

DORSET POLICE & CRIME PANEL – 4 FEBRUARY 2020

OLDER VICTIMS OF CRIME

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper updates members on work to reduce older victims of crime locally, including the role of Dorset Police, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and partners. The paper outlines current issues, work on the action, prevention and commissioning to tackle these issues, and possible future areas of focus.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dorset has a higher than average proportion of older residents, and whilst many of these people will lead safe and active lives, others may be vulnerable, socially isolated or living with poor physical or mental health.

Policing and the wider criminal justice system, along with all other public services must address any hindrances that exist to allow older people the proper access to services.

Whilst crime is well understood, police and criminal justice datasets do not always collect age-related data, or collect it in such a way that allows for the easy analysis of the information held.

However, it is well established that older people are vulnerable to becoming victims of certain types of crime. These crime types, and the police and OPCC response, are considered in more detail below.

The PCC recognises that whilst older people are less likely to be victims of crime, they are more likely to fear being the victims of crime. However, older victims of crime are sometimes disproportionately impacted, particularly where those crimes occur in the home.

To ensure a robust approach to managing crimes against older people, Dorset Police agreed to work with HMICFRS inspectors to improve the police and CPS response¹. Inspectors visited Dorset, alongside five other forces, where they reviewed policies and relevant documents, interviewed senior and operational officer, and held focus groups with frontline officers, staff and partner organisations. They also completed assessments of relevant cases in each force.

This recent voluntary inspection has enabled the PCC to conclude that, whilst there will always remain more that should be done to prevent and deter crime, and to improve the response to victims, Dorset Police is performing at a good level in this area.

¹ HMICFRS: The poor relation – The police and CPS response to crimes against older people (2019)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The population is ageing². Whilst the number of children (aged up to 15 years) increased by 7.8% between 2008 and 2018, and the working age population (aged 16 to 64 years) increased by 3.5% during the same period, the number of people aged 65 to 84 years and the number of people aged 85 years and over, both increased by 23%.
- 1.2. The local figures are more pronounced. In the Dorset Council area 28% of the population is aged 65 and over (106,100), while in the BCP Council area the figure is 22% (85,245) compared with 18% in England and Wales.
- 1.3. There is no agreed age or definition across the criminal justice system for what constitutes an older person. Some charitable organisations define old age as starting at 50 years whereas the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) uses 60. Even within policing the definitions vary, with Dorset Police classifying older people as aged 65 and over.
- 1.4. There are no national data on recorded crime by age, but the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimates that the likelihood of being a victim of crime is around half for those aged 65 and over, compared to those aged 16 to 64.
- 1.5. Whilst CSEW and other research shows that older people have less risk of experiencing crime, some crime types – such as those linked to physical, mental, or financial abuse – disproportionately affect older people.
- 1.6. Some older people are especially at risk, either because perpetrators target them or because their circumstances make them vulnerable. For example, if they are bereaved, lonely or living with dementia. The financial and health impacts of these crimes can be devastating. In addition, some older people are socially isolated and may lack established support mechanisms to help protect them, and help them recover if they become victims.
- 1.7. While the police alone cannot tackle all issues affecting older people, Chief Constable James Vaughan has set out his ambition for the Dorset Police around vulnerability, stating:

“Dorset (Police) has the aim of providing an outstanding service to the most vulnerable members of our communities. Protecting those less able to protect themselves is a core principle of policing and every one of us, has a part to play in achieving this goal.”
- 1.8. A key focus of the work by Dorset Police is therefore to look at all victims of crime on a ‘case by case’ basis and to identify any vulnerabilities and/or support needs. Dorset Police’s Safeguarding Referral Unit (SRU) receive approximately 6,000 cases per month of all types and ages of safeguarding.
- 1.9. In Dorset, in both 2018 and 2019, 7.1% of victims of total crime were aged 65 and over. In a report by Action Fraud for 10 months in 2019 (January to December 2019, but excluding August and September) 21.8% of the 3,473 victims of fraud in Dorset were older people. Also people aged 65 and over made up around 10% of Public Protection Notices (PPNs) allocated by the Force in both 2018 and 2019 in Dorset.

2. THREATS AND RESPONSES

- 2.1. There are a number of key areas of threat and vulnerability to older people, and a significant amount of work is in place to mitigate against these risks. This activity also links in with the Police and Crime Plan priorities and commitments.

