

Integrated vulnerability inspection post-inspection review

Cleveland Police

Contents

Introduction	1
The 2017–2019 inspections conducted by HMICFRS	2
Our 2020 post-inspection review	5
Post-inspection review detailed findings: initial contact and response	8
Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections	8
Summary of post-inspection review findings	9
Post-inspection review detailed findings: assessment and help	13
Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections:	13
Summary of our post-inspection review findings	14
Post-inspection review detailed findings: crime recording	18
Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections	18
Summary of our post-inspection review findings	18
Post-inspection review detailed findings: investigation	21
Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections	21
Summary of our post-inspection review findings	21
Post-inspection review detailed findings: child investigations	25
Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections	25
Summary of our post-inspection review findings	25
Post-inspection review detailed findings: decision-making with partners	28
Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspection	28
Summary of our post-inspection review findings	28
Post-inspection review detailed findings: managing suspects and offenders	30
Recommendations from reports of the 2017–2019 inspection	30
Summary of our post-inspection review findings	30
Post-inspection review detailed findings: police detention	33

Recommendations from reports of the 2017–2019 inspection	33
Summary of our post-inspection review findings	33
Next steps	36
<u>Explanatory notes</u>	37

Introduction

Between 2017 and 2019, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) carried out three inspections of Cleveland Police:

- [National Child Protection Inspection \(NCPI\) \(2017\)](#)
- [Crime Data Integrity \(CDI\) \(2018\)](#)
- [Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy \(PEEL\) \(2019\)](#)

A common strand in the findings from these inspections is the force's ability to protect vulnerable people, including children. Between the three reports, we gave the force two causes of concern, along with multiple recommendations and areas for improvement.

In November 2020, a year after the PEEL inspection was published, we returned to review the progress the force had made in responding to the open recommendations from all three inspections that specifically relate to how the force protects vulnerable people.

This is a bespoke inspection of how the force is responding to, assessing, safeguarding, investigating and protecting vulnerable victims. This is the first time that we have brought together multiple types of inspection to review the progress the force is making in a single area. The review included:

- an examination of force policies, strategies and other documents;
- an audit of calls, incident logs and case files, including child protection cases and vulnerable adult cases, that related specifically to the areas for improvement set out in the previous inspection reports (this audit looked at case files from June to August 2020);
- interviews with officers and staff;
- some 'reality testing' of the force's processes and speaking to some staff doing this work where this could be done remotely without extracting them from their work.

This inspection took place during the COVID-19 lockdown period. So that our inspectors could continue to inspect, the force provided remote access to incident and crime-recording systems, investigation files, telephone recordings and body-worn video footage.

This report outlines our findings from our 2020 post-inspection review.

The 2017–2019 inspections conducted by HMICFRS

Our 2017 NCPI inspection

In May 2017, we inspected how well Cleveland Police was keeping children under the age of 18 safe.

While some of the findings were encouraging, we identified weaknesses in the force's approach to child protection and made seven recommendations.

We found that:

- the force was committed to protecting children. Protecting vulnerable people was a priority for the force and the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and was reflected in the police and crime plan.
- the chief constable, his chief officer team and the PCC all had a strong commitment to child protection. In 2016, the force conducted an internal review of demand, which led to the allocation of additional resources for those departments responsible for child protection. The review also prompted significant changes to the governance and oversight arrangements that shape the force's approach to child protection and vulnerability.
- overall, work being done by the force was improving outcomes for vulnerable children, and its focus on vulnerability was translating into positive action for its child protection work.

However, HMICFRS also discovered some weaknesses in the force's approach to child protection.

- Inspectors found that investigations often lacked evidence of supervision. This contributed to drift in the investigations and inconsistent outcomes for children.
- We were concerned about the force's response to those children reported missing. HMICFRS assessed several cases of missing children and found a failure to properly assess risk or undertake prompt and effective enquiries to locate children – many of whom were reported missing on a regular basis.
- The force needed to improve its approach to children detained in custody, who are often vulnerable and have complex needs. HMICFRS could find no evidence, in any of the cases we examined, of referrals being made to children's social care services for an assessment of safeguarding needs to be undertaken. In addition, in none of the cases where children were charged with an offence and denied bail were they transferred to alternative accommodation provided by the local authority. This means that children are being unnecessarily detained in police custody.
- During the course of the inspection, we examined a total of 81 cases where children were identified as being at risk. The force's practice in 15 of these was assessed as good, in 42 as requiring improvement and in 24 as inadequate. This demonstrated how there were still areas where improvement was required to ensure that the quality of the service the force provides to those children in need of help and protection is consistent and of the appropriate quality. Better recording of decisions taken, the rationale for these decisions and the actions agreed as a result would help the force to achieve this improvement.

We conducted a post-inspection review of these recommendations in July 2018, and further reviewed them during our PEEL inspection in May 2019. All seven remain open.

Our 2018 CDI inspection

In March 2018, we inspected how well Cleveland Police recorded crimes and placed the victim at the forefront of its crime-recording decisions.

The force was judged to be inadequate and was given a 'cause of concern' and associated recommendations.

We found that the force:

- achieved good levels of recording accuracy for reported sexual offences, including rape crimes;
- was good at recording crimes of modern slavery;
- was good at recording crimes reported directly to its protecting vulnerable people teams;
- had improved its processes for cancelling crimes, leading to good performance in this area;
- had implemented most of the recommendations set out in our [2014 report](#); and
- had made good progress against a national action plan developed to improve crime recording by police forces.

However, Cleveland Police officers and staff too often failed to make correct crime-recording decisions at the first opportunity when dealing with reports of violent crime, especially in cases of domestic abuse. This was due to deficiencies in the force's crime-recording processes, insufficient understanding of crime-recording requirements, and limited supervision to correct the decisions of officers and staff and improve standards from the outset. This meant that the force was letting too many victims down.

We found unacceptable standards in the following areas:

- The force was under-recording violent crimes.
- The process for identifying domestic violence incidents as crimes and assessing the correct closure of such incidents within the force control room did not support accurate crime recording.
- The force was not recording crimes within the 24 hours permitted.
- The force needed to improve the extent to which it collected information regarding the effect of criminality on identifiable groups within communities, in particular groups with identifiable protected characteristics (e.g. gender, sexuality or ethnicity).

Those failings were a consequence of officers and staff not always understanding their responsibilities for crime recording, compounded by deficiencies in the processes for crime recording within the force and inconsistent and limited supervision of crime-recording decisions.

Our 2019 PEEL inspection

In May 2019, we inspected how well Cleveland Police was protecting vulnerable people, as part of a broader PEEL inspection. The force was judged to be inadequate and was given a cause of concern and associated recommendations that relate to the service provided to those who are vulnerable.

We found that Cleveland Police was failing to respond appropriately to vulnerable people, including children. We raised serious concerns that the force was leaving vulnerable victims at risk. The force had high levels of repeat victimisation but wasn't considering the cumulative effect, and there were too many examples of the force:

- not identifying vulnerable victims;
- not providing any response to vulnerable victims, or providing a significantly delayed response;
- not fully assessing and safeguarding vulnerable victims including children; and/or
- not adequately investigating cases with low levels of vulnerability.

The force's approach to vulnerability was unclear. There was no vulnerability strategy or overall approach that the workforce understood. It analysed some patterns of offending against vulnerable victims but didn't use this knowledge well. Training for some of the workforce in how to identify and assess vulnerability had helped their understanding.

The force had made changes to try and manage its demand. But in doing so it was creating unnecessary risks in how it:

- deals with non-emergency calls;
- responds to vulnerable victims, particularly victims of domestic abuse;
- assesses victims of domestic abuse and associated children; and
- manages reports of missing children.

It had plans to improve its call handling, but these plans didn't fully address all the problems.

