



RESPONSE BY THE PCC TO HMIC INSPECTIONS OF CLEVELAND POLICE

INSPECTION DETAILS

Title of Inspection

Cleveland Police's Approach to Tackling Domestic Abuse

Date Inspection Published

March 2014

Type of Inspection:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleveland Specific | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Follow Up | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thematic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Partner Inspection | |

Is Cleveland Police quoted in the Report?

- Yes No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Picture of Domestic Abuse in Cleveland

- In Cleveland, domestic abuse accounts for 3% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 42% were from repeat victims.
- Domestic abuse accounts for 8% of all recorded crime.
- Cleveland recorded 186 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 37 were domestic abuse related. This is 20% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.
- The force also recorded 3,476 assaults with injury, of these 1,125 were domestic abuse related. This is 32% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.
- The force recorded 193 harassment offences, of these 117 were domestic abuse related. This is 61% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.
- The force also recorded 582 sexual offences, of these 37 were domestic abuse related. This is 6% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.
- On, 31 August 2013 Cleveland had 6,275 active domestic abuse cases; 8% were high risk, 15% were medium risk, and 77% were standard risk.
- For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded, there were 98 arrests in Cleveland. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.
- Cleveland recorded 3,168 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 28% resulted in a charge, 10% resulted in a caution and, 1% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

Although HMIC found much effective work being done to tackle domestic abuse, there are several areas for improvement which Cleveland Police needs to address before it can have confidence that it is providing a consistently good service to manage domestic abuse and minimise the risk to victims.

Identifying Victims

Call handlers and dispatchers have received some training in recognising domestic abuse and there are good systems in place to enable them to check for previous history when a call is received. HMIC found a lack of knowledge among call handlers as to the definitions of a repeat or a vulnerable victim, although there was an understanding that these factors were important in risk assessing a victim. The force prioritises domestic abuse so that victims get a priority attendance by a police officer, although we found that it is not always the nearest officer who is sent, which means that the victim may not get as quick a response as is possible. Supervision is good and the force regularly assesses the quality of this initial response.

Keeping Victims Safe

Tackling domestic abuse is a clear priority in Cleveland; there is strong leadership and management of services from the police and the Police and crime commissioner (PCC). Staff are committed to providing an effective response and there is a proportionate approach based on the risks faced by victims. There is room for improvement in the training provided to staff and some officers lack a full understanding of the complex issues and variety of forms that abuse can take. More domestic abuse prosecutions fail to achieve a conviction in Cleveland than in other areas of the country, and the force is working to understand and improve this situation.

Management of Risk

HMIC found that the specialist team in Cleveland is providing effective services to high-risk and some medium-risk victims of domestic abuse. It oversees and checks the risk assessments and safety plans of other police officers and staff dealing with lower-risk victims. Assessment of risk is well managed and all officers and staff throughout the force are clear about their responsibilities for keeping victims safe. However, there is scope to tighten the continuing review of risk for medium-risk victims and in some of the response teams there was a lack of awareness of the support that was available to victims. The force works well in partnership with other agencies to reduce the risk to victims.

Recommendations

As a result of this inspection, HMIC has developed recommendations which are designed to tackle any risks identified in the service to victims of domestic abuse. These force specific recommendations should be considered in conjunction with recommendations to all forces set out in the national report. The force should:

1. ensure all staff in the control room are aware of the definitions of a repeat and vulnerable victim to ensure identification at the earliest opportunity;
2. ensure staff are using new software, due to be introduced early 2014, to efficiently and effectively manage resources;
3. ensure training on domestic abuse includes the psychological effects and the different types, such as coercive control;
4. provide domestic abuse training to front enquiry office staff;
5. extend the types of safety measures immediately available to IRT staff to enable them to increase the security of victims;

6. clarify how the risk assessment process for medium-risk victims is reviewed, following the initial risk assessment by the first attending officer and quality assurance by the RASPOs;
7. address its lack of oversight and scrutiny of safety planning arrangements once cases have been referred to IDVAs and outreach services;
8. improve the knowledge of IRT staff regarding the support services available for victims of domestic abuse;
9. review how the risk level to victims is reassessed when those perpetrators, dealt with by PHTs, are bailed by the court;
10. review how the risk level to victims is reassessed when perpetrators are released without charge from police custody;
11. continue to improve the way serial and serious perpetrators of domestic abuse are identified and managed; and
12. ensure the understanding of local officers and commanders, as to which families are at greatest risk of domestic abuse in their area, is consistent across the force.

FORCE RESPONSE TO FINDINGS

Cleveland Police have commissioned a full review of the risk assessment process in relation to domestic abuse from the initial officer attending the incident to the conclusion of the investigation (and beyond) to ensure that appropriate support services and safety plans are in place and constantly reviewed.

A number of recommendations have been made to improve the risk assessment process and a 24 point domestic abuse action plan is currently being implemented to ensure that risk is regularly reviewed.

A full day scenario based training programme is being planned for all staff and includes unconscious bias, culture, definitions of repeat and vulnerable and the different types of abuse such as psychological and coercive control.

New software has also been introduced within the control room which ensures that the most appropriate unit is assigned to incidents to efficiently manage resources.

There is currently a review ongoing of safety measures available to officers attending domestic incidents and all frontline officers have now been trained in crime prevention.

PCC RESPONSE TO FINDINGS

"I was recently shocked at figures for 2013 which highlighted the number of children that were present in the home during domestic incidents including over 3,500 under-fives. We must not forget our vulnerable children who are often the unheard victims of domestic abuse and why working with our local charities, support services and partner agencies on this issue is so important.

“We can begin to protect children by addressing the behaviour of these abusers, and by empowering victims to take the difficult step to move forward in a more positive environment.

“There are plans to launch a new power regionally to help save victims of domestic violence. Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) will provide protection to victims by enabling the police and magistrates to put in place protection in the immediate aftermath of a domestic violence incident. It is very important to safeguard victims at an early stage and these orders will prove a lifeline for victims and children by reducing the risk of immediate harm against them.

“My office has worked very closely with the Force in developing their domestic abuse action plan ensuring it complements the work detailed in the Cleveland Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) action plan, produced following the launch of a regional strategy with my North East counterparts and their associated Forces.

“I will continue to support the Force in implementing the actions within both plans and monitor the recommendations as set out by HMIC.”