. The next phase of the new domestic abuse risk assessment tool is about to start. DCC Rolfe and the COP have written to all chief constables explaining the new process. DCC Rolfe and the National Stakeholders Group have been part of this process since 2014.
- **Positive and preventative action:** Nationally, arrest rates for domestic abuse are falling, with large variations across forces. There are considerable variations in the use of preventative measures. Forces need monitoring processes, supported by accurate data, to ensure that they are taking positive action such as arrest, and are making effective use of powers, for example domestic violence protection orders and the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. Where orders or bail conditions are breached, forces need to ensure that there are appropriately robust processes in place to take action. Arrest rates and referrals to the CPS have been shared with the National Stakeholders on several occasions and DCC Rolfe also attended the NOG, HASC and HMICFRS reference group to discuss them. Best practice surrounding the use of DVPOs and DVDSs has been explored within the National Stakeholders and further development includes a pilot DVDS online form to be trialled by the Metropolitan Police Service. The National Stakeholders Group has also been involved in the DA Consultation and work conducted by the Home Office.
- **Building the investigative case:** Forces need to ensure that there are clear standards and expectations, with effective supervision, for building the best possible case for the victims of domestic abuse whether victims support police action or not. As part of the National Stakeholders Group the CPS and NPCC developed and distributed a best practice guide for prosecuting coercive control/DA cases. The guide was for police and prosecutors.
- **CPS referrals and prosecutions:** Nationally, referrals and charge rates are falling. Forces need to monitor the data and work closely with the CPS to understand whether improvement is required, and, if so, to effect change.



This remains an open action within the National Stakeholders Meeting. Forces have received their regional data on CPS referrals. DCC Rolfe has also discussed this at NOG and the HMICFRS reference group. This is a joint action for police and CPS as the number of referrals needs further exploration as there could be multiple factors.

Chief officers in each police force should continue to oversee and ensure full implementation of these action plans and offer regular feedback on progress to their police and crime commissioners. This should be a personal responsibility of the chief constable in each case. The leadership task for the service now is to sustain the level of determination and commitment seen since the publication of *Everyone's Business* to ensure that the police response to victims of domestic abuse continues to improve. HMICFRS will continue to monitor progress against force action plans as part of their PEEL inspection regime.

The police Vulnerability Board, which is attended by all NPCC leads, should ensure leadership in this area of policing remains robust and accountable.