The force didn't make effective and consistent use of protective powers and measures to safeguard vulnerable victims. It wasn't making disclosures under [Clare's Law](#) and [Sarah's Law](#) promptly, and it wasn't making sufficient use of [domestic abuse protection notices](#). This was despite the high number of repeat incidents and the increase in domestic abuse incidents overall.

The force worked well with partners to assess, respond to and safeguard victims. There were mental health and domestic abuse practitioners in the force control room. The multi-agency approach in the north of the force to safeguard children was effective. But a similar approach in the south of the force hadn't started.

During this PEEL inspection, we reviewed all the recommendations relating to our previous national child protection inspections (NCPI) of Cleveland Police. Disappointingly, the force hadn't made enough progress for any of those recommendations to be signed off.

Directly after our PEEL inspection, as a result of enduring concerns about the performance of Cleveland Police, a decision was taken to engage the force in our [formal monitoring process](#) through which there is an increased level of scrutiny of a force.

Throughout this process, the force has prioritised the improvements it needs to make in assessing, safeguarding and investigating incidents and crimes that involve vulnerable people.

Our 2020 post-inspection review

Summary of findings

Since our last inspection, the force has appointed a new executive team and senior leaders, and has started a significant programme to implement changes across the whole organisation. As part of this, it has prioritised how it deals with vulnerable people, particularly victims of domestic abuse, and started to develop its overall approach to vulnerability. In January 2020, the force launched its vulnerability strategy, which focuses on “protecting vulnerable people in our communities with the objective of creating a vulnerability-centred approach to policing”. Implementation of this strategy is overseen by a strategic governance meeting, and the force is starting to restructure and change its ways of working to better protect vulnerable people.

During this inspection, we found that the force has made progress in most areas relating to the protection of vulnerable people, but it needs to continue to improve to achieve a good standard of service. We recognise the scale of the task for the force, and that some areas will take longer to address. However, we remain concerned about the limited progress made in some areas, despite the force’s efforts to improve.

Our findings from our review of open recommendations follow the victim’s journey from initial contact and response through to the detention of other people, including children.

Initial contact and response

The level of service when someone calls the force for help has improved, as has the initial assessment of the call, which informs the correct grading of the response. The force has also improved its prioritisation of vulnerable victims to get to them as quickly as possible, and is getting better at managing its incident queues. While we are pleased to see this progress, there are still too many victims, including victims of domestic abuse, whose risk grading means that they should be responded to within an hour, but who are left waiting.

Officers are better at identifying vulnerable people and understand the need to assess the risk to them so that appropriate support and safeguarding can be sought. We found that the content of these referrals needs to continue to improve so that partner agencies and the force have enough information to decide what support is required.

The initial response to most children who go missing remains poor and, while we found notable improvement in some of the investigations of children who go missing regularly, not all of these cases are investigated further once the child is found.

Assessment and help

We found that more risk assessments are being submitted when officers attend incidents involving vulnerable victims, and that they are being submitted more often for children in custody or who go missing from home, so that appropriate support can be sought from partner agencies. This is a positive development.

The timeliness of sharing information with partners has improved for support to be sought through multi-agency partnership arrangements now in place across the force area. However, too often, child strategy meetings are not being held when they should be.

Crime recording

We are pleased with the significant improvement the force has made in its overall recording of reported crime. The force has increased its workforce's knowledge and understanding of crime-recording requirements, supported by good governance and audit. The force has made only marginal improvements to its poor recording standards for violent crime, particularly for domestic abuse-related crimes such as coercive controlling behaviour, harassment and stalking, and many serious crimes involving anti-social behaviour (ASB) are not being recorded or investigated.

Investigations

The overall quality of investigations has not yet improved. We found that less than half the force's investigations are of a good overall standard, which is similar to our findings in 2019. This was evident across all types of investigations, but more apparent this time in complex investigations involving vulnerable adults and children. While the force has made several changes to its systems and processes, at the time of inspection, these had not yet resulted in the improvement expected.

Officers have improved the way they engage with victims, making contact regularly and providing updates. There are better relationships between officers and victims in cases of domestic abuse, and a significant improvement in gaining the support of victims to progress prosecutions and bring offenders to justice, which safeguards them and the wider public.

Managing suspects and offenders

The force is better at catching criminals, and making robust interventions and more timely arrests. It is prioritising suspects, who haven't yet been arrested, and wanted offenders, through its daily management meetings and regular review by police managers. It has improved its use of legal powers to prevent re-offending, through an increased arrest rate, the use of conditional bail and better use of [domestic violence protection notices](#) (DVPNs).

Police detention

Children who are detained by the force may also be vulnerable. We found that too often children are spending the night in custody because of delays in the arrival of an 'appropriate adult' to deal with their needs. For children who are charged and refused bail, we found that officers and staff correctly request secure accommodation, but too often this cannot be provided by statutory partners.

Overall, we are not yet seeing the improvements we expect in how the force responds to, assesses, safeguards and investigates cases involving vulnerable children, including domestic abuse cases, missing children, and child abuse and exploitation. This remains a concern.

The force is better at identifying, assessing, protecting and supporting victims of domestic abuse. It has changed its processes to focus on these victims after we found in 2019 that it was putting them at risk because levels of repeat victimisation were high, it was failing to identify victims as vulnerable and to fully assess and safeguard them, and it wasn't providing any response at all to some victims. The positive changes we found this year, with the force's vulnerability desk and better officer engagement with victims, are starting to reduce the number of victims who are suffering from domestic abuse multiple times. The force acknowledges that it needs to continue with this positive progress to achieve a good overall standard and improve its investigation of domestic abuse-related crimes.

This inspection took place during the COVID-19 tier restrictions, during which many of the force's officers and staff had to change the way they work. In addition, the force has a significant lack of capacity and capability, from its frontline officers to its specialist investigators, and officers and staff have to work long hours to maintain levels of service to the public. This has been further affected by social distancing requirements, resulting in limited face-to-face training and skills development of officers and staff. The early findings from this inspection have been shared with the force and it has responded positively to ensure that aspects identified during this inspection are included within its programme of change.

Post-inspection review detailed findings: initial contact and response

Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections

For initial contact and response, we recommended that Cleveland Police ensures that:

- at the point of contact, for the purpose of crime recording, greater emphasis is placed on the initial account of victims and that victims are believed following a deployment (CDI);
- call handling staff can draw together all available information from police systems to better inform their response and risk assessment (PEEL);
- staff are aware of the significance of drawing together all available information from police systems, including information about people who pose a risk to children, better to inform risk assessments (NCPI);
- conversations between call handlers and callers are summarised accurately in the incident log and the full facts are communicated to officers on which to base crime-recording decisions (CDI);
- officers and staff can identify vulnerable people and repeat victims effectively (PEEL);
- officers promptly attend incidents involving vulnerable people, and any regrading of incidents is based on a structured and recorded risk assessment with supervisory oversight (PEEL);
- the grading process for incidents is improved (CDI);
- staff are aware of their responsibilities for protecting children who are reported missing from home, particularly those cases where it is a regular occurrence (NCPI); and
- all children managed within VEMT (now CET) have a trigger plan (PEEL).

We recommended that training is provided on:

- the importance of first account of the victim, malicious communications, harassment and public order (CDI);
- the need to record as full an account from the caller making it clear when an incident amounts to a crime (CDI); and
- the need to fully communicate all available information to officers deployed (CDI).

Summary of post-inspection review findings

Call handling

The force's control room, where calls are received, was managed by a private provider until May 2019 when it transferred back to the force. Since then, the force has restructured the control room, increased the number of staff who work there, and recruited and trained these staff.

The standard of call handling has improved

In this inspection, we found that the majority of calls are answered promptly, and callers receive a polite, professional and empathetic service from the call handler. Call handlers also provide callers with appropriate advice about how to keep safe until an officer can attend, and how to preserve evidence.

