

**Report of the Chief Constable to the Chair and Members
of the Operational Policing Panel
26th May 2011**

**Executive & Presenting Officer: Mr Sean White, Assistant Chief
Constable (Crime & Operations)**

Status: For Information

Vulnerability Update

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To update Members on the current work being undertaken across the Force to tackle areas of 'vulnerability'.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Members note the content of this report.

3. Reasons

- 3.1 Vulnerability Units were launched on 13th July 2009, with the North unit, sited at Billingham, responsible for Hartlepool and Stockton, and the South unit, sited at Kirkleatham, responsible for Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland.
- 3.2 Vulnerability Units investigate all serious and complex cases of domestic abuse, all referrals of child abuse except stranger abuse and they investigate abuse against vulnerable adults.
- 3.3 Domestic Abuse
The domestic abuse incidents include:
- Serious assaults
 - Domestic abuse linked sexual offences including rape
 - Honour Based Violence or Forced Marriage crimes

- Any domestic violence related offence, however minor, when the incident is classified as “high risk” due to previous incidents involving either the perpetrator or the victim.
- 3.4 All other offences of domestic abuse i.e. common assault, criminal damage or public order offences are dealt with by district officers or the Prisoner Handling Team. However where capacity allows the Vulnerability Unit will assist.
 - 3.5 The initial response to any report of domestic abuse is managed through the Force Command and Control system and incidents are primarily attended by Response teams. The initial officer attending is responsible for securing the safety of all parties at the address including all children, whether or not they have been directly involved. The officer then seeks to establish if any offences have been committed and take positive action to secure an arrest in all cases where a power of arrest exists, in line with Force policy. The officer should also carry out initial investigative actions and take steps to secure and preserve all available evidence. Finally, for all incidents of domestic abuse, whether or not a crime has been committed, the officer should complete and submit the domestic abuse form and carry out a ‘risk assessment’ exercise.
 - 3.6 The domestic abuse forms are reviewed on a daily basis by the Vulnerability Units and the initial risk assessment will be reviewed and graded. The determined risk level will then dictate further action by staff including risk management, safety planning, target hardening and the offer of support services. All incidents of domestic abuse graded as high or very high risk will be referred through the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) process and the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) informed. A domestic abuse officer from the Vulnerability Unit will also arrange a visit to the victim.
 - 3.7 Each district now has a MARAC. The purpose of MARAC is to bring all agencies involved in tackling domestic abuse together in a single meeting, ensuring that information is shared and that a victim focused approach is taken to tackling the issues around domestic abuse and protecting vulnerable people.
 - 3.8 A Teeswide MARAC operational group has been established to develop core procedures across the Force area and to implement best practice. This group links in with the four Community Safety Partnerships to ensure they are monitoring the performance of their respective local MARACs.
 - 3.9 Domestic abuse cases may also be referred into MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements) where the offender qualifies under the terms of MAPPA guidance. To ensure there is no duplication of processes, if a case meets the criteria for MAPPA referral it will no longer be managed within MARAC.

