

Homicide prevention

An inspection of the police
contribution to the prevention of
homicide

Contents

Summary	1
Introduction	4
About us	4
Background and context	4
Our inspection	6
Our commission	7
Our terms of reference	7
Our methodology	8
1. How effectively do forces understand the patterns of homicide?	9
Leadership and governance	9
National and local analysis	11
Victims and offenders	15
2. How effectively do forces contribute to the prevention of homicide?	21
Working with partners	21
Learning from homicides	25
The homicide prevention framework	27
Communications	28
Prevention and enforcement	30
The elements of more effective homicide prevention	33

Summary

How effectively do forces understand the patterns of homicide?

We found that most police forces were able to identify the patterns and causes of homicide effectively. And they were able to prioritise and allocate the right resources to tackle them. Some of the forces completed accurate assessments of homicide and developed plans that they shared with their [personnel](#). But some forces didn't understand the homicide threat in their area, so didn't effectively prevent homicide.

We were pleased to find that in some forces there was clear and effective leadership of homicide prevention. This leadership helped to co-ordinate activity and make sure that all the causes of homicide were tackled effectively. But some forces didn't have this leadership, which led to a lack of co-ordination and collaboration in addressing the causes of homicide.

For several years, the link between drugs and homicide may have been overstated. The Home Office is developing the analysis of homicide data to better understand the problem. But the current system for homicide data collection from forces in England and Wales prevents sufficient and accurate information being submitted to the Home Office. Until this is resolved, the Home Office, and in turn police forces, may only have a partial understanding of homicide and its causes.

In previous reports, we have highlighted that the shortage of analysts meant many forces were unable to complete analysis. This is still the case and prevents a good understanding of homicide patterns.

Forces aren't able to assess and link less serious crimes or incidents so they can take action to prevent these crimes or incidents escalating to homicide. We found no evidence of effective processes to identify linked incidents. This included assessment of deaths in non-suspicious circumstances, for example in care homes.

If police forces are to contribute effectively to the Government's target of reducing homicide by 20 percent, the availability of analysts needs to improve.

How effectively do forces contribute to the prevention of homicide?

Many interviewees told us that the [Serious Violence Duty \(SVD\)](#), which aims to improve how information is shared between police, local services and councils to prevent serious crime, is a missed opportunity. This is because it is unclear to the police how other agencies will be held to account for failing to share information with them. Interviewees told us repeatedly about organisations being unable or unwilling to share information about serious violence. And we heard about cases when the police believed other organisations should have told them about threats of serious violence. Some of these cases resulted in homicides. It remains to be seen if the SVD improves current arrangements and prevents similar incidents.

Police forces complete major crime and statutory reviews following incidents of homicide and serious violence. But these reviews take time and most forces we inspected didn't have a way of quickly identifying learning. When they identified learning, too often recommendations weren't effectively communicated to frontline personnel, who play an essential role in preventing violence.

During our inspection, we looked at how forces used the [homicide prevention framework \(HPF\)](#). The framework was developed by the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) after the [College of Policing](#) requested forces share how they were preventing homicide. The HPF relies on forces engaging with it, but many didn't contribute. They used the framework to different degrees. We found that forces that used more of the HPF prevention techniques were generally more effective at preventing crime.

Social media is increasingly used by the police to communicate with the public. But forces rely on social media platforms that young people, the people at most risk of becoming involved in homicide, are less likely to use. This means that prevention messages may be lost or communicated disproportionately to older people, who are less likely to become involved in homicide. This may increase their fear of crime unnecessarily.

We found that during our inspection, senior officers relied on the [daily management meeting \(DMM\)](#) to manage longer-term issues. These included identifying linked-series crimes and incidents, as well as learning lessons from serious violence incidents. This reliance is misplaced. College of Policing [authorised professional practice](#) states the DMM process is a means of dealing with day-to-day policing issues. It isn't an effective substitute for longer-term risk management processes.

We found that some forces failed to allocate resources to manage their lists of potentially dangerous people who had been identified by analysts and other personnel. They were just compiling growing lists of names. This is a failure to protect the public. And it lets down those [officers](#) and [staff](#) who cannot, as a result, address the identified serious risk.

Forces told us that they wanted to know the elements of effective homicide prevention. We end this report with what we conclude are those elements and we strongly encourage forces to consider implementing them.

Introduction

About us

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services, in the public interest. In preparing our reports, we ask the questions that the public would ask, and publish the answers in accessible form. We use our expertise to interpret the evidence and make recommendations for improvement.

Background and context

The scope of our inspection

Homicide is a term used to describe the unlawful killing of another person. Most homicides in England and Wales fall into the categories of murder and manslaughter.

Our inspection examined how effectively the police understood, and contributed to the prevention of, homicides.

A range of factors can lead to homicide. They include:

- domestic abuse;
- serious and organised crime;
- youth violence, including urban street gangs;
- offences against vulnerable people, including children; and
- drug and alcohol abuse.

Some incidents are near-misses, when factors such as the prompt arrival of medical support or sheer luck mean the victim survives. Sometimes the difference between a stabbing that results in a serious injury and a homicide can be measured in millimetres. For these reasons, our inspection focused on murder, manslaughter and the serious violence that may lead to homicide.

Preventing violent incidents should be a priority for every police force. When the prevention of near-misses, such as serious assaults, is effective, it will reduce the likelihood of a homicide.

The homicide risk is low

For most people, the risk of becoming a victim of homicide in England and Wales is extremely low. In an age of 24-hour news, the public is more aware of homicide and violent crime than it has ever been. For some, this has created a perception that homicide has increased dramatically. But [data from the Office for National Statistics](#) tells a different story. The homicide rate gradually increased from the mid-1970s to a peak in the early 2000s. But in the past two decades, the risk of being a victim of homicide has reduced to a level that we saw half a century ago.

The homicide rate in England and Wales is lower than in many other countries. According to the [Global study on homicide](#) by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the global average homicide rate was around five times higher than it was in England and Wales.

However, there were 696 victims of homicide in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2022. One victim is one too many.

The risk of becoming a homicide victim isn't the same for everyone

A young Black man living in a deprived, urban area is far more likely to be a victim of homicide than an elderly White woman living in an affluent area.

Homicide rates in the three years ending 31 March 2022, and accounting for different population sizes, were around four times higher for Black people than White people. The most common age group for victims of homicide in England and Wales is 16 to 24 years. Men are more likely to be victims than women.

In 2020, the Home Office [Trends and drivers of homicide report](#) identified a strong relationship between deprivation and homicide. It suggested that it was likely that deprivation explained some of the disparity between Black and White homicide rates. It said: "More than half the White population live in the most affluent half of the country, whereas just 17 percent of the Black population do."