Domestic abuse victims can now contact the force silently in an emergency situation. The force conducted a mass 'text burst', which was sent to known high-risk victims of domestic abuse, where a secure mobile number exists, providing them with detail of how to contact the police and make use of the Silent Solution 55 approach. The Silent Solution system enables a 999 mobile caller who is too scared to make a noise or speak to press 55 when prompted, which informs police they are in a genuine emergency situation.

Understanding of the importance of recording a full account from the victim has improved

Call handlers have received training on the importance of recording the first account given by the victim. We found that the call log is an accurate reflection of the call in most cases. However, call handlers do not always question the caller about the full circumstances, or about any wider context relevant to vulnerability.

Control room staff are better at identifying risk and this is reflected in the grading of the incident

Call handlers have now been trained to use a structured risk assessment ([THRIVE](#)) to properly assess the risk to the caller or victim. We found that in the majority of cases the risk assessment reflects the content of the call, and the grading of the response is appropriate to the level of risk. The force has changed its policy so that any re-grade of an incident now requires a rationale to be documented, and must be authorised by a supervisor. We found that very few incidents were being re-graded, and those that were had rationale recorded, but half lacked any supervisory oversight.

Officers and staff are better at identifying vulnerability, but more needs to be done to effectively identify repeat victims

In 81 percent of the case files we looked at, vulnerable victims were identified correctly, which is an improvement on what we found in 2019. However, this means that one in five victims are still not being correctly identified as vulnerable. We also found that, in some calls, the brief questions asked by the call handler did not fully explore the victim's vulnerability or wider context, so the full circumstances were not learned or recorded. The force now monitors this through regular audits of its calls.

The identification of repeat victims has improved, though it still lags behind overall identification of vulnerable victims – only 64 percent of repeat victims are being identified and recorded.

Call handlers do not yet have access to all the relevant police systems, which means they don't have all the information they need to fully complete a structured risk assessment

Assessments are completed based on the content of the call, but call handlers cannot access wider information in police systems to fully assess the risk to the victim. For example, they cannot access information about the suspect to understand if they pose a threat, or assess the risk from and to other people or children associated with the incident or caller.

This means that the risk assessment is only as good as the information that is presented to the call handler, and so the officer responding to the incident will not have all the facts they need. This in turn is likely to affect any assessment they make and their decisions about recording crimes and safeguarding. While we recognise that the force plans to introduce a newer version of an existing product, known as 'ICE', to provide better information, this still won't give access to the full range of information required.

The force is better at assessing the vulnerability of, and risk to, victims of domestic abuse, including repeat victims

In our 2019 report, we were concerned that the force had high levels of repeat victims and wasn't considering the cumulative effect of numerous incidents on the same victim. We also found too many examples of repeat vulnerable victims not being identified as such.

A 'vulnerability desk' has been created within the control room, which has made a positive impact. It focuses on victims of domestic abuse, and is staffed by police officers with experience of identifying vulnerability and safeguarding victims, and whose role is to support call handlers in understanding vulnerability better. The desk's role is specifically focused on improving the experience for victims of domestic abuse when they call the force for help, and ensuring that they receive an appropriate response. These officers have access to all force systems and are better able to make a full assessment of risk, including the cumulative effect, based on all the information known about the victim, suspect and other people in the household, including children. As a result, these victims are being prioritised and officers have more comprehensive information when attending incidents. The role of this desk had been limited to

domestic abuse, but during our inspection we found that it had just started to support incidents where rape was reported.

The force is starting to see the positive effect of this process, and there has been a reduction in the number of domestic abuse repeat victims, which the force has communicated is its priority.

Call handler training has commenced

Training for staff working in the control room has been reviewed and new staff are being trained prior to starting their role. However, existing staff don't have a training day built into their shift pattern, which is a legacy from when they worked for a private provider. This is intended to change in January 2021 when they start a new shift pattern that includes a built-in training day. This change should result in further improvement.

Some online training about stalking and harassment has been provided but staff haven't yet received training in malicious communications and public order. Additional training has been delayed because of the COVID-19 situation and social distancing requirements.

Deployment and response

The force has recruited additional frontline officers to fill the vacancies we saw in 2019. It has also begun recruitment as part of the Home Office's 'uplift programme', which provides funding to increase police officer numbers. This will mean an additional 200 officers by the end of 2020/21 in Cleveland. Most of these officers have now been recruited, which means that, like many forces, nearly half of Cleveland Police's response function is now made up of student officers. This presents challenges not only for the officers themselves but for the force as a whole in terms of how best to deploy officers with limited experience. An effective supervision and development programme for these new officers will enable the force to make the most of the opportunity provided by this increase in the workforce.

A new shift pattern for all response officers was designed to provide a more timely response to victims, particularly those who are most vulnerable and need urgent help. This was created based on the force's understanding of incident demand, but was implemented in May 2020 during the first COVID-19 lockdown that unexpectedly changed the type and volume of incidents being reported.

The response to incidents involving vulnerable people, including victims of domestic abuse, has improved. However, further improvement is required

In the majority of cases we reviewed, we found a consistent approach to allocating incidents to the appropriate team. Cases involving vulnerable people are primarily allocated to response officers.

We also found that the monitoring of incident queues has improved, and victims of domestic abuse and other types of vulnerability are being prioritised. This means that vulnerable victims are receiving a more timely and appropriate response than we found in 2019. However, there are still too many vulnerable victims who have to wait too long for a response.

We saw some incidents being upgraded through positive intervention by supervisors and the vulnerability desk to ensure a more appropriate response. But we also found that delays in responding to incidents is having an impact on the subsequent investigation, where some victims are left waiting for hours or days, with little or no supervision of the incident.

The force's response to missing children remains poor

It is taking too long for officers to respond to children who regularly go missing. When a child is identified as high risk, requiring an immediate emergency response, there is a more prompt response in most cases and positive work to try and locate the child. However, too often there are delays in looking for children who are not assessed as very high risk and require a response within an hour. And valuable information about children who go missing regularly is not being shared with response officers. The force should have 'trigger plans' to provide background about these children and where to look for them.

When a child is found, or returns home, officers usually visit and speak to them. However, this is usually just a simple check to make sure that they are safe and well. Officers should conduct a full 'prevention interview'. Interviews with children at this stage can provide important information about the reasons why they are running away, particularly when this is happening frequently.

'Return home' interviews are the responsibility of the local authority. In the cases we audited, we saw no evidence of the force receiving information from these interviews. Therefore, intelligence that would inform trigger plans, reports of crimes or other information, could be being missed.

We also found that when children are reported missing, the use of language within force records is still not appropriate. We saw phrases such as "he can keep himself safe" or reference to a child being "street wise".

All this suggests that officers do not yet fully understand the link between children going missing and their being exploited or exposed to other risks.

Post-inspection review detailed findings: assessment and help

Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections

We recommend that Cleveland Police ensures:

- effective completion of a structured risk assessment (PEEL);
- officers always record their observations of a child's behaviour and demeanour at domestic abuse incident (NCPI);
- that staff are aware of the need to pass information about people who pose a risk to children on to other agencies (NCPI);
- referrals for ongoing safeguarding are made at the appropriate time (PEEL);
- the force improves its work with partner organisations in relation to sharing information and safeguarding through a multi-agency safeguarding hub (first issued in PEEL 2015);
- it supplies the information people need and are entitled to under the provisions of [Clare's Law](#) and [Sarah's Law](#) (PEEL); and
- the force must take immediate action to ensure that there is sufficient supervision of domestic abuse cases assessed as having a standard level of risk (PEEL).