² Office for National Statistics: Population estimates for the UK - mid-2018 [latest available data]

Safeguarding and Vulnerability

- 2.2. Dorset Police ensure that officers are trained to identify signs of vulnerabilities in older people and upskilled to use PPNs more effectively for adults. Work with partners is in progress to improve responses to adult safeguarding referrals.
- 2.3. The Dorset Police Safeguarding Referral Unit (SRU) receive all safeguarding cases and they are triaged by a team of three sergeants and receive approximately 6,000 cases per month (all ages). The team has been trained in all strands of vulnerability.
- 2.4. In 2018/19, 3.0% of victims of domestic abuse (DA) crimes reported to Dorset Police were aged 65 years or over. It was recognised that this figure was very likely low due to poor reporting, and therefore steps were taken within the community to increase and improve reporting methods. In the first three quarters of 2019/20 this proportion has increased to 4.8%. It is recognised that improved awareness of DA may be contributing to this increase.
- 2.5. An emerging issue for Dorset Police with regards to older people as victims, is modern slavery. To ensure the workforce is aware of this threat, a one day awareness training course has been given to NPTs, and a cohort of investigators will be attending an in-depth training course in July 2020.
- 2.6. The Force's new vulnerability lawyers will start work in February 2020 and will introduce a range of protection orders to cover areas such as domestic abuse, sexual risk and modern slavery. These lawyers will exploit the legislation available to forces to implement, for example, Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) which have already proven useful in breaking the cycle of domestic abuse by providing short term, emergency protection for a victim of domestic abuse.
- 2.7. Maximizing the use of the Dorset Remote Live Link is also an important element for vulnerable and older victims, allowing for a more powerful victim's statement to be made by video, rather than in writing. The Live Link can support our most vulnerable victims and witnesses by saving them the ordeal of a courtroom.

Partnership Working

- 2.8. In terms of general vulnerability, the PCC has identified that policing alone cannot protect vulnerable and older people, and an approach has to be made in partnership, potentially with partners pooling resources, budgets and staff to protect those most at risk.
- 2.9. Whilst both the PCC and the Chief Constable have made firm their desire to provide an outstanding police service to the people of Dorset, their shared aim is to focus particularly on those who are the most vulnerable.
- 2.10. Much work has been done with partners to progress the local response to those at risk or vulnerable to harm. This activity has been at both the strategic and operational level and includes:
 - Development of a pan-Dorset strategy;
 - Placed based approaches to shared priorities;
 - Tackling the criminal exploitation of the vulnerable;
 - Reviewing the Appropriate Adult provision in Dorset;
 - PCC funding and support to a number of initiatives addressing vulnerability;
 - PCC Community Grant Scheme, providing a number of smaller amounts of funding in support of local projects working in areas including homelessness, mental health, learning disabilities, abuse and drug and alcohol education

Safe and Independent Living

- 2.11. Safe and Independent Living (SAIL) is a partnership between local authorities, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, Dorset Police, voluntary organisations including Age UK and other local groups and services. SAIL can provide people with additional support or information, including:
- Fitting free smoke detectors and completing home safety checks;
 - Home energy checks and information about grants for insulation;
 - Benefit checks and entitlements;
 - Debt advice;
 - Signposting to local social opportunities and activities, such as lunch clubs, exercise classes or learning centres;
 - Signposting to fall prevention services; and
 - Support to live a healthier lifestyle.
- 2.12. SAIL has been established in Dorset for some years, working with a range of partners including Dorset Energy Advice Service Centre. The Scheme is now being extended into Wiltshire, led by Wiltshire Council and involving a number of voluntary organisations.

Cyber-Crime Prevention

- 2.13. Cyber-crime is a growing threat to the community, in particular the vulnerable and including older people. The Dorset Police Cyber Protect Officer (CPO) specifically engages with older people to pass on prevention advice. This is in recognition of a suspected under-reporting of cyber-crimes and links in with the PCC's commitment to increase awareness, confidence and reporting of traditionally under-reported issues.
- 2.14. The CPO delivers cyber-crime sessions with Dorset Council's Digital Champions. This is a group who assist older people with all things digital, from online shopping and banking to universal credit applications, to ensure relevant messaging can be passed on through their connections. Cyber security awareness sessions have been delivered in a local nursing home with a view to this being a regular occurrence.
- 2.15. The CPO also continues to work with Dorset Community Action (DCA), a charity that supports charities, voluntary groups and social enterprises across the Dorset community. Their mission is to bring people together to develop community based solutions that deliver better services for the benefit of all. Through this connection, Dorset Police have been able to arrange and deliver further cyber awareness sessions to specific groups including older members of the community. Additionally, the Dorset Police Cyber Protect Officer works alongside Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPTs) to ensure prevention messages are disseminated to older people.

Fraud

- 2.16. Dorset Police frequently keep members of the public updated on current scams both online and in person such as doorstep scammers. The Force has recently been publicising awareness of banking and courier fraud, as part of a national campaign in January 2020. Older people can be particularly susceptible to this type of crime.
- 2.17. This is an area for which the PCC had been particularly exercised, as he was the APCC lead on fraud from 2013 to 2017. This included sitting on the Action Fraud Communications Group and the Home Secretary's Fraud Taskforce. During that time, he was quite critical of Action Fraud, and spoke several times in national newspapers, asking for better victim services and more resources to be made available.

- 2.18. Since handing over this portfolio in 2017, he had not been as actively involved in this area. However, in recent months the PCC has been back in this space, alongside Rt Hon Sir Oliver Letwin MP (West Dorset) as they both feel that the service is in dire need of reform, not the least since the Times ran their undercover investigation³.
- 2.19. The PCC undertook a public consultation into Dorset residents experiences with Action Fraud, and found that over 70% of the 330 respondents who had contacted Action Fraud previously were unsatisfied with how their issue had been dealt with. As a result, the PCC took this matter direct to Commander Karen Baxter, the NPCC Coordinator for Economic Crime, whom he met in mid-January.