Reductions in police funding don't reflect the risk of homicide

In the year to 31 December 2022, Merseyside Police recorded 19 homicides per million population, the third highest in England and Wales. Surrey Police had the lowest in England and Wales at 0.8 homicides per million population.

In 2022, the [Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis of police funding](#) in England and Wales found that force areas with denser populations experienced larger reductions in per capita funding between 2013/14 and 2019/20.

It stated: "The force that serves the most-deprived area, Merseyside, experienced an 11 percent reduction in funding per capita, while the force that serves the least-deprived area, Surrey, experienced a 2 percent reduction in funding per capita."

The Government recently set a target to reduce homicide levels by 20 percent. For the police to be able to contribute to this target, areas of high population and high deprivation must benefit from an appropriate allocation of resources. In our view, the disproportionate reduction in police funding in these areas will not support homicide prevention.

Our inspection

Homicide investigations are often lengthy and complex, and some of the most skilled investigators work on murder cases. Their work means dangerous people are imprisoned, usually for many years and sometimes for the rest of their lives. The police solve an overwhelming number of homicides.

This inspection focused on homicide prevention. Effective prevention of homicides saves lives and is better than effective investigation. We are reminded of the first of Sir Robert Peel's principles, formed around 1829, that "the basic mission for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder".

A joined-up approach to inspection

During the summer of 2022, HMICFRS, the [College of Policing](#) and the [Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\)](#) helped the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#) produce the [homicide prevention framework \(HPF\)](#).

The framework, part of the NPCC's national homicide strategy, was introduced in October 2022 by the College of Policing on its website. It gives police forces information on a range of techniques they can use to prevent homicide more effectively. The framework consists of:

- a [homicide problem-solving guide](#);
- a [smarter practice](#) section with summaries of policing techniques that may help prevent homicide;
- a [crime reduction toolkit](#) giving forces the best available evidence on what works to reduce crime; and
- a [research project map](#) giving forces an overview of current research relating to policing and crime reduction.

In this inspection, we looked at how the police used the HPF, including the smarter practice section and crime reduction toolkit.

We worked closely with the College of Policing and were supported by the NPCC and IOPC. Our inspection examined how well police forces understood the patterns of homicide in their area through accurate analysis. We then examined how they contributed to the prevention of homicide.

The police can't achieve the Government's homicide reduction target alone

The police play an important role in homicide prevention and achieving the Government's reduction target. But they can't prevent every homicide.

We asked the forces we inspected to complete an assessment of homicides in their force areas. We wanted to establish to what extent they could prevent people killing others.

In 15 of the 51 homicides the forces reviewed, the offender wasn't previously known to the police or partner organisations, such as the Probation Service. These homicides were unlikely to be foreseeable.

In the remaining cases, each offender had a history of violence or was known to the police or partner organisations. That doesn't mean all these cases were preventable. Having a previous conviction for assault is unlikely, without other aggravating factors, to mean that the police or their partners would be able to predict or foresee that person committing homicide in the future, and intervene to stop them.

The police don't work alone. They work as part of a system with other public bodies. Each has a significant role to play in preventing homicide and serious violence. And in some cases, other bodies are far more likely to be able to intervene to prevent the circumstances that may lead to homicide.

We don't inspect these other public bodies, but we do expect the police to work well with them.

Our commission

At the request of the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire, we included the topic of homicide prevention in our policing inspection programme and framework.

Our terms of reference

We conducted a [thematic inspection](#) of homicide prevention, jointly supported by the NPCC, the College of Policing and the IOPC. In our inspection, we examined:

- how effectively forces understand the pattern of homicide in their areas, including the underlying causes and risks; and
- how effectively forces contribute to the prevention of homicides, including how they use the homicide prevention framework.

Our methodology

Our inspection focused on eight police forces. They accounted for 37 percent (260) of the 696 homicides in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2022.

We inspected:

- Gloucestershire Constabulary;
- Greater Manchester Police;
- Merseyside Police;
- Metropolitan Police;
- South Yorkshire Police;
- Surrey Police;
- West Midlands Police; and
- West Yorkshire Police.

We reviewed data and documents. We conducted interviews and focus groups with:

- police personnel;
- NPCC police leaders;
- College of Policing staff;
- Home Office staff;
- police and crime commissioners; and
- statutory partners including staff from local authorities, social services and the NHS.

1. How effectively do forces understand the patterns of homicide?

Leadership and governance

The response to the causes of homicide isn't always prioritised so resources can be allocated to prevent them

It is important that police forces identify the causes of homicide in their areas. If they identify the causes effectively, they are more likely to allocate the right resources to prevent them. An accurate [strategic threat assessment](#) will identify homicide causes and priorities that can be included in a control strategy. A [control strategy](#) sets out the operational and long-term crime prevention priorities for a force. It helps the police decide how to allocate their resources.

Most of the forces we inspected had assessed and identified homicide causes from the crimes they had recorded. Some used [MoRiLE](#), or a similar model, to assess homicide causes and generate a risk score. This score helped them allocate their resources to the highest-risk causes. Some forces had set priorities with a sound rationale that was recorded and made available to operational personnel. But we didn't find this in all forces.

Personnel in one force had completed a MoRiLE assessment and scored [domestic abuse](#) as the highest risk to the public, making up approximately one third of homicides over the past five years. But the force didn't include domestic abuse in its control strategy or appear to prioritise it. For example, it hadn't allocated enough personnel to process applications under the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#). The scheme helps the public to ask the police for information about a person's previous history of abuse or violence if that person is their partner, or the partner of a close friend or relative. The lack of personnel led to a backlog of 300 applications, which would take up to 6 months to process. This may lead to vulnerable people, including children, living with people with a record of domestic abuse.

The control strategy submitted to us by another force consisted of presentation slides rather than an effective assessment of homicide causes. There was no risk prioritisation process, such as MoRiLE. The force didn't share its control strategy with most senior officers. We found that local policing areas had developed their own ways of preventing homicide, but these lacked any consistent or coherent approach to

tackling the problem across the force area. And we found an absence of [chief officer](#) oversight.

Some personnel in another force told us that although mental ill health had been the cause of several homicides, it wasn't included in the control strategy. Police had retreated from mental health partnerships because they didn't feel it was their job to take the lead. This may have led to a deterioration of partnership working, including information sharing.

Put simply, the most effective forces had identified factors leading to homicide. They had then developed a plan to help prevent homicide and shared this with operational personnel.

Not all forces have effective leadership of homicide prevention

Effective leadership of homicide prevention, to co-ordinate activity and avoid officers and staff working in isolation in their teams, is important to make best use of resources.

In some forces we found evidence of clear and effective leadership. In Greater Manchester Police, a strategic lead co-ordinated homicide prevention. They were supported by senior personnel who were each responsible for tackling one of the themes that contributed to homicide. The lead for each theme regularly attended a strategic oversight board to explain how they were helping to prevent homicide.