We recommended that Cleveland Police immediately undertakes a review, together with children's social care services and other relevant agencies, to ensure that the force is fulfilling its statutory responsibilities as set out in [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#). As a minimum, this should include:

- the assessment of risk, how information is shared and the development of joint protective plans (NCPI).

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

Officers better understand the need to assess the risk to vulnerable people, but more detail is required for decision-making

In cases involving vulnerable victims, including children, officers are required to complete a public protection notice (PPN), which includes sections to assess victims of domestic abuse, vulnerable adults and children. The information recorded about the victim is used to make an assessment of risk to the adult or child. The attending officer then makes their own assessment, which is reviewed by their supervisor. People who are assessed as being most vulnerable, including any child who is identified, have a secondary review by the force's protecting vulnerable people (PVP) hub. This is then shared with partner agencies.

We found an increase in the number of PPNs being submitted for vulnerable people, and more focus on the quality of the entries being made by officers through dip samples being undertaken within the force.

We also found improved oversight when the level of risk on a PPN is re-graded. These now have improved oversight by the force's PVP hub and are reviewed daily to ensure that the assessment of risk is correct before the information is referred to partners.

We are pleased to find that the force is no longer completing risk assessments without seeing the victim or others in the household. In 2019, the force was doing this over the phone as part of a telephone investigation, based on an ongoing national pilot to assess whether this was an effective way to manage demand. However, Cleveland Police was not part of this pilot, which was being done in a controlled environment and had not reported its findings.

The recording of the behaviour and demeanour of children, despite efforts, remains inconsistent

All children who are associated with a household where domestic abuse has occurred are required to be risk assessed for their own safety and wellbeing. Basic details of the child must be recorded on the PPN, including:

- the child's name, address and age;
- the name of their primary carer and GP; and
- the name of their school if they are of school age.

Officers are now better at recognising the risk to children, and more children are now being identified at the scene of domestic abuse incidents, when detained in custody, and when they go missing from home.

The force has gone to some effort to encourage officers to record children's concerns and views. It has provided guidance to officers on completing a PPN 'through the eyes of a child', and regularly reviews the quality of PPNs when a child is identified, picking up on common mistakes and communicating these back to officers. The force has developed the mnemonic 'CHERISH' to help frontline officers more accurately capture

a child's experience – 'Correct children, Hear the voice, Extra mile, Right residence, Investigator's eye, School setting, Health providers'.

However, despite this improvement, officers are still not consistently taking the time and care to record the circumstances and potential risk experienced by children living in households where domestic abuse is happening. The child's demeanour, concerns and experiences are often not captured. The information that is recorded is often not detailed enough to inform decision making, and important factors about cumulative risk based on the history of incidents is frequently not provided.

Some children are being identified by partner agencies as a result of an adult referral in the same household. While this acts as a safety net for some children living in domestic abuse households, it is still the responsibility of the attending officer to record this child as being at the address, speak to them and assess them properly.

When a child is identified, the quality of the PPN is regularly monitored to ensure that all relevant details are included. The PVP hub oversees all cases that are high risk, medium risk and those where children are already identified.

The oversight of domestic abuse cases assessed as 'standard risk' and the assessment of cumulative risk remains inconsistent

In our 2019 report, we found that there was limited oversight of domestic abuse cases assessed as 'standard risk' and that the force had no way of assessing the cumulative risk to adults and children who experience many incidents, because frontline supervisors did not have the necessary time to do the full range of research required.

In our recent inspection, we found that reviewing standard-risk PPNs was still the responsibility of frontline supervisors, who mostly ratify what the officer has written, often with no further input or research recorded. We also found that sergeants are lowering the risk assessment without any understanding of whether this is the right thing to do. The lack of oversight of standard-risk PPNs remains a concern.

More positively, we found that all referrals where children are already identified are subject to a secondary review by the force's PVP hub. In addition, repeat victims who have suffered more than three occurrences of domestic abuse within six months, or four or more occurrences in 12 months, are also reviewed centrally. This means in these cases there is more opportunity for the cumulative or escalating risk to be captured.

The force has immediate plans for a more integrated approach to safeguarding, which means all domestic abuse assessments will be reviewed centrally by the relevant safeguarding hub.

The timeliness of referrals to partners for ongoing safeguarding has improved

We found that how promptly PPNs are shared with partners has generally improved. Officers can now complete a PPN remotely via their mobile device, which allows them to refer vulnerable people directly to support services, and to submit them for ongoing help and safeguarding in a timelier way.

Partners also told us that they are starting to see improvements in how quickly PPN referrals are shared through the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

The force is quicker at sharing information with schools about children of school age who are living in domestic abuse households. It has invested in additional staff to support its [Operation Encompass](#) process to do this.

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are in place across the force area for children and young people

The force contributes to well-established [multi-agency arrangements](#) through its children's hub in the north of the force area, covering the local authority areas of Hartlepool and Stockton.

It has since worked with partners to set up a similar joint arrangement with two local authorities in the south of the force area to allow for improved information sharing and safeguarding decisions. This joint arrangement started in June 2019, but it was subsequently affected by the two local authorities working in different ways. The force still has multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in place with these local authorities, but it has had to invest more of its resources to facilitate this change.

At the time of inspection, the force was changing its own internal processes to allow for better integration with partners. From December 2020, its internal PVP hub will be integrated into the multi-agency arrangements to allow for further joint working. While we have not been able to inspect the effectiveness of this recent change, we will do so as part of our continuous assessment.

The force has improved its sharing of information with partners about children at risk, but it doesn't always record enough detail or hold a strategy discussion

We found that information is now usually shared more often and more promptly with partners. However, the quality of these referrals is mixed – sometimes the paperwork is incomplete, often leaving out the views and experience of the child. Children's social care services make an assessment based on the content of these referrals, so decisions about intervention are often based on incomplete information.

This was particularly evident in the domestic abuse cases we reviewed that involved children. We didn't see any that resulted in a strategy discussion even when we would have expected there to be one.

The local authorities do not routinely report the decision they have made to the force. As a result, there is no opportunity to provide further information or challenge the decision, and consequently opportunities to intervene are being missed.

The force is poor at recording the ethnicity of children – in almost half the cases we reviewed this wasn't recorded. This means that the force is unable to accurately assess how ethnicity affects risk to children, or to monitor whether it treats children equitably.

Information sharing for the highest risk cases of domestic abuse is inconsistent

The force participates in a [multi-agency risk assessment conference](#) (MARAC), where the highest-risk domestic abuse cases are discussed between partners so that a co-ordinated safety plan can then be created. We found good representation from agencies and local support organisations at the meeting we observed. While this represents good joint working with partners, we also found that there were additional safeguarding actions and tactics that could have been explored during the meeting but weren't. The force is one partner of many who are involved in the MARAC process. However, the process is not fully owned by the force. A strategic MARAC group has recently been re-formed (following an 18-month period within which it did not meet) and has commissioned a review of the whole MARAC process by [SafeLives](#).

The force is now quicker at supplying information that people need and are entitled to under the provisions of Clare's Law and Sarah's Law

The force has reviewed its processes for both [Clare's Law](#) and [Sarah's Law](#) disclosures to members of the public. Members of the public can now request a disclosure using an online form on the force's website. Requests are now managed by a dedicated officer who risk assesses them to ensure that anyone who may need to be safeguarded receives this information within 24 hours. When a disclosure about a person is appropriate, these are now provided without delay, and the recording of these requests on force systems has improved.

We recognise that the force is involved in, and has access to, other partnership arrangements to gain support and help for vulnerable people. These don't feature in this report because they are not part of our inspection and not part of the recommendations we have issued to the force. They include, but are not limited to, partnership arrangements such as Team around the Individual, Team around the Family, Transformation Challenge and the Future for Families programme.