Tackling Rogue Traders and Distraction Crime

- 2.20. Rogue traders often take advantage of the most vulnerable adults in our communities. This has long term effects on that individual's health, confidence and independence. Rogue traders approach a property and typically offer house maintenance services in such a way as to manipulate and intimidate, with the result of extracting large sums of money.
- 2.21. In 2018, there were 569 reported incidents of doorstep crime and in 2019, 453 incidents were recorded. 67% of the ages recorded were people aged 65 and over. This issue requires a partnership response, and therefore officers from Trading Standards and local authorities accompany NPTs at events, providing residents with enhanced prevention advice. They encourage people to share the advice with other people in their lives who may be vulnerable to this type of crime.
- 2.22. Older people are disproportionately affected by doorstep criminals who commit distraction burglaries. In 2019 there were 17 distraction burglary crimes reported by the aged 65 and over age group compared to seven crimes reported by the under 65s. Dorset Police and Trading Standards provide information on current scams and information on how to stay safe via leaflets, community engagement and online via Dorset Alert, social media and their respective websites.
- 2.23. It is expected that the Dorset Police Bobby Van will have a positive impact in this area.

Engaging and communication with older people

- 2.24. As part of his wider consultation and engagement activity, the PCC has attended numerous events throughout this term of office, including PROBUS, Discussion Clubs, Neighbourhood Watch groups and U3A groups in order to both listen to the thoughts of our older communities and to give updates on the work of the OPCC. Those engagement opportunities allow the chance to identify gaps in services and information and, as a result, OPCC is able to identify opportunities for follow-up work by Dorset Police. Typically this involves referrals to the Cyber Protect Officer, the Rural Crime Team and/or the Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator.

3. COMMISSIONING

- 3.1. The PCC's commissioning activity in relation to supporting older people and associated initiatives is summarised below:

Victim Support

³ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/action-fraud-investigation-victims-misled-and-mocked-as-police-fail-to-investigate-wlh8c6rs6>

- 3.2. Victim support has been commissioned to provide victims of crime with emotional and practical support. Contact with victims can be over the telephone, in person at the victims' hub or via face-to-face visits. Victim Support ensure that victims of crime receive the information and support they need. This may be arranging a meeting to talk to them and receive emotional support in confidence, helping to fill out a compensation forms or get advice on how to make homes more secure, or refer on to other specialist organisations that can also help.
- 3.3. Victim Support has a range of specific products and materials for older victims of crime. They engage with, and provide information to, older victims at GP surgeries, local groups, local events and supermarkets to help raise awareness of the support available. Victim Support has also continued to explore other innovative ways to engage with older victims of crime, working with other organisations and charities to encourage a higher take up of emotional and practical support. For example, recently they used their social media presence to raise awareness of DA support services in rural areas. There was an accompanying slight increase in referrals from people aged over 70.

Bobby Van

- 3.4. The Bobby Van Scheme was launched on 23 January 2020 and will initially be providing a service to vulnerable people in BCP and East Dorset areas who have been a victim of crime, to improve the feeling of safety and reduce re-victimisation. Vulnerable victims of crime will come from the following groups: older people (aged 60 or over), victims of burglary, people with learning difficulties and registered disabled people aged 18 or over.
- 3.5. The service provides support to vulnerable people, offering safety and security advice, including practical support such as fitting locks, alarms, fixing doors and windows to ensure the property is secure. The service also refers vulnerable victims to appropriate support agencies for specialist support; such as online support, cyber-crime support and financial advice. The Bobby Van is staffed by one full time member of staff and one part time administrator who assists with the process and referrals.
- 3.6. As the service develops it is hoped that there may be the potential to increase the number of vans and geographical coverage of the service, and possibly to include focus on additional types of crime.

Scampaks

- 3.7. In past years, crime prevention partners have made use of Scampaks – which contain crime prevention information, as well as items such as credit card RFID blockers and door stickers. The OPCC has commissioned the Prama Foundation to purchase 750 Scampaks and distribute them amongst the vulnerable older people with whom they work.

Early Intervention Service

- 3.8. The Early Intervention Service (formally known as the Adult Return Home Interviews initiative) has been funded for one year by the PCC to support adults who return home after going missing. Evidence suggests that some of these will be older people who have mental health needs and/or other vulnerabilities.

4. FURTHER WORK

- 4.1 The OPCC and the Force will continue to work with partners to develop a greater understanding of the impact of crimes against older people in Dorset.
- 4.2 The OPCC will continue to work closely with Victim Support to encourage older victims to take up the range of free services that Victim Support can offer victims of crime. Also the

OPCC and the Force will explore improving links with existing and new practices by other partners – for example, many GPs hold regular safeguarding case meetings.

- 4.3 Further analytical work by the Force to identify the numbers of older people who are victims of crime, their vulnerabilities (if any), the impact of the crimes, and the method and type of support offered will be considered. The resulting insight could then link with the Community Safety Partnerships around methods and types of support available.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the report.

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