In another force, the governance of homicide prevention was less effective. This was because the force failed to co-ordinate prevention work across the areas that may contribute, such as domestic abuse or youth violence. [Police personnel](#) responsible for aspects of homicide prevention were unaware of initiatives in other workstreams.

In some forces we inspected, some officers and other personnel were unaware of who was responsible for leading homicide prevention, or nobody held that responsibility. In one force, the governance structure didn't enable a sufficiently senior officer to have control and influence over prevention resources across the force. This meant junior officers were developing prevention strategies in isolation without the support, leadership or direction from senior officers.

We encourage chief officers to review their current structures to satisfy themselves they have the necessary leadership and governance to help prevent homicide. It is our view that the most effective leadership model is a single chief officer, with clear responsibility for homicide prevention. They also need to have control and influence over the relevant personnel. The chief officer lead should be supported by a governance structure that includes senior personnel responsible for prevention activity aligned to identified homicide causes. Regular oversight meetings, supported by high-quality analysis, should help the chief officer co-ordinate activity and hold the leads to account for progress on each cause.

Up-to-date strategies and plans can help police prevent homicide

In most forces, we found detailed prevention plans targeting the factors that contribute to homicide, such as knife-carrying and alcohol consumption. But we also found evidence that some documents were outdated. In one force, some [serious and organised crime local profiles](#) hadn't been reviewed for three years. It is unlikely they will be as effective at helping to prevent homicide.

Some forces had an overarching homicide prevention strategy, and some didn't. Others had a serious violence strategy because those forces believed that by preventing serious violence, homicide would be prevented.

In our view, the name of the strategy is less important than the need to have one. A carefully considered plan, which is clearly communicated to personnel and well implemented, will help to keep people safe.

National and local analysis

Drug-related homicide data is improving

The Government's [Serious Violence Strategy](#) was published in 2018. It said:

“Drug-related cases seem to be an important driver. Between 2014/15 and 2016/17, homicides where either the victim or suspect were known to be involved in using or dealing illicit drugs increased from 50 percent to 57 percent.”

The strategy identified four key themes, one of which was tackling [county lines](#) and the misuse of drugs.

The Government's [Beating crime plan](#) was published in 2021. It said:

“Over the past decade, we have also seen worrying rises in some of the most destructive and devastating crimes, such as homicide and knife crime, with drugs playing a prominent role.”

It went on to say:

“Drugs often play a prominent role; and in the year to March 2020 48 percent of homicides were drug related. That is why we are focusing our efforts on the places where these crimes occur, the people who commit them and the criminal enterprises that fuel the drugs trade.”

But, during our inspection, we were told repeatedly that the definition of drug-related homicide was too broad. For example, a case where a homicide suspect had a previous [caution](#) for possession of drugs many years earlier could be included, even if the homicide had no link to drugs.

Recent analysis has suggested that drugs may play a far less prominent role in homicide. Tackling the misuse of drugs remains important, but its influence on homicide may have been overstated. This may have led police forces to allocate resources to tackling drugs as a way of preventing homicide. This is likely to have been ineffective.

The Home Office is now trying a new approach, working with the [College of Policing](#), to identify homicide trends, including the main drivers or causes of homicide. This may help police forces to better allocate their resources and identify opportunities to prevent homicides.

Current arrangements prevent police forces providing more detailed information on homicides

Police forces in England and Wales must submit information about every homicide to the Home Office through an online portal within 30 days of the homicide being reported. The information includes details of the victim, offender and circumstances of the case, such as the location and the way the victim was killed. Police forces must also provide updates when suspects are charged and again upon conviction.

The Home Office uses this information to create a Homicide Index to monitor trends. Important decisions are made using this data. For example, the Office for National Statistics uses the information to publish [annual reports on homicide in England and Wales](#). But the Home Office told us that the detail entered onto the portal by some police forces was insufficient.

The importance of giving a full and detailed account of each case can't be underestimated if analysis is to reveal the causes and trends of homicide. The Home Office mandates in its guidance to forces that they should cut and paste the detailed case summary, known as an MG5 report. But the portal has been set up with a limit of 2,000 characters, only enough for a few paragraphs. The MG5 reports almost always exceed this character limit.

The character limit needs to increase. If this isn't feasible, an alternative method for police to submit the relevant information should be identified.

Recommendation 1

By 1 December 2023, the Home Office should make sure that forces can provide it with relevant, detailed information on each homicide either via the online portal or through another secure method. The Home Office should update its guidance to police forces accordingly.

Problem profiles help forces understand patterns of homicide

One way police forces can achieve a better understanding of the patterns and causes of homicide in their areas is by developing a [problem profile](#) for homicide.

Problem profiles contain information that can help the police better understand trends or hotspots and identify high-risk issues. They help to identify [intelligence](#) gaps so police can direct and support their personnel to fill them.

Every force we inspected had problem profiles for homicide themes, such as gun crime or urban street gangs. Seven of the eight forces we inspected had a homicide or serious violence problem profile. One had only recently produced its homicide problem profile and hadn't yet shared it with personnel or partner organisations.

Only two of the forces with a homicide or serious violence profile included information from partner organisations, such as hospital admissions for knife injuries. This information provides a deeper understanding of patterns because not all violent incidents are reported to the police, but many victims attend hospital.

Serious violence data is important in finding ways to prevent homicide. We were encouraged to find that some forces included serious violence data in their profiles because they understood the fine margin between serious injury and death.

Some forces realised they had to include this data because the small numbers of homicide in their areas didn't provide enough opportunities to identify patterns.

It was frequently referred to as 'near-miss' data by analysts and other personnel. This is because the College of Policing has identified offences that forces might include as [homicide near-misses](#). Most forces have tried to use these definitions as a way of selecting crime data to include in their problem profiles. But in some forces the information contained within near-miss data isn't analysed. It could provide opportunities to prevent homicide.

Officers and staff in some forces told us that the College of Policing definition wasn't effective at helping them identify near-misses. They told us that the current range of offences included incidents not always regarded as near-misses, such as those involving comparatively minor injuries like a cut to the hand. But other offences, such as non-fatal strangulation or non-fatal suffocation introduced in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, weren't included. These are likely to be more serious and more likely to end in the death of the victim. Consequently, some forces are developing their own near-miss definition.

The College of Policing is reviewing the offences it defines as near-misses. We would encourage forces to use the definition it develops. A single definition of near-miss will provide a better opportunity to understand homicide patterns regionally and across England and Wales.

Homicide problem profiles aren't always up to date

We were told that most forces struggled to keep their problem profiles updated and some couldn't. This was mainly due to a lack of analysis. If problem profiles aren't updated with current information, they are likely to be of limited value because homicide and serious violence patterns change.