Post-inspection review detailed findings: crime recording

Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections

We recommended that:

- the force improves its process for the supervision of the closure of incident records, ensuring that this includes a check of compliance with the crime-recording rules and that sufficient supervisory knowledge and capacity exists to do so (CDI);
- victims are believed following deployment (CDI); and
- the force should immediately improve how it collects diversity information from victims of crime and how it uses this to inform compliance with its equality duty (CDI).

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

The force has improved its processes and increased the knowledge and understanding of its workforce, supported by good governance and audit

We found that the force has appropriate arrangements in place. An accredited force crime and incident registrar oversees crime-recording standards, interprets the crime-recording rules and assigns outcomes. They have direct access to a chief officer who is responsible for the force's crime performance. The chief officer has oversight through a strategic crime-recording group that is responsible for driving improvement. A range of guidance, awareness-raising publications, videos and drop-in sessions have been made available to officers and staff to improve their knowledge and understanding. A comprehensive audit programme also helps the force to understand where it needs to improve.

While we couldn't assess the knowledge and understanding of frontline officers during our remote inspection by speaking to them directly, their application of crime recording in the files we reviewed shows that these have increased. This is noteworthy.

The force has made promising improvements to its recording of crime

We found that the force's overall recording of crime has improved since 2018, but further improvement is still required.

Our audit of crimes found that the force now records 89.9 percent of crime (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.6 percent). This is a statistically significant improvement.

There has also been a notable improvement in the force's recording of sexual offences, with a recording rate of 97.1 percent (confidence interval +/- 2.9 percent).

In the recording of reports of rape, we reviewed 43 crimes, of which 37 were correctly recorded. Six crimes of rape were not correctly recorded, although in four of these cases the victims were adequately safeguarded and investigations were carried out. The two remaining incorrectly recorded crimes were historical reports of rape and related to one victim who had been raped twice. In those cases, the police made little attempt to safeguard the victim or carry out an effective investigation.

It is estimated that 4,800 additional crimes have been recorded in the year covered by our inspection, as a result of the improvements made so far, compared to 2018.

There is less improvement in the recording of violent crime

We found marginal improvement in the recording of violent crime at 84.2 percent (confidence interval +/- 4.6 percent) with an additional 860 crimes now having been recorded. Some of the unreported crimes were 'additional crimes' – that is, situations involving multiple crimes where the primary crime was recorded but secondary crimes weren't. However, some of the crimes not recorded were outright crimes. And a high proportion of these unrecorded crimes involve cases that relate to domestic abuse involving harassment, stalking and coercive controlling behaviour.

Of the 558 reports of crime that we audited, we assessed 134 as related to domestic abuse. Of these, the force had recorded 110. The 24 offences not recorded included 21 violent crimes, a sexual offence and two other crimes. We dip-sampled the missing crimes and found that six of the seven we assessed had no investigation because no crime had been recorded. The force had safeguarded all but one of the victims.

The force is not recording or investigating most serious crimes relating to anti-social behaviour

As part of our revised methodology for 2020, we examined 50 incidents of ASB. In this sample, we found 17 crimes that should have been recorded, but only 2 had been, meaning that 15 crimes hadn't been investigated. Many of the missing crimes related to harassment between neighbours.

Incidents recorded as ASB often contain reports of crime that are not recorded and may involve vulnerable victims suffering long-term abuse. The force should strengthen its systems to make sure that crimes reported as part of ASB are identified and recorded, so that the victims of these crime-related incidents receive the same investigation and safeguarding support as victims of other crimes.

The force has improved in its recording of crimes within the 24 hours permitted

In 2018, we found that the speed of crime recording was poor, with too many crimes not being recorded within 24 hours (although we did not issue a recommendation). During this inspection, we found that crimes were mostly recorded or screened out within a few hours. However, victims are not routinely informed when their report has been screened out, leaving them unaware that it will not be investigated further.

Victims are believed following deployment and recorded observations on body-worn video

Officers and staff are better at recording a crime when the victim has reported one in the original call, which the officer attending then investigates. Officers are now required to use body-worn video at domestic abuse incidents to capture the circumstances and victim's account of what happened. The force has recently invested in more reliable equipment for this purpose. In the domestic abuse cases reviewed, we found consistent use of body-worn video by officers to capture what happens when they attend these incidents.

The recording of third-party reports of crime is inconsistent

We reviewed 20 third-party reports of crime sent to the force's specialist teams from other professionals by email. We found that, when a crime report was required, this was recorded correctly in all cases. However, we also found instances where a call handler refused to take a report of a crime from a third-party professional reporting a crime on behalf of a victim, and of third-party reports of crime not being picked up from strategy meetings. Building on the positive performance highlighted, the force should ensure that it is recording and investigating all third-party reports of crime.

The force continues to have good oversight of cancelled crimes

When a recorded crime is later found not to have occurred, it can be 'cancelled'. We found appropriate arrangements in place with a single accredited person being able to cancel a crime. Our audit shows that all cancellations of rape were correct, and that 18 of the 20 other types of cancellations we reviewed were also correct. If an officer wants to cancel a recorded crime, there is a process for authorising this, and we found that refused cancellations are also being dealt with correctly. However, we found that victims aren't being informed of their crime being cancelled.

The force cannot be assured that it is meeting its equality duty

Our audit found that the force does not regularly capture information on the disability or sexual orientation of a victim. While there is better collection of the ethnicity of the victim, this is shown as 'not known' in too many cases.

This means the force cannot fully know whether it offers people from different protected groups the same level of service as others. Nor can it assess the extent to which these groups are affected by crime in comparison to others (to better inform its response), or whether at any given time a particular group is being subject to targeted criminal behaviour in a way that requires a focused response.

Post-inspection review detailed findings: investigation

Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections

We recommended that the force should:

- review its provision of investigative training, development and guidance (PEEL);
- improve how it allocates crime, ensuring it allocates investigations to appropriately trained and supported officers, and that it reviews this throughout the investigation (PEEL);
- ensure that staff with the right skills are investigating crimes thoroughly, leading to satisfactory outcomes for victims (PEEL);
- ensure that all investigations are completed to a consistently good standard and in a timely manner (PEEL); and
- take steps to understand why a high proportion of crimes fall into ‘evidential difficulties – victim does not support’ and rectify this to ensure that it is pursuing justice on behalf of victims of domestic abuse (first issued in PEEL 2016).

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

The force has reviewed its provision of investigative training, development and guidance

We found that a full review of guidance, training, and development has been undertaken, and new guidance and other products have been made available to the workforce. Cleveland Police has looked to other forces for their experience of ‘what works’ and has tailored this for its own use.

The suite of guidance, tools and products includes crime management and investigative guidance, a crime assessment and allocation tool, learning materials about raising investigative standards, a victim and witness strategy, a video about understanding the victim’s experience (made with input from people who have been victims), an outcome booklet, and a template to record the offender’s and victim’s views. Changes to policy requiring regular supervisory reviews of investigations are supported by an aide-memoire for supervisors. New strategic governance arrangements are informed by internal assurance reviews of the quality of investigations.

The force has improved its allocation of crime

The force has introduced a crime allocation and assessment tool to ensure that crimes are assessed based on complexity, solvability, proportionality and vulnerability, and then allocated to the appropriate team, or not investigated further if appropriate.

We found that crime screening decisions were generally correct, with the majority of investigations allocated to the right team in a timely way, in accordance with force policy.

The force does not have the investigative skills it needs to ensure that crimes are thoroughly investigated

Since our 2019 inspection, the force has made a significant investment in recruiting more officers and staff to fill its vacancies and develop their investigation skills, but the overwhelming lack of investigation skills and experience means it is going to take some time for the force to achieve the necessary improvements to ensure that investigations are effective. The factors that have contributed to this include:

- the large proportion of students in frontline roles who are still developing into their role and investigating lower-level crimes;
- the move of experienced officers from frontline response into neighbourhood policing;
- removal of experienced investigators to work on [Operation Pandect](#), a historic enquiry;
- officers not having the required accreditation levels because the force hasn't kept up to date with these;
- difficulties in recruiting officers with the required skills due to the national detective shortage and competing for police staff investigators with the National Crime Agency, which pays a higher salary.