- 3.10 Specialist domestic violence courts have been established within Teesside and Hartlepool Magistrates Courts. This includes dedicated sessions at the courts for dealing with domestic abuse cases and the Magistrates involved have received additional training. Furthermore, there are Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) attached to the courts. Their role is to support the victim throughout the criminal justice process to improve victim care and successful prosecutions.
- 3.11 Child Abuse
The Unit will investigate child abuse referrals when appropriate, although it does have in the main an investigative role, it also has a general responsibility within the multi-agency setting to ensure the best interests and welfare of the child are maintained at all times. Vulnerability Units focus upon allegations of abuse or physical / sexual assault within the family. Districts CID deal with other allegations.
- 3.12 Staff dealing with child abuse investigations have all undertaken a Joint Investigation Course and have completed, or are in the process of completing, the ICIDP (Detectives) course. Once both elements have been completed they will be accredited Child Abuse Investigators. Members of the CAIU also receive specialist training e.g. interviewing sex offenders training, and are therefore an important source of guidance and information for officers carrying out enquiries into alleged child abuse.
- 3.13 Vulnerable Adults (VA)
The investigation of abuse against vulnerable adults comes under the remit of the Vulnerability Units (VU). Two Detective Constables deal with investigations in this area, one based in the North VU and one in the South VU, supported by a specified supervisor within the unit. Additional assistance is provided by other staff within the unit at the discretion of the Detective Inspector in charge of the unit.
- 3.14 These staff deal with a variety of offences committed against VA where the offender has custody care or control over the VA. Custody or care includes carers within care homes or those providing domiciliary care within individuals homes. Control includes individuals who have control over finances for family members or who have Power of Attorney. Investigations are also conducted into offences against a VA where the perpetrator is a VA, these rarely result in a prosecution.
- 3.15 The specialist investigators deal with a range of offences including assaults, sexual offences, financial investigations (often with the support of the Economic Crime Unit) and ill treatment or neglect offences. The offence of ill treating or neglecting a Vulnerable Adult is very similar in definition to neglecting a child. It was introduced by the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and Cleveland were one of the first forces in the country to successfully prosecute for this offence.

- 3.16 The Chief Constable is a signatory to the 'No Secrets' document that commits Cleveland Police to working closely with partner agencies; these include Social Services, Primary Care Trusts, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the CPS, and the Department for Works and Pensions. The VA staff also work with individual care home providers.
- 3.17 Referrals of alleged abuse are reported from other agencies as well as the police to the VA Co-ordinator within each of the local authorities. Each Social Services Department within the four unitary authorities has an appointed VA Co-ordinator. The Co-ordinators within each of the unitary authorities receive an annual funding contribution from Cleveland Police.
- 3.18 When a VA referral is made to the VA Co-ordinator a strategy meeting is held within 24 hours. This meeting is chaired by the VA Co-ordinator. Any agency which holds information about the VA is invited to attend the meeting where information is shared and a strategy is formulated to determine how the case will proceed.
- 3.19 The Detective Chief Inspector (Public Protection) is a member of the Tees wide Adult Safeguarding Board. The Detective Inspectors in the VUs are the police representatives on each of the Local Authority Protection Committees and the nominated VA Detective Sergeant's in the VUs are members of the working groups that stem from these committees.

4. Performance

- 4.1 Reported incidents of domestic abuse for the Force rose from 13,381 in the period April 2009 to March 2010, to 15,042 in the same period 2010/11.
- 4.2 The Force recorded 6,603 repeat victims in the period April 2010 to March 2011 compared with 6,052 during the same period 2009/10.
- 4.3 The Force conviction rate for Domestic Abuse offences fell from 77.5% for the period April 2009 to March 2010, to 67.3% during the same period 2010/11.
- 4.4 District totals are shown for comparison.

Reported Incidents	April 09-March 10	April 10-March 11
Hartlepool	2638	2846
Redcar & Cleveland	2524	3100
Middlesbrough	4315	4574
Stockton	3904	4522
Force	13381	15042

Repeat Victims	April 09-March 10	April 10-March 11
Hartlepool	1154	1214
Redcar & Cleveland	1070	1317
Middlesbrough	2220	2203
Stockton	1608	1869
Force	6052	6603

Arrests	April 09-March 10	April 10-March 11
Hartlepool	700	784
Redcar & Cleveland	647	849
Middlesbrough	1045	1298
Stockton	843	882
Force	3235	3813

Conviction Rate	April 09-March 10	April 10-March 11
Hartlepool	62.9%	62.0%
Redcar & Cleveland	79.0 %	63.9%
Middlesbrough	78.6%	70.1%
Stockton	77.3%	71.4%
Force	77.5%	67.3%