The [College of Policing guidance on problem profiles](#) states:

“The problem profile must be current and relevant. It should be added to and updated until the problem is dealt with, then stored for retrieval if necessary.”

In October 2022, the College of Policing sent police forces a template to help them create an annual homicide problem profile for their force and to contribute to a national problem profile. This may improve police forces' understanding of homicide in their areas and help police leaders to understand homicide patterns regionally and in England and Wales. All the forces we inspected completed the template, but the length of the document and level of detail varied.

Police forces need to identify gaps in knowledge about homicide causes and direct and support their officers and staff to collect intelligence to fill those gaps

It is unlikely that police forces will always have comprehensive knowledge about every homicide cause in their area. Intelligence gaps will become apparent, especially when new risks are identified.

The force's [intelligence requirement](#) sets out information that is required, or questions that need to be answered, to fill gaps in police knowledge about threats and risks to communities.

It is important that the intelligence requirement is communicated clearly to officers and staff, so that they can use their time effectively by collecting the right information. However, some of the forces we inspected weren't clearly communicating intelligence gaps to relevant people, for example [neighbourhood policing teams](#).

One force was focused on filling intelligence gaps relating to [organised crime groups](#) and urban street gangs. It didn't direct personnel to collect intelligence about people involved in other violence, such as domestic abuse, even though intelligence gaps existed.

In another force, a group of analysts couldn't provide examples of when the intelligence requirement had led to colleagues collecting relevant information.

Forces need to do more to improve their knowledge and make sure that, when intelligence gaps are identified, they do all they can to fill them. Otherwise, their understanding of homicide causes may be limited and opportunities to prevent homicides may not be taken.

Insufficient analysis of homicide makes the police’s contribution to the Government’s reduction target more difficult

The analysis of homicide and its causes is important if forces are to understand patterns in their areas. The [College of Policing says analysis “provides an insight into what is happening and why”](#). Analysts are important in the prevention of homicide because they use their skills and analytical tools to:

- support complex investigations;
- analyse violent crime patterns;
- analyse information to provide an assessment of a problem; and
- identify intelligence gaps and recommend ways of addressing the problem.

In previous reports, our inspectors have highlighted the problems forces have with the shortage of analysts and their consequent inability to complete analysis. To a large degree, this is due to years of austerity and a reduction in police budgets. In this inspection, we found the same problem in homicide prevention.

We found that shortages of analysts were severe in some of the most populous police force areas we inspected. They contain large cities with areas of high deprivation.

A lack of analysis prevents a good understanding of homicide patterns and will reduce forces’ ability to allocate resources to prevent them. If police forces are to contribute effectively to the Government’s 20 percent homicide reduction target, the lack of analysts working in the places where homicides are far more likely to occur is a barrier.

Victims and offenders

Most forces monitor community tensions effectively

It is important for forces to monitor community tensions effectively. This allows the police to engage with affected communities at an early stage to prevent homicide. For example, where serious violence has occurred because of the activities of urban street gangs or organised crime gangs, community tensions and the risk of reprisals can increase.

Most forces we inspected monitored community tensions effectively, usually by the force intelligence bureau. Some forces monitored social media to assess community tensions. They made response and neighbourhood officers aware of anniversaries of homicides so they could complete high-visibility patrols to prevent reprisals and engage with the community to reduce tensions.

Some forces involved partner organisations or [violence reduction units \(VRUs\)](#) in monitoring community tensions so a range of information contributed to accurate assessments. VRUs bring together police, local government, health and education professionals, and community leaders to reduce violent crime. The Government funds

VRUs in forces that have high levels of violent crime. Other forces are unlikely to be able to afford them.

Some forces used their [daily management meeting \(DMM\)](#) to identify community tensions, but in some cases this was ineffective. Forces should use this meeting to manage day-to-day matters, considering incidents over the past and the next 24 hours. During our inspection, we attended DMMs in every force. In some, the meetings appeared to exist to gather information about instances that might cause the force reputational harm, rather than supporting operational activity. In our view, community tensions shouldn't solely be monitored through DMMs.

Some forces need to do more to prevent homicides linked to domestic abuse

Police use the [Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour-Based Violence \(DASH\)](#) risk identification, assessment and management model, or a similar [risk assessment](#) tool, to prioritise people at high risk of domestic abuse. DASH is used to help frontline personnel identify high-risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and so-called [honour-based violence](#).

Confidence in these tools varied. One chief officer told us that while DASH risk assessments are a good starting point, they don't prevent homicide and sometimes professional curiosity is forgotten because officers are too focused on completing the checklist.

The [Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\)](#) told us that it had made the same recommendations to a number of forces when there had been a homicide or a serious injury after police attendance at a domestic incident. Forces aren't learning the lessons from reviews of other forces' serious incidents. The recommendations generally related to how risk assessments were completed, including use of the DASH tool. Two of the most recent IOPC recommendations related to making sure officers understood the need to ask probing questions and consider the previous history of domestic abuse when assessing risk.

The [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme \(DVDS\)](#) allows the police to disclose information about someone's previous history of domestic abuse or violent acts. In South Yorkshire, the police used DVDS effectively. They had a team that identified cases where disclosures were needed to protect people.

We didn't have confidence that all forces were effectively using the DVDS to protect people. We have reported this before. In our 2021 inspection of the [police response to violence against women and girls](#), we found in the four forces we inspected that there wasn't a robust management process in place to make sure the DVDS was working effectively. The timeliness of the disclosures wasn't monitored and there was little oversight of how this affected the victim.

During this inspection, we identified similar gaps. We interviewed a group of officers working in an adult [safeguarding](#) team in one force. They were unaware of the procedure for immediate disclosures of information when the applicant was at risk of significant harm. In another force, officers told us that DVDS applications were passed to a central unit, even if people were at risk of significant harm and the information should be disclosed immediately. This caused a delay while the applicant remained at risk.

Information systems don't always help police prevent homicide

In some forces, information systems were a barrier to the identification of potential offenders and victims. The information system in one force didn't allow personnel to search for people at risk of becoming a victim or offender because of domestic abuse or mental ill health. Officers in another force told us that its crime and intelligence system produced different results when the same search was repeated. Users had lost confidence in the system, and some told us that it was a risk to the public.

Police forces have access to the [violent and sex offender register \(ViSOR\)](#), a national database of people who pose a serious risk of harm to the public. Forces need to make sure personnel have access to ViSOR for it to be effective. Child protection officers in one force told us that there weren't enough ViSOR licences or personnel trained to use the system in their force. Sometimes they couldn't access crucial intelligence on violent or dangerous offenders when they needed it because there were no trained personnel on duty.