This has resulted in a 32 percent capacity gap in the force's specialist investigator capability, and a reliance on untrained detectives for specialist vulnerability investigations (domestic abuse, child abuse and vulnerable adults), with less than half of the investigators in these teams having the required accreditation.

The force has a plan to fill its vacancies through external recruitment and through attracting student officers into detective roles. It is also developing the skills of its existing officers and working to help others gain the required accreditations. However, this will take some time to achieve, and the force cannot yet commit to when it will be completed.

The overall quality of investigations has not yet improved

We found that just over half the force's investigations are of a good overall standard, which is similar to our findings in 2019. Although the force has revised its guidance, provided more learning and development, and has strategic governance arrangements in place, this is not yet translating into improvements in investigations.

We found some good examples of thorough investigations, with positive action taken at the scene of domestic abuse incidents, suspects arrested, and good contact

maintained with the victims. But we also found that too many investigations did not meet the required standard. This was evident across all types of investigations, but was more apparent in complex investigations involving vulnerable victims and children.

Overall, the standard of investigation was not achieved because too often we found that:

- investigative opportunities are being missed, some of which are significant – serious crimes not being completed, witnesses not traced, additional victims not spoken to, named suspects not arrested and interviewed, and devices not being examined;
- investigation plans are insufficient – varying from no plan to a brief outline – and with no audit trail of what has been done;
- investigations are being delayed due to very high workloads and third-party material not being applied for quickly enough;
- supervisor and manager reviews are regularly not completed – we found that they are struggling to keep on top of investigative reviews due to high workloads; and
- supervisor endorsement of the outcome of an investigation is often not recorded.

The force has improved its contact with victims of crime, but more needs to be done to assess their needs

We found that there was regular contact with victims and updates were being recorded. However, victims are not always being made aware when crimes are cancelled or will not be investigated. While we found that, in the majority of cases, victims' needs assessments were completed, the vulnerability recorded did not consistently align with that identified by the call handler and the officer's risk assessment. This means that the assessment often isn't adequately informing the special measures the victim requires at court to remove the stress of giving evidence. These measures include screens in the court room, a live video link to the court room, and other ways of giving evidence.

The force has improved its pursuit of justice on behalf of victims of domestic abuse

In 2016, Cleveland Police and five other forces were named in our national [2016 PEEL Effectiveness report](#) because we were concerned about their very high levels of use of outcome 16 ('evidential difficulties – victim does not support police action') to close investigations and prevent prosecution, despite a suspect being identified. This particular outcome type demonstrates how vital the relationship is between the police and the victim.

The force researched why there was a disproportionate use of outcome 16, but concluded that it was consistent with the views and wishes of the victims. This resulted in our further reporting of this in our 2017 and 2019 PEEL inspections.

The reasons that victims may not support police action are complex and varied. In some cases, it is because they are vulnerable and unable, rather than unwilling. The onus should be on the criminal justice agencies to seek justice on behalf of the

victim, rather than on the victim to support the actions of the police and other agencies. Cleveland Police has done more to understand this by seeking the views of victims of domestic abuse and producing a video for officers in which victims tell their story to raise awareness. It has also improved its governance in this area.

We found that in the majority of the investigations where outcome 16 had been applied, this was the correct decision. We reviewed body-worn video footage and saw examples of officers engaging well with victims, resulting in them changing their minds about wanting to withdraw their statement because of the positive support offered.

The force's own data demonstrates the significant improvement made in this area. In May 2019, the force's outcome 16 rate for domestic abuse victims not supporting police action was 93.9 percent. In September 2020, it had reduced to 58.7 percent. This represents a significant reduction, and brings the force into line with where similar forces were in May 2019.

Where the victim does withdraw support, the force is starting to progress these cases based on the evidence available. We found some cases where an evidence-led prosecution could have been considered but wasn't. Guidance has been provided to officers about being 'victim focused' in their investigations rather than 'victim led', and the need for positive action to be taken, including evidence-led prosecutions.

A female reported an incident of domestic abuse – a mother to five children also living in the same household with her and her partner, who is the father of two of the children. There is a significant history of domestic abuse between the couple, and all five children are on a child protection register for neglect and physical harm. Officers attended the call for assistance quickly, and a risk assessment (PPN) was completed, which included the observations of the officer and the demeanour and feelings of the children. The information was shared with children's social care. The female also disclosed a historic rape whilst answering the questions the officer asked her, which was allocated appropriately for further investigation. There were clear updates on the investigation and it was dealt with appropriately. An Operation Encompass referral was made for the children so that their schools were made aware. There are markers on force systems to inform that the children are on a child protection plan. This is an example of a good investigation with the victim, the mother, and the welfare of the children at the centre of the investigation.

Post-inspection review detailed findings: child investigations

Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspections

We recommended that Cleveland Police should immediately improve its practice in cases of children who go missing from home. As a minimum, this should include:

- improving staff awareness of the links between children going missing from home and the risk of sexual exploitation (NCPI);
- ensuring that staff are aware of the need to pass this information about people who pose a risk to children on to other agencies (NCPI);
- identifying the range of responses and actions that the police can contribute to multi-agency plans for protecting children in these cases (NCPI); and
- all children managed within VEMT (now CET) should have a person dossier and trigger plan with appropriate supervisory oversight (NCPI).

We also recommended that Cleveland Police improve its child sexual exploitation investigations, paying attention to:

- improving staff awareness, knowledge and skills in this area of work (NCPI);
- ensuring a prompt response to any concern raised (NCPI);
- undertaking risk assessments that consider the totality of a child's circumstances and risks to other children (NCPI); and
- improving the oversight and management of cases (to include auditing of child abuse and exploitation investigations to ensure that standards are being met) (NCPI).

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

The force has improved the way in which it investigates some cases of children who go missing from home repeatedly

We found notable improvement in the way the force investigates cases of missing children when they are allocated to its specialist team, the new complex exploitation team (CET). This has replaced the vulnerable, exploited, missing and trafficked team (VEMT). The new team is led by an experienced major investigations specialist. It has a dossier for each of the children it manages, which draws on information available from force systems and partners. These include comprehensive updates, which give a clear indication of the multi-agency work being undertaken to understand and mitigate the risk.

We saw evidence of child abduction warning notices being issued to mitigate the risk to missing children, with officers proactively attending a suspect's address as soon as a child is reported missing. Markers on force systems are being used well to assist the officers who respond when a child goes missing, and make them aware of any risk to the child.

The force has improved its sharing of information about missing children with partners. This happened in all the cases we reviewed. However, the outcome of that sharing was generally not recorded.

While we are pleased with the progress that has been made with those children managed by the CET, we are concerned to find that the force only has limited oversight of other children who regularly go missing. These children, as individuals, have been overlooked in the changes the force has made to its internal teams, resulting in different levels of service and safeguarding for vulnerable children. The force would also benefit from determining clear selection criteria for which cases are investigated by the CET.

Earlier in this report, we said that the force is poor at responding to children who go missing from home. This means that the good work by the CET is being undermined by this poor initial response. This early activity to locate children remains inconsistent – some of the cases we saw lacked any real activity to locate the child while they were missing.

There is a broader set of information that would help the force to better understand children who go missing regularly, such as effective use of trigger plans (we only saw one of these in the cases we reviewed, which wasn't bespoke to the child); information about where a child has been when they go missing through better use of prevention interviews; and information gained from local authority return home interviews. This is a missed opportunity to develop a richer picture of vulnerable children and assist in the response when they are reported as missing.