- 4.5 The Force continues to be acknowledged as leading best practice with regards to Honour Based Violence through the confidential CHOICE helpline. All staff across the Force have now been briefed with regards to the policy and procedures for Honour based Violence.
- 4.6 Since its inception in November 2007 there have been 821 calls to the CHOICE helpline, on average there are 29 calls per month, the vast majority of which are received during office hours and dealt with by the Vulnerability Unit staff. Out of hours volunteers provide cover for the line providing advice and ensuring action is taken where appropriate.
- 4.7 Domestic abuse is managed via a Force action plan which is monitored by ACC White (Crime Operations) through a regular Public Protection Gold Group meeting.
- 4.8 Levels of Vulnerable Adults Abuse
Levels of reporting of alleged abuse have decreased this financial year as demonstrated in the table overleaf (The statistics kept by the Force do not break down the referrals into categories e.g. elderly, disabled). There are a number of factors which are contributing to this decrease but the main reason is better working arrangements with Local Authorities to ensure that they are only referring those cases with which the police should be involved.

Not all referrals result in an investigation by the police, some require an initial investigation to establish if a crime has been committed, if it is not the case then police involvement ceases.

Year	Referrals	Recorded Crimes
2005	332	46
2006	433	26
2007	425	35
2008	485	17
2009	644	42
2010	680	43
2011	648	30

5. Implications

5.1 Finance

MARAC co-ordinators now cover the Force area. Cleveland Police Authority contributes £5K to the salary of the co-ordinator who covers Hartlepool and Stockton, this post was funded until March 2011, an unsuccessful application was made for Home Office funding to cover 2011/12. It has been agreed that the post will continue and the Police Authority will again contribute £5K in the coming financial year. Similarly Redcar and Cleveland were unsuccessful in their bid for Home Office funding and the Authority will contribute £2K towards the salary of their co-ordinator for the 2011/12 financial year. Middlesbrough were successful in their bid for funding, the Authority will not therefore contribute to the cost of their co-ordinator.

5.2 Diversity and Equal Opportunities

There are no diversity or equal opportunity issues as all services provided take account of gender and ethnicity.

5.3 Human Rights Act

There are no Human Rights Act implications arising from this report.

5.4 Sustainability

The Vulnerability Units are now well established, the Operational Performance Team (OPT) carried out a review of the units to ensure that they were operating successfully, there were some recommendations around training and staffing numbers which are being addressed, but overall the report was positive.

5.5 Risk

Domestic abuse, Vulnerable Adult and Child abuse are all significant areas of organisational risk for the Force. The Vulnerability Units have been established and new policies and procedures written to mitigate that risk. All referrals/reports to the Force about abuse in these areas are assessed

by staff in the Vulnerability Unit, an assessment of risk is made and a decision taken as to the most appropriate way to manage the investigation to ensure that the victim receives the best possible service.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The Public Protection portfolio is a key area of work for the Force, the incidence of reported domestic abuse has increased during this financial year, this may well reflect the increased confidence victims have in the police and partners.
- 6.2 The number of repeat victims has increased during this financial year, when this is examined more closely it is apparent that the attrition rate for domestic abuse cases is double that of all other cases that are prosecuted. Further examination reveals that where domestic abuse cases fail to be successfully prosecuted a large proportion of them are where victims or witnesses fail to attend court or they retract their evidence. This then potentially leads to them being repeat victims of domestic abuse. The Vulnerability Units and partner agencies all recognise that this is an issue and are working together to identify early those victims who need support to ensure a successful outcome at court, this will be monitored at the Public Protection Gold group.
- 6.3 Whilst the number of HBV incidents remain low they are dealt with professionally by trained officers who are able to provide advice, reassurance and guidance to victims.
- 6.4 Due to the ageing population the number of referrals into the Vulnerable Adult Unit is likely to increase, this will have an implication for resourcing within the Vulnerability Unit and was highlighted in the OPT review. During the past financial year the referrals into the Unit actually fell, this was due to improved working protocols with the respective Local Authorities but the situation will be monitored during the next twelve months.

Sean Price
Chief Constable