Poor IT systems were hampering some forces and stopping them identifying dangerous people. However, computer systems take a long time to develop and implement, they are usually expensive and sometimes still don't meet the users' needs. But forces do need to make sure their personnel can access the information held on national information systems such as ViSOR if they are to be effective at preventing homicide.

Police are working hard to prevent homicides caused by knife crime

In the year ending 31 March 2022, 41 percent of homicides involved the use of a knife or sharp instrument, while 4 percent involved a shooting. Understandably, many forces have focused on knife crime to reduce homicide.

They have developed ways of identifying people they think are more likely to carry a knife in public and become involved in knife crime as both offenders and victims. These are often known as habitual knife carriers. Once these people are identified, the police can intervene, sometimes with partner organisations, to prevent an escalation of violence. The police can also target their use of [stop and search powers](#) to recover dangerous weapons and prevent homicide.

The College of Policing has identified smarter practice in Sussex Police (which wasn't part of this inspection). Its [habitual knife carrier index](#) combined police-recorded knife crime and knife-related intelligence data with lifestyle factors associated with serious violence, such as involvement in gangs. It was used to identify people who may benefit from a referral to a youth project to divert them away from violence.

The index was refreshed quarterly to make sure people who no longer presented a risk were removed and those who did were included. There were 202 people on the index in October 2022 and 66 were assessed by the force as high risk.

In Greater Manchester Police, Operation Sycamore aimed to tackle serious violence, including knife crime. Officers visited habitual knife carriers to explain the dangers of knife crime. Other forces in England and Wales were trying different ways to prevent knife-related homicide and the first step was to identify people at risk.

Forces should be intelligence-led and innovative in their fight against knife crime. They should also be aware of the importance of making sure the criteria for identifying potential offenders and victims are unbiased. This will guard against inadvertent disproportionality based on race and other characteristics.

Police forces must improve the way they analyse incidents to establish links and trends

Linked homicides feature in the news because of their seriousness and because they are rare. Some examples involve less serious precursor crimes that escalate quickly to homicide, and others involve serial homicides.

The earlier police forces can identify similarities in linked incidents, the more likely they are to gather the evidence needed to identify offenders and prevent them from committing homicides.

Case study: Serial offender Stephen Port

In June 2014, Stephen Port drugged, raped and murdered a young man at a flat in Barking, East London. He left his victim, who had died from an overdose of gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), in the open air outside the flat. In a little over a year, Port went on to murder a further three young men in the same premises, in the same way. On those occasions, he took their bodies to a nearby church graveyard and left them slumped against a wall.

Despite the obvious similarities, the Metropolitan Police Service failed to see that the deaths might be connected. The force even failed to recognise that the four men – who were all gay – had been murdered. It only identified Port as a suspect one month after he had claimed his last victim. And it only made the connection to Port by chance, after grieving relatives persistently refused to accept the Metropolitan Police Service's original conclusions.

Had the police conducted an appropriate and thorough investigation after the first death, it is possible that three of the victims would still be alive.

In our recent inspection of the [Metropolitan Police Service's \(MPS's\) response to lessons from the Stephen Port murders](#), we commented:

“But we are still concerned that there isn't a pan-London approach or specific analytical reports to help the force understand, map and potentially link deaths reported anywhere in the force. We are especially concerned that deaths considered non-suspicious from the outset could be completely overlooked.”

In this inspection, we found that other forces didn't have processes that consistently and effectively identified incidents, including deaths, that could be linked.

In some forces, the shortage of analysts meant they were working on complex investigations and not assessing incidents, including deaths, for similarities.

In other forces, senior leaders were confident that because they had small numbers of homicides, when two or more occurred the links would be obvious to them. We believe this confidence is misplaced.

Some homicides follow less serious incidents. These homicides are less likely to be prevented if the precursor incidents aren't linked. And other homicides may not have been initially thought of as suspicious and aren't analysed for similarities.

Some senior officers told us that, in the absence of a robust analytical process, their DMM would highlight links. We disagree. The DMM isn't a way to identify linked crimes. College of Policing authorised professional practice states the DMM process is a means of dealing with day-to-day policing issues. It isn't an effective substitute for longer-term risk management processes.

In any event, we found the quality of some of these meetings was poor. In one force, there was no intelligence discussed or available and no actions set from previous meetings. The chair told us that “analysts don’t have time to assess incidents and it was possible that the force could miss a linked series of precursor events” that could have prevented a homicide. In another force, nobody from the intelligence department was invited to the DMM.

Even when DMMs are effective, they shouldn’t be relied on as the only way of identifying linked incidents because:

- less serious precursor incidents, or those that have happened in other force areas, are unlikely to always be discussed; and
- the level of detail available on each incident at the DMM is unlikely to always help officers determine whether cases are linked.

Worryingly, the information available to senior officers on emerging violent crime trends was sometimes lacking. We asked a homicide prevention lead about a recent sharp increase in offences involving the use of firearms in their force area. We also asked the senior officer chairing the DMM. Neither had been given that information, neither expected to have been given it, but both agreed they needed to know about it.

Our inspection provided little confidence that other forces had learned the lessons from the Stephen Port murders.

In our report into the MPS response to lessons from the murders, we recommended that the force made sure it could produce an analytical report concerning its death investigations on a sufficiently frequent basis. We extend this recommendation to all forces in England and Wales.

Recommendation 2

By 31 August 2024, chief constables in England and Wales should devise an approach to make sure their force can, on a sufficiently frequent basis, produce an analytical report concerning its death investigations. This will help the force to:

- better understand the pattern of death reports across the force area, drawing on force data and information gathered by other organisations, including the NHS and local authorities; and
- identify any linked series of death reports.

2. How effectively do forces contribute to the prevention of homicide?

The police play an important role in homicide prevention. But they can't do it alone. The Government's [Serious Violence Strategy](#) published in April 2018 said:

“Our overarching message is that tackling serious violence is not a law enforcement issue alone. It requires a multiple strand approach involving a range of partners across different sectors.”

We looked at how well the police contributed to that approach and worked with other organisations to prevent homicide.

Working with partners

The frequency of multi-agency safeguarding conferences should be held according to the need to meet demand and manage risk

Rarely does a single agency have a complete picture of the life of those at the highest risk of domestic abuse. Police forces work with other agencies, such as health, housing and probation services, to safeguard them. This involves sharing information and agreeing action plans to increase adult and children's safety. This is often done at a [multi-agency risk assessment conference \(MARAC\)](#).

We found evidence of regular and effective MARAC meetings, but not in every force. One force was overhauling its MARAC process and structure because it couldn't cope with the number of cases. And in another force, we found that MARAC meetings were held daily in some areas, but every three weeks in others. Their frequency depended on how often safeguarding partners were available to meet, rather than on need. Some personnel told us that safeguarding for domestic abuse victims depended on where they lived. We encourage police forces and their partner organisations to make sure they hold MARACs on a sufficiently regular basis to meet demand and manage risk.