We recognise that the force is working with partners to introduce a vulnerability tracker to assist in prioritising children who go missing.

The standard of investigations when children are exploited, abused or exposed to harm remains inconsistent

In domestic abuse cases involving children, when the matter was investigated by the specialist domestic abuse team, we found the standard was good – there were meaningful investigation plans and regular reviews that helped the investigation. However, when cases were allocated to non-specialists (that is, those graded as lower risk, including harassment, breach of non-molestation orders and breach of bail), no perpetrators were arrested, seen or spoken to. The focus was on closing the crime and, when the victim didn't support police action, an evidence-led prosecution wasn't considered.

The standard of investigation and supervision of child abuse investigations was generally poor in cases allocated to both specialists and non-specialist investigators. Often investigation plans were brief and details of what was agreed at the strategy discussion with partners were vague. Of the six Section 47 cases we reviewed, only one resulted in the arrest of a suspect. All the others were dealt with by voluntary

interview, sometimes to the detriment of the investigation. In addition, investigative opportunities were missed, such as seizing of devices to be examined, leaving abuse images in the possession of children, not interviewing other child witnesses, and not visiting the scene.

A social worker reported a one-year-old boy had arrived at hospital with head injuries which they believed were non-accidental. Information was shared with children's social care and a decision made about how the other children in the household could be safeguarded. Within two days the hospital confirmed its belief that the injuries were non-accidental; however, there was a delay of a further four days before a strategy meeting was arranged.

The mother admitted that she had lied about the circumstances of the accident and that her boyfriend had been caring for the children when it happened. She believed he had been using his phone at the time.

There were numerous lines of enquiry the force did not pursue, including not visiting or examining the scene, examining the suspects' phones or following up on advice to get expert medical opinion. The suspects were interviewed by appointment a week apart giving them opportunity to discuss what was said.

Despite further evidence from the same hospital confirming its original diagnosis, the force prematurely closed the investigation and took no further action. This was ahead of a strategy discussion where it was agreed the children would return to the exclusive care of their mother.

This case was referred back to the force during the inspection. The investigation was reopened.

Officers are better at recognising vulnerability but do not always recognise wider safeguarding concerns

Even though response officers recognised vulnerability in those children they met, they did not always recognise wider safeguarding concerns in relation to other children who may be at risk or where a child offender may pose a risk.

We found evidence that officers usually don't recognise harmful sexual behaviour, or appreciate the aggravating features of online exploitation involving youth-produced sexual imagery. When this is not recognised, we found that it has an impact on their decision-making and the outcome of investigations, resulting in poorer outcomes for children.

The force is a partner in a Department for Education [Futures for Families](#) programme to help families stay together and reduce the number of children entering care. This programme will also assist in understanding children who go missing from care and those at risk of exploitation or neglect.

Post-inspection review detailed findings: decision-making with partners

Recommendations from the reports of the 2017–2019 inspection

We recommended that Cleveland Police take steps to ensure that all relevant information is properly recorded and is readily accessible in all cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children.

We recommended that:

- the force records on police systems decisions the reached at meetings to ensure that staff are aware of all relevant developments (NCPI).

Guidance to staff should include:

- what information should be recorded (and in what form) on systems to enable good decision-making (NCPI);
- the importance of sending the information to the correct police department and/or agency (NCPI); and
- the importance of ensuring that records are made promptly and kept up-to-date (NCPI).

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

The force's recording of decisions has improved but remains inconsistent

When a child strategy meeting takes place, the force's recording of this has improved – a template is now added to the force record. However, we found that the entries are inconsistent and often have only a very brief description of the outcome. For example, when there is agreement for a Section 47 enquiry where children's social care must carry out an investigation, this is recorded but often without detailing what actions will be completed, which will be done jointly, and what the plan is. This means that officers attending subsequent incidents still don't have a clear understanding of what the force and its partners are doing to protect these children.

We also saw that recording within custody records was inconsistent – for example, not recording the time that an appropriate adult was contacted, or not properly recording a decision to refuse bail.

There are regular and comprehensive updates on the person dossiers that exist, which give a clear indication of the multi-agency work being undertaken to understand and mitigate the risk.

When observing the force's MARAC meeting, where the highest-risk domestic abuse cases are discussed, we found that most safeguarding actions and tactics are recorded. However, we also found that the recording of a third-party report of crime was missed and not all safeguarding actions and tactics were explored in the meeting, which means that the decision-making was not fully informed.

Post-inspection review detailed findings: managing suspects and offenders

Recommendations from reports of the 2017–2019 inspection

In 2019, we were concerned that the force's poor offender management was putting the public at risk. The force wasn't proactive enough at catching criminals. It didn't have a clear process, with good leadership and senior officer oversight.

We recommended that:

- there are effective processes in place for catching criminals which are subject to supervision and scrutiny (PEEL); and
- the force improves its use of available legal powers to prevent re-offending (particularly [DVPNs/DVPOs](#) and the use of bail as opposed to [RUI](#)) (PEEL).

Although we didn't issue a recommendation, our 2017 NCPI report commented negatively about sergeants' attendance at [MAPPA](#) level 2 meetings.

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

The force has improved its management of outstanding suspects and wanted offenders

Generally, we found that the force has improved the way it manages outstanding suspects, and offenders who are wanted, through improved oversight and management of risk. The force's arrest rate has increased to beyond its previous level through taking positive action at the scene of incidents. And there is better oversight and accountability of domestic abuse perpetrators – these suspects and offenders are monitored at daily operational meetings and allocated to response officers to search for and apprehend them promptly. However, we found some delays in responding to breaches of bail and non-molestation orders.

We saw some positive swift action to circulate information about wanted domestic abuse suspects to other officers and forces. But we also found that information about some offenders had not been circulated in a timely way, and that some suspects were invited to attend a voluntary interview when they should have been arrested. This potentially hinders the effective management of these offenders and the safeguarding of the victim while the investigation is ongoing.

The force has communicated clearly to its officers that positive action should be taken at the scene of domestic abuse incidents and, when necessary, an arrest made. It acknowledges that too many wanted suspects are not having their information

circulated on the national police system, and it is trying to change its culture to make this happen. The force has experienced capacity difficulties in its custody facility during the COVID-19 pandemic – the force was required to retain prisoners in custody for longer periods of time and had to use the custody facility for virtual remand hearings, rather than the detainees attending court.

When a suspect is arrested for domestic abuse, the decision to release them can only be made by an inspector, to ensure that all appropriate measures have been put in place to safeguard the victim.

The force has improved its use of legal powers to prevent re-offending, particularly domestic violence protection notices and conditional bail

The force has a new policy that provides guidance to officers on this area. It has also created a poster to remind officers to consider using a DVPN when appropriate to protect the victim and the wider public.

In the 12 months to September 2020, the force submitted nearly three times as many applications to court for these notices than it did in 2019. Out of 101 applications made, 72 resulted in an order being issued by the court. A dedicated DVPN officer now reviews domestic abuse crimes, reminds officers about the option of using these notices, and oversees the process. They also attend court to gain a protection notice in advance of an order being placed on the offender. This ensures more consistency in the application for orders.

The force continues to improve its use of DVPNs when violence is being used or threatened against the victim; the alleged perpetrator is to be released from custody without bail; or the victim or associated person needs to be protected from violence or threat of violence.

We found good evidence of police conditional bail being used for domestic abuse suspects to help protect victims and, while we did not see evidence of the use of DVPNs during our audits, we found evidence of the DVPN officer offering their support, and of DVPNs being considered but discounted due to police bail conditions being in place.

The force is not proactively managing suspects who are [released under investigation \(RUI\)](#)

The force has already identified that this is an issue, and will now only release under investigation on the authority of the inspector overseeing the case. Performance is being monitored through monthly reporting, which is starting to see a reduction in these cases.

