

Cleveland Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

Executive summary

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.⁹

Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe

The force has effective systems and understanding to manage domestic abuse and the risks to victims, although there is still room for improvement. The force recognises the importance of maintaining contact with the victim whilst the offender is imprisoned and recognises that the level of risk and safeguarding of the victim needs to be reassessed when a perpetrator is released from prison. In most cases this happens, although there are some weaknesses in the systems for ensuring the police's prisoner handling team routinely keep victims updated when a perpetrator is released without charge following an initial arrest. Tackling the behaviour of the most serious domestic abuse perpetrators is important and Cleveland Police has recognised that it needs to do more of this. Although it is in the early stages of development, there are initiatives underway to tackle this.