There are concerns about how information sharing mandated by the Serious Violence Duty will be enforced

The [Serious Violence Duty \(SVD\)](#) requires authorities, including probation services, health services, local authorities, fire and rescue services, youth offending teams and the police, to work together and share information to reduce serious violence.

The statutory guidance was published in December 2022 and the SVD came into effect on 31 January 2023, coinciding with the start of our inspection fieldwork. We assessed if forces were aware of the SVD and how well prepared they were for its introduction.

We found that all eight forces had made some preparations. Knowledge of the SVD was better among senior leaders. However, operational officers and staff, even those at a senior level, were often unaware of the duty. In most forces, the SVD was seen as a means of building on existing arrangements, such as crime and disorder partnerships and violence reduction units.

While we found a good deal of optimism about the SVD, there was also scepticism, particularly about its scope and effectiveness. We were told it was a missed opportunity to improve how information is shared. Two chief officers thought that the duty might have “no teeth”, because it was unclear how other agencies would be held to account for a failure to share information with the police.

Many interviewees shared this concern and told us they had experienced an unwillingness from partner organisations to share information about serious violence. Healthcare professionals were often cited as being unable or unwilling to share information, particularly personal information, even when police felt it was necessary and justified.

We were told about the benefits of health professionals passing the personal details of people attending medical premises for treatment for injuries like stab wounds. In these cases, the police might be able to safeguard vulnerable individuals and bring their attackers to justice. This might prevent further violence and homicide.

We were given evidence about occasions when the police thought health services should have passed information and didn't.

Case study: Police not told by mental health services of man's threats to kill

A couple were killed in their home by their adult son, who had been staying with them.

Neither the victims nor their son had previously come to the notice of the police. There was no record of them on any police database.

The son had a history of mental ill health and was known to mental health services. His family had become increasingly concerned about him and felt he wasn't always being honest with them, or medical professionals, about his mental health.

In 2021, the son reported to mental health services that he was experiencing psychotic disturbances and hallucinations, including hearing voices that told him to do bad things. At that time, mental health services didn't perceive him to be high risk because he had "insight into his thoughts".

In 2022, his mother contacted community health services as her son was stating he wanted to kill someone. She was advised to take him to A&E. He was subsequently referred for home treatment. He told mental health services he had thoughts of raping and murdering a young [child](#) known to him and living nearby.

Health services didn't inform the police about the statements as they considered him "not having the insight to act". But they made plans for him not to be left unsupervised with the child.

The following month, the son self-referred due to further mental health issues. However, the crisis team didn't accept the referral, despite him being described as angry, lonely, paranoid and making staff feel uncomfortable.

The last contact mental health services had with the son was in October 2022 after he had been seen by his GP. The crisis team sent him a letter to enquire if he still wanted to engage with them. He didn't respond.

Shortly after, he killed his parents. Mental health services only shared the son's medical history with the police after the homicide. At trial, he pleaded guilty to manslaughter by reason of diminished responsibility.

Another force told us of a case where a pupil had been threatened, but his school hadn't shared the information.

Case study: School doesn't report gang threats to police before boy's murder

A teenage boy was murdered as he walked home from school. He hadn't previously come to the notice of the police, but he had recently distanced himself from a local gang after becoming involved with them.

In the months before the murder, staff at his school became aware that he was being intimidated by gang members. This information was recorded on a computer system used by schools to record safeguarding and student wellbeing concerns.

However, school staff didn't pass these concerns to the police.

Shortly after the start of a new school term, two gang members waited for the teenager as he left school. He was stabbed to death.

From the information we have been given, it is unclear if the police could have prevented these homicides even if they had been informed.

Neither the son who murdered his parents or the teenager killed on his way home from school was known to the police. But health and education services didn't know this. In these types of cases there may be information held by the police, or other organisations, which may help prevent homicide. Unless other authorities share information with police, they stand less chance of preventing some homicides.

We repeat that the police are unlikely to achieve the Government's homicide reduction target of 20 percent alone. Partners such as health and education also have a significant role. The Home Office is responsible for making sure the Government's homicide reduction target is achieved. Other government departments share a similar responsibility.

The SVD is an opportunity to share information more often and in more detail to prevent homicide. It remains to be seen how it improves current arrangements and prevents the type of tragic incidents in our case studies.

Learning from homicides

Some forces don't identify learning quickly from homicides and serious violence incidents to prevent further violence

Police forces complete major investigation reviews so that lessons can be learned to help senior investigators solve crime.

The police also complete statutory safeguarding reviews, such as domestic homicide reviews (DHRs), which are compulsory by law. These reviews are carried out by, and between, [statutory safeguarding partners](#) from organisations such as police, health, local authorities and probation. The purpose of a statutory safeguarding review is to learn lessons and drive service improvement.

In the forces we inspected, skilled and experienced personnel completed major investigation and statutory reviews. But these types of review take time to complete. We were told that learning from DHRs wasn't always available in time to make changes to prevent further homicide. Sometimes learning from DHRs was available over two years after the homicide and sometimes up to four years.

Most forces we inspected didn't have a way of quickly identifying learning following incidents of homicide and serious violence so they could change their processes to prevent future homicides.

Before our inspection, we visited Essex Police, with the [College of Policing](#) and [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#), to assess its [rapid debrief process](#) for homicide and near-misses. The debrief process involves an early analysis of an incident, including partner organisations when appropriate. A meeting is held shortly after the incident, which:

- reviews the response to the incident; and
- assesses the arrangements in place and any learning to be taken to inform the prevention of future homicides.

The NPCC included the rapid debrief process in its [homicide prevention framework \(HPF\)](#) as smarter practice. Some forces we inspected were in the process of assessing how they could implement rapid debriefs. Others had started doing them already, but without involving partner organisations.

But other forces didn't have a way of identifying lessons quickly. We were told by a senior officer in one force that its [daily management meeting \(DMM\)](#) would quickly identify learning from homicide and serious violence incidents. Having attended that force's DMM, and our experience during this inspection of DMMs more widely, we disagree.

If they don't have one, forces should implement a process to quickly identify lessons from homicides and serious violence incidents.

Recommendation 3

By 1 December 2023, chief constables should make sure their force can quickly identify lessons from homicides and serious violence incidents. The process should be capable of involving partner organisations when appropriate, so that lessons can be learned more widely.

Forces are generally poor at making sure that learning from previous homicides drives operational improvements

While forces were good at identifying learning from major crime and statutory reviews, this didn't always result in operational improvements. This risked mistakes being repeated, and in some cases they were, leading to similar recommendations being issued repeatedly.