The impact of COVID-19 has hampered the force's ability to proactively reduce the number of suspects who are RUI. It has experienced difficulties in gathering forensic evidence in a timely way, and there is a backlog within the courts system. If there are no grounds for granting conditional bail, the force is using RUI.

When a person is arrested and detained, they are taken to the force's custody suite. Once the detainee is booked in by the custody sergeant, the arresting officer is

required to explain their interview strategy, intention to charge, and plan for release considering bail and RUI.

Force representation at [multi-agency public protection \(MAPPA\)](#) meetings has improved

In our 2017 National Child Protection Inspection, we reported that MAPPA level 2 meetings were not being attended by the right officers. They are now attended by a senior leader (detective inspector or detective chief inspector) who has the authority to make the decisions required.

The force has other approaches in place for managing offenders. However, these were not part of our previous recommendations, and are therefore not covered by this post-inspection review. These other approaches include integrated offender management; a domestic abuse solutions team that promotes working with domestic abuse perpetrators to change their offending behaviour; and a multi-agency tasking and co-ordination (MATAC) team, which helps to get support for the 'criminogenic' and social needs of serial domestic abuse perpetrators, and to co-ordinate when police and probation are actively managing an offender who is a perpetrator in a [MARAC](#) case.

Post-inspection review detailed findings: police detention

Recommendations from reports of the 2017–2019 inspection

We recommended that Cleveland Police undertake a review (jointly with children's social care services and other relevant agencies) of how it manages the detention of children. This review was to include, as a minimum, how best to:

- ensure that all children are only detained when necessary and for the absolute minimum amount of time (NCPI);
- assess, at an early stage, the need for alternative accommodation (secure or otherwise) and work with children's social care services to achieve the best option for the child (NCPI);
- ensure that custody staff comply with their statutory duties to complete detention certificates if a child is detained for any reason in police custody following charge (NCPI);
- ensure that custody staff make a record of all actions taken and decisions made on the relevant documentation (NCPI); and
- improve awareness among custody staff of child protection (including the risk of sexual exploitation), the standard of risk assessment required to reflect the children's needs, and the support required at the time of detention and on release) (NCPI).

Summary of our post-inspection review findings

The force has seen an increase in its arrest rate, which means that more people are being detained in its single custody facility. COVID-19 has also brought additional problems, not least having to isolate those who are detained with symptoms. As part of the isolation process, the force has put in place a separate booking-in desk and a separate cell block for isolation. At the time of inspection, court hearings for prisoners being remanded were being held virtually from the force's custody suite.

Detainees can sometimes be just as vulnerable as victims. The force ensures that detainees who are vulnerable are assessed, as required, by a health professional, and have access to a liaison and diversion service while they are in custody. We were encouraged to find that, prior to COVID-19, a vulnerability desk had been newly set up to specifically cater for those detainees who may be victims or vulnerable themselves. However, this had to stop to allow this separate booking-in facility to be used during the pandemic. The force intends to bring back the desk for all vulnerable detainees once social distancing is no longer required.

This inspection specifically focused on children brought into custody, as part of our assessment of progress made on our previous recommendations. HMICFRS and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons have a national six-year rolling joint programme of inspection of custody facilities to determine how well a force is fulfilling its responsibilities for safe detention. Cleveland Police was last inspected in 2015 as part of this programme.

The initial risk assessment of children in custody has improved

We found that, when children are detained, the initial risk assessment is usually good, and that children are regularly seen by a healthcare professional and/or the liaison and diversion team when necessary. Inspectors' reviews of detention are usually carried out in person.

More risk assessments are being completed for children by officers submitting a PPN form when safeguarding issues are evident. However, the quality of the information in the forms is inconsistent and they are largely factual rather than focusing on the views and needs of the child. We also noted some situations when PPNs should have been submitted but weren't.

Children are being held longer than necessary overnight, before being released or charged, due to delays in appropriate adult attendance

We found that children are still being detained for longer than is necessary before being charged or released, often for extended periods and overnight between the hours of 8.00pm and 6.00am. During July and August, 40 children were held overnight. The length of time these children were held in custody ranged from just under 2 hours to over 23 hours; 14 children were detained for over 10 hours and a further 6 for over 20 hours.

There are delays in the attendance of appropriate adults, which is a backward step from our review in 2018. We saw cases in which appropriate adults didn't attend for a long time (19 hours and 17 hours in two cases), and only attended interviews and similar activities rather than being there to address any concerns the child had and to ensure their welfare was considered. If a member of the family is the appropriate adult but cannot attend for many hours, this would suggest that they are not the most appropriate adult to deal with the child's concerns at that time. The force acknowledges that this has been a learning point over the last 24 months.

The force has recently put additional measures in place for senior leaders to capture these issues as they happen through an evening 'pacesetter' meeting, and for concerns to be escalated.

The force understands when to request secure accommodation from partners

Custody officers and staff recognise the need to request secure accommodation for children. However, we found that this accommodation is regularly not available for children who have been arrested, charged and refused bail. It is the responsibility of local authority partners to provide this accommodation, of which there is a shortage. This is a national problem that we have recently reported on in our [evaluation of the National Child Protection Inspection programme on policing](#).

The force is actively meeting with partners to address the issues of both alternative and secure accommodation for children brought into custody. For secure accommodation, which is required once a child has been charged, there is limited real-time escalation to partners when this accommodation is not available.

Custody staff are complying with statutory duties regarding detention

Detention certificates, which outline to a court the reason why someone has been remanded in custody, are essential for police accountability and enable forces to monitor how well they are discharging their responsibilities under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Of the nine custody cases we audited, we found that all detention certificates were completed as required.

Pre-release risk assessments are not addressing the risk

While we found that pre-release risk assessments are completed, they often don't acknowledge the risks seen while the child was in custody, such as substance misuse or self-harm.

Custody records are inconsistent

On custody records, we found inconsistent recording of actions taken and decisions made, such as the time an appropriate adult was contacted not being recorded, or a decision to refuse bail not properly recorded.

The force has a comprehensive system of dip-sampling of custody records. Each custody inspector reviews records from their own team and peer-reviews the records of another team. These findings are discussed and actions added to an action plan.

Next steps

Cleveland Police must continue with the positive improvements it has made to ensure that the service provided to all victims of crime is of a good standard in all respects. It has made good progress in most areas but it must do more to provide consistently good outcomes for vulnerable people, including children, who need help and protection.

Through our ongoing monitoring and PEEL continuous assessment of the force during 2021-2022, we will again revisit the areas where we are yet to see the improvements we expect.

Explanatory notes

Confidence level and confidence intervals

We apply the 95 percent confidence level as the generally accepted level of certainty used in statistical tests. Any sample may produce estimates that differ from the figures that would have been obtained if the whole population had been examined. At the 95 percent confidence level, with many repeats of an audit under the same conditions, we expect the confidence interval would contain the true population value 95 times out of 100.

The audit aims to select a random sample size necessary to yield confidence intervals of no more than +/- 5 percent for violent crime, sexual offences and all other crime (at the 95 percent confidence level) and +/- 3 percent for overall recorded crime.

The confidence interval provides an estimated range of values that the given population being examined is likely to fall within. For example, if an audit found that 85 percent of crimes were correctly recorded with a confidence interval of +/- 3 percent, then we could be confident that between 82 percent and 88 percent of crimes were correctly recorded of the population for the period being examined.

Domestic abuse

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological;
- physical;
- sexual;
- financial; or
- emotional abuse.

This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes honour-based violence and abuse, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

Estimate of the number of unrecorded crimes

This estimate has been calculated by applying our audit findings, covering a three-month audit period, to Home Office police-recorded crime figures (excluding fraud) for the force for the 12 months to the end of the audit period.

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