The forces we inspected had governance meetings where learning from reviews was discussed and recommendations were allocated to senior personnel so they could make improvements. These meetings were ineffective in most of the forces we inspected. For example, personnel from learning and development departments were often not invited. This meant that the responsibility for learning from recommendations was given to operational officers to pass on to colleagues. Too often this resulted in the learning being passed on by at best an article on the force intranet, or email, rather than a learning and development product.

In one force, statutory reviews, such as domestic homicide reviews, weren't included in the governance meeting and lessons weren't reaching frontline officers. Sometimes learning opportunities were identified, but they were directed towards personnel in a limited range of roles.

Frontline officers in some forces told us that training days often consisted of mandatory first aid and personal safety, but not training on homicide prevention themes.

Frontline officers provide the first response to incidents that might escalate to homicide. They are often involved in safeguarding and investigation roles that are important in keeping people safe. But we found that too often the lack of governance of recommendations, and insufficient training, meant frontline officers weren't able to learn lessons from previous incidents.

In some forces, there was an effective approach. In Merseyside Police, an assistant chief constable chaired the crime scrutiny board where high-harm crimes were reviewed. These included homicides, child protection and firearms offences. Actions were allocated, which were regularly reviewed. Police training included national learning from homicide prevention activity.

Forces don't always learn from each other

Senior officers we spoke to told us that they struggled to find a way to share learning or to identify learning from other forces. An NPCC lead told us that the learning from force and national reviews lacked co-ordination, such as a single place for it to be stored for reference.

We were told by senior officers that the College of Policing didn't always meet the needs of forces because learning was included in authorised professional practice, which took too long to be developed and distributed. The college has responded to this by contributing to the HPF and hosting it on its website.

The homicide prevention framework

The homicide prevention framework (HPF), introduced in October 2022, aims to:

- support forces to analyse and understand homicide;
- develop and implement effective interventions and tactics; and
- identify where partnership support is needed.

During our inspection, we looked at how police forces used the HPF. We found it wasn't widely known in forces, although we found greater awareness among more senior police personnel. We were encouraged to hear of initiatives to raise its profile within several forces.

The value of the framework will increase if more police forces contribute to it

The HPF was developed following a College of Policing 'call for practice', a request for homicide prevention practice examples to all 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales. Disappointingly, many forces didn't respond. One senior leader told us that "some forces have a mindset to look outside, some don't, and some forces feel they are big enough not to need to look outside".

The HPF is designed to meet the needs of forces. But it will only be effective if police forces share examples of smarter practice with the College of Policing. We encourage all forces to respond positively to the next call for practice.

Most forces had assessed how the framework could help them prevent homicide

The HPF isn't a mandatory set of instructions. It is a toolkit for forces to use according to the homicide causes in their areas. It relies on an accurate assessment to identify those causes, such as through a homicide or serious violence problem profile. At the time of our inspection, we expected forces to have assessed which practice could help them prevent homicide. With one exception, the forces had completed this assessment.

Forces should use the framework to enhance their efforts at preventing serious violence and homicide

Hotspot policing techniques, patrolling areas with high levels of violent crime, is a tactic that forces have used for many years. To make sure activity to reduce violent crime is most effective, hotspots need to be accurately identified. In some of the forces we inspected, the level of analysis to identify violent crime hotspots was unsophisticated. Some used historic crime data and other forces struggled to separate antisocial behaviour incidents from serious violence. This was unlikely to help officers target serious violence hotspots effectively.

Although not subject to this inspection, we assessed Thames Valley Police's (TVP's) [Operation Rasure](#) with the College of Policing and NPCC. The operation tackled serious violence by identifying and managing hotspots. TVP used targeted patrols and multi-agency problem solving to reduce violence. We were impressed by the level of analysis and data products that directed activity within hotspots.

The HPF contains a range of tested policing tactics for the reduction of violent and sexual crime in a crime reduction toolkit. We encourage forces to make use of it to enhance their efforts at preventing serious violence and homicide.

Forces that are more effective at preventing crime make greater use of the tactics within the framework

We assessed if the forces we inspected used these tactics and to what degree. Some forces were critical of its value. One senior officer commented that his force didn't have the resources to implement HPF practice. Another told us that, in his opinion, the HPF was yet to offer practice relevant to homicide prevention.

But we found that three forces that were performing well used tactics within the HPF to a greater degree than the other forces, demonstrating they were receptive to innovation and new approaches. We graded two of them, West Yorkshire Police and South Yorkshire Police, outstanding for preventing crime in our PEEL inspection of 2021/22.

Communications

We examined communication processes and assessed two areas:

- how forces made sure their workforce was aware of homicide and serious violence threats in their areas so they could prevent homicide; and
- how forces engaged with the public to explain those threats, and communicated prevention messages and the action being taken.

Forces need to make sure their workforce is aware of homicide and serious violence threats

In most of the forces we inspected, homicide prevention leads didn't have an internal communication strategy and didn't engage with their communications departments. This meant communications to the wider force were limited to information about specific operations or incidents. They didn't tell officers and staff how they could contribute to homicide prevention in the course of their normal duties.

Communication relied heavily on emails and bulletins, and was often ineffective. One senior officer told us that internal messages were lost in 20-page bulletins, and this created confusion among personnel about priorities.

However, some forces have taken a different approach. Greater Manchester Police has introduced a series of ten events per year where the chief constable briefs large groups of officers and staff. Homicide prevention was one of the themes.

Forces need to improve how they engage with the public

We found that some forces adapted their communication methods depending on the target audience. These forces used traditional media, community leaders and local policing teams to reassure communities, pass them messages during prevention campaigns or seek their help.

In most forces, social media was increasingly used to communicate with the public. But we question whether forces are using this to its full advantage. When we spoke to officers and staff, they often referred to channels such as Facebook and Twitter. These clearly have a place, but it is questionable whether these platforms reach those at most risk of being involved in homicide.

As we said earlier in this report, young people aged between 16 and 24 are more likely to become involved in homicide than older age groups. In 2017, the London School of Economics and Political Science published [*Social Media Platforms and Demographics*](#), which recommended to "go where your audience are". For example, if your target audience was older people, Snapchat might be a less effective channel as only 2 percent of Snapchat users were over 55. But if your audience was young people below the age of 25, then Snapchat might be effective as around 50 percent of Snapchat users were under 25 years of age. Other channels, such as TikTok and Instagram, have a similar audience profile.

On 16 March 2023, following a Cabinet Office security review, the UK Government banned TikTok on its electronic devices, unless an exemption is granted for work purposes. We found little evidence of forces using Snapchat, Instagram or TikTok, even before the ban. But some forces had creative approaches to engage young people.

West Midlands Police worked with social media influencers, people with large numbers of followers and the ability to sway others. By using influencers, the force could get homicide prevention messages to young people in greater numbers than before. We were told this was a brave move by the force. We agree, as there was a risk of the messages being corrupted. But this work appears to have been successful. We were told that the Metropolitan Police Service also worked with social media influencers to communicate with audiences it had previously struggled to reach to prevent youth homicides.

It is important to choose the most effective way to get a message to the intended audience. A fashion company might not sell many clothes to young people by advertising in a parish magazine. And yet some police forces were still trying to communicate with young people using less effective social media platforms.

This approach fails to reach the target audience to prevent them becoming victims or offenders. And an unintended consequence is the increased fear of violent crime among older people, who are less likely to become victims.

We encourage all forces to think creatively and use the most appropriate means of communicating homicide prevention messages to their target audiences.

Prevention and enforcement

Forces use a range of statutory measures to control the activities of dangerous offenders to prevent violence. In our 2021/22 PEEL assessments, we assessed how all forces manage dangerous offenders, including their contribution to [multi-agency public protection arrangements \(MAPPA\)](#) and the [management of sexual offenders and violent offenders \(MOSOVO\)](#).

In this inspection, we didn't assess how forces managed offenders under MAPPA or MOSOVO arrangements. Instead, we examined how well forces attempted to control other people at risk of becoming violent. We also assessed how well forces used protective orders to prevent homicide.

How the police use protective orders to prevent homicide

There are a range of protective orders available to forces to help them prevent homicides or the types of violent offences that might lead to homicide. They include:

- [domestic violence protection orders](#);
- [knife crime prevention orders](#);
- [sexual harm prevention orders](#);
- [stalking protection orders](#); and
- [serious crime prevention orders](#).

Injunctions, [restraining orders](#) and [non-molestation orders](#) are also options available in certain cases. These orders vary widely in terms of who can apply for them, the conditions that can be attached to them and the consequences of breaching them.

From spring 2024, the Home Office and Ministry of Justice will pilot [domestic abuse protection notices \(DAPNs\)](#) and [orders \(DAPOs\)](#) in three areas of England and Wales. These new orders are intended to replace [domestic violence protection orders \(DVPOs\)](#), as well as domestic abuse-related injunctions or non-molestation orders.

We found that some forces used protective orders more than others. For example, some Greater Manchester Police personnel told us the force had relentlessly focused on domestic abuse-related orders. This resulted in a substantial increase in DVPO applications by the force to 339 in the year ending 30 September 2022 from 150 the previous year.

Some of the forces we inspected had formed teams to apply for orders, especially DVPOs. This often meant there were increases in the number of successful applications, as the team members developed a greater knowledge of the process.

Some officers described the barriers to successful applications, such as the length of time and amount of evidence required to secure a gang injunction, which limit the activities of a person involved in gang-related violence. We were told the effort to obtain the order wasn't proportionate to the sanction when it was breached. We were told of a case where an injunction took 12 months and 300 pages of evidence to secure but the punishment for its breach was 24 hours in custody. Personnel in other forces told us about similar cases.

It is important that police forces act quickly when people breach protective orders. In our inspection of the [police response to violence against women and girls](#), we found that breaches of protective orders weren't always acted upon.

The DMM is a good opportunity to share intelligence about offenders who are assessed as dangerous and target those who have breached protective orders. Many of the DMMs we observed were ineffective at helping manage domestic abuse and other dangerous offenders.

In one DMM, a domestic abuser assessed as one of the most high risk for many months, was discussed at length. During the meeting it became clear that he was in prison and presented no immediate risk. His name hadn't been removed from the list because the force had ineffective review processes.

We found that when breaches of protective orders were identified, they weren't included in some forces' DMMs so that officers could be allocated to make an arrest. In one force we found officers working in one area arrested people who had breached DVPOs, but officers working in other areas didn't.

Forces are letting down the public by identifying potentially dangerous people but not allocating sufficient resources to manage the risk

A potentially dangerous person (PDP) is a person who isn't currently managed under MAPPA but is believed to pose a risk of committing offences that will cause serious harm. For example, a PDP could be a person charged with domestic abuse offences, repeatedly against different partners, but never convicted.

The College of Policing's authorised professional practice sets out a framework for managing PDPs who may commit homicide. This includes guidance on risk assessments, who should complete them, and sharing information with other agencies.

We found that knowledge of the framework for managing PDPs was sometimes poor. A senior officer in one force told us that there was "poor awareness of the scheme, and it is not fit for purpose". That force had only one person designated as a PDP. Another force we inspected had a PDP policy but had yet to identify anyone fitting the definition.

However, South Yorkshire Police had introduced meetings in two areas to help manage the risk presented by PDPs. It used a risk matrix to help officers allocate a high-risk, medium-risk or low-risk rating to the person. This means it can prioritise people more likely to commit a homicide and allocate resources to protect the public.

Most of the forces we inspected compiled lists of offenders likely to present a high risk of harm to women and girls, or people likely to commit domestic abuse offences. The Metropolitan Police has developed Operation Bassano. This uses recorded crime data to identify people suspected of committing multiple sexual offences but aren't subject to any form of statutory control. An algorithm identified the top 100 people likely to offend. Officers targeted these people by obtaining protective orders, executing warrants and disrupting them in other ways, such as taking steps to revoke their driving licence.

However, once lists of dangerous people were created, we found that some forces failed to allocate police personnel to manage the risk. These dangerous offenders are known to present a heightened risk of committing homicide. Analysts and other personnel are often working hard to identify them. When forces don't do anything with this information, they are failing to protect the public. By giving officers and staff the information but not the resources, some forces were just compiling growing lists of names. They let officers and staff down by identifying serious risk but not giving them the resources to deal with it.

The elements of more effective homicide prevention

During our inspection, we found a range of measures that might help forces prevent homicide. We have combined these into what we conclude are important elements of homicide prevention. We strongly encourage forces to implement them. They are:

- an identifiable chief officer lead for homicide prevention with control of, or a high degree of influence over, prevention resources;
- an accurate strategic assessment that determines and defines the causes and patterns of homicide and serious violence;
- a control strategy that defines the homicide causes and is communicated to officers and staff at all levels so that effective resource allocation decisions can be made;
- identifiable operational leads for the causes of homicide with control of, or a high degree of influence over, prevention resources;
- homicide and serious violence problem profiles based on a range of information, including from partner organisations;
- thorough analysis of linked incidents, including across police borders;
- communication of targeted homicide prevention messages to people at most risk of homicide or serious violence;
- accurate identification of serious violence hotspots, from regular analysis of crime data and other information, including from partners;
- an effective review and rapid debrief process that allows officers and staff to learn lessons to prevent homicide and serious violence;
- robust governance of the application for protective orders to make sure they are obtained in appropriate cases; and
- action when a person breaches a protective order.

August 2023 | © HMICFRS 2023

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs