HMICFRS

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

PEEL 2021/22

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Hertfordshire Constabulary

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Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how good Hertfordshire Constabulary is in nine areas of policing. We make graded judgments in eight of these nine as follows:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Preventing crime	Investigating crime	Responding to the public	
	Treatment of the public	Protecting vulnerable people		
		Managing offenders		
		Developing a positive workplace		
		Good use of resources		

We also inspected how effective a service Hertfordshire Constabulary gives to victims of crime. We don't make a graded judgment in this overall area.

We set out our detailed findings about things the force is doing well and where the force should improve in the rest of this report.

Data in this report

For more information, please view this report on our website and select the 'About the data' section.

Important changes to PEEL

In 2014, we introduced our police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections, which assess the performance of all 43 police forces in England and Wales. Since then, we have been continuously adapting our approach and during the past year we have seen the most significant changes yet.

We now use a more intelligence-led, continual assessment approach, rather than the annual PEEL inspections we used in previous years. For instance, we have integrated our rolling crime data integrity inspections into these PEEL assessments. Our PEEL victim service assessment also includes a crime data integrity element in at least every other assessment. We have also changed our approach to graded judgments. We now assess forces against the characteristics of good performance, set out in the PEEL Assessment Framework 2021/22, and we more clearly link our judgments to causes of concern and areas for improvement. We have also expanded our previous four-tier system of judgments to five tiers. As a result, we can state more precisely where we consider improvement is needed and highlight more effectively the best ways of doing things.

However, these changes mean that it isn't possible to make direct comparisons between the grades awarded in this round of PEEL inspections with those from previous years. A reduction in grade, particularly from good to adequate, doesn't necessarily mean that there has been a reduction in performance, unless we say so in the report.

HM Inspector's observations

I am pleased with the performance of Hertfordshire Constabulary in keeping people safe and reducing crime, although it needs to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service.

These are the findings I consider most important from our assessments of the constabulary over the last year.

The constabulary has invested in cultural change through the Prevention First programme, which has had positive initial results

The constabulary has carried out an impressive and well-resourced cultural change project called Prevention First. We heard significant praise from officers and staff regarding this initiative, who said they could put what they had learned into practice.

While there is still work to be done, it is clear that Prevention First is promoting positive cultural change in the constabulary. The programme is resourced sufficiently, meaning that this change can be sustained in the long term.

The constabulary has an effective strategic planning framework to make sure it tackles issues that are important locally and nationally

The constabulary has effective operational planning processes. Force priorities, such as vulnerability and serious and organised crime, are addressed by staff throughout the constabulary – from those in senior leadership positions to frontline officers.

We saw evidence of the constabulary understanding local concerns, supported by an effective relationship with the police and crime commissioner (PCC). The public can be assured that the constabulary's plans and priorities address what matters to them at local and national levels.

There were some aspects of the process that were still being developed. For example, training on how to manage budgets has been limited. And not all officers and staff that we spoke to felt meaningfully involved in the operational planning process. But the constabulary is aware of these opportunities to develop its approach and is addressing these issues.

The constabulary should improve the time it takes to attend calls for service

As part of our victim service assessment, we found that the constabulary wasn't always responding to calls for service made to its control room within the required time frame.

If the constabulary doesn't attend incidents in time, this can cause victims to lose confidence in it, or, in more serious cases, they may be put directly at risk. This is an area for improvement.

The constabulary should improve how it identifies vulnerable and repeat victims

We found that the constabulary wasn't routinely identifying vulnerable or repeat victims at the first point of contact. We also found that it wasn't always conducting victims needs assessments to identify whether additional support is required. This is an area for improvement.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Constabulary

Reducing crime assessment

We have identified seven themes underpinning a force or constabulary's ability to reduce crime effectively which, taken together, allow an assessment of the extent to which the constabulary is doing all it can to reduce crime. This is a narrative assessment, as police-recorded crime figures can be affected by variations and changes in recording policy and practice, making it difficult to make comparisons over time.

Hertfordshire Constabulary effectively engages with communities using its 'echo' platform and identifies the issues that matter in local areas. The constabulary analyses crime hotspots and works effectively with other organisations to tackle criminal offences and antisocial behaviour. We also saw good evidence of the constabulary supporting children and young people and diverting them from criminal activity.

Other factors contributing to the constabulary's ability to reduce crime are:

- The constabulary has increased its use of ancillary orders targeting antisocial behaviour.
- The constabulary has effective integrated offender management teams, which work with offenders who are at high risk of reoffending.
- The constabulary proactively monitors preventative orders, such as serious crime prevention orders, and makes sure they are complied with.
- The constabulary makes sure its safer neighbourhood teams can dedicate their time to solving problems and working and interacting with local communities.

I am pleased that the constabulary is addressing the right areas of policing to reduce crime. But the following areas may negatively affect the constabulary's ability to reduce crime:

- The constabulary isn't always answering or responding to calls from the public quickly and effectively.
- The constabulary doesn't always identify repeat victims at the first point of contact.
- The constabulary doesn't always apply for protective orders to prevent victims from being subject to further offences.
- The constabulary doesn't routinely evaluate problem-solving activity or share the results of evaluation widely.

Providing a service to the victims of crime

Victim service assessment

This section describes our assessment of the service victims receive from Hertfordshire Constabulary, from the point of reporting a crime through to the end result. As part of this assessment, we reviewed 90 case files.

When the police close a case of a reported crime, it will be assigned what is referred to as an 'outcome type'. This describes the reason for closing it.

We also reviewed 20 cases where the following outcome types were used:

- A suspect was identified, and the victim supported police action, but evidential difficulties prevented further action (outcome 15).
- A suspect was identified, but there were evidential difficulties, and the victim didn't support or withdrew their support for police action (outcome 16).
- A suspect was identified, but the time limit for prosecution had expired (outcome 17).

While this assessment is ungraded, it influences graded judgments in the other areas we have inspected.

The constabulary needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls and how consistently it identifies repeat and vulnerable victims

When a victim contacts the police, it is important that their call is answered quickly and that the right information is recorded accurately on police systems. The caller should be spoken to in a professional manner. The information should be assessed, taking into consideration threat, harm, risk and vulnerability. The victim should also receive appropriate safeguarding advice.

The constabulary needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls. When calls are answered, call handlers don't always assess the victim's vulnerability using a structured process. They also don't always identify repeat victims, which means this information isn't taken into account when the constabulary is considering the response the victim should receive. Call handlers don't always give victims advice on crime prevention and on how to preserve evidence.

In many cases, the constabulary doesn't respond promptly to calls for service

A constabulary should aim to attend incidents within the timescales it has set, which are determined on the basis of the level of prioritisation given to the call. It should change call priority only if the original prioritisation is deemed inappropriate or if further information suggests a change is needed. The constabulary's response should take into consideration risk and victim vulnerability, including any information obtained after the call.

We found that the constabulary doesn't always attend incidents within set timescales. It doesn't always inform victims about delays, so their expectations aren't always met. This may cause victims to lose confidence in the police and withdraw from any investigation.

The constabulary makes sure that investigations are allocated to staff with suitable levels of experience

All forces and constabularies should have a policy to make sure investigations are allocated to suitably trained officers or staff. The policy should also establish the circumstances when a crime isn't to be investigated further, which should be applied consistently to all cases. The victim of the crime should be kept informed of who is dealing with their case. They should also be fully informed of the decision to close the investigation.

We found the constabulary allocated crimes for investigation according to its policy. In nearly all cases, it allocated the crime to the most appropriate department for further investigation.

The constabulary isn't always carrying out thorough and prompt investigations

Police forces and constabularies should investigate reported crimes quickly, proportionately and thoroughly. Victims should be kept updated about the investigation, and forces and constabularies should have effective governance arrangements in place to make sure investigation standards are high.

We found that, in some cases, the constabulary didn't carry out investigations as quickly as it could, and relevant lines of inquiry weren't always completed. Investigations weren't always supervised, and victims weren't always updated throughout. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when they receive regular updates.

When a victim withdrew support for an investigation, the constabulary didn't always consider progressing the case without the victim's support. This can be an important method of safeguarding the victim and preventing further offences from being committed. In most cases, the constabulary didn't record whether it considers using orders designed to protect victims, such as a domestic violence protection notice or order.

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime requires forces and constabularies to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage of any investigation to determine whether a victim needs additional support. The constabulary didn't always carry out these assessments or in some cases, weren't recording them in enough detail. Also, in most cases, the constabulary didn't take victim personal statements, which give victims the opportunity to describe how crime has affected their lives.

The constabulary often assigns the right outcome type and usually considers victims' wishes and offenders' backgrounds, but it doesn't always keep auditable records of victims' wishes

The constabulary should make sure it follows national guidance and rules for deciding the outcome type it will assign to each report of crime. In deciding the outcome type, the constabulary should consider the nature of the crime, the offender and the victim. These decisions should be supported and overseen by leaders throughout the constabulary.

When a suspect has been identified and the victim supports police action, but evidential difficulties prevent further action, the victim should be informed of the decision to close the investigation. The constabulary used this outcome correctly on most occasions, but officers didn't always inform victims of the decision to take no further action and to close the investigation.

When a suspect has been identified but the victim doesn't support or withdraws their support for police action, the constabulary should keep an auditable record from the victim, confirming their decision. This allows the investigation to be closed. But in some of the cases we reviewed, there was no evidence of the victim's decision. This means there is a risk that the victim's wishes may not be fully represented and considered by officers before the investigation is closed.

A crime that can only be prosecuted at a magistrates' court must have its prosecution commence within six months of the offence being committed. A crime can be closed if a suspect has been identified but the time limit has expired. We found the constabulary used this outcome incorrectly on some occasions.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Good

Hertfordshire Constabulary is good at treating people fairly and with respect.

Innovative practice

The constabulary uses the echo customer feedback platform to effectively engage with the communities of Hertfordshire

The constabulary uses a customer feedback platform called echo. The public can use a link to access a webpage or receive a text from the constabulary which prompts them to submit feedback. This platform is used by the constabulary to assess how well its service has been received, but it has also used it in more innovative ways.

The constabulary uses echo to encourage the public to submit concerns about their local area. It can then use echo to evaluate the success of its efforts to reduce these concerns.

For example, following a violent crime in Hoddesdon, the constabulary and local authority used the platform to establish that residents felt unsafe. The constabulary increased patrols while the council repaired broken street lighting. It then used echo to gather feedback and found that the residents' feelings of safety had increased. The constabulary has also been awarded funding to tackle antisocial behaviour based on information gained via echo.

The constabulary is also using echo to get feedback on stop and search encounters. After a stop and search encounter, the searched person is given a link to a survey, which they can complete. The survey questions were written by community members who are on an external stop and search scrutiny panel. The constabulary has only recently begun this process but has had approximately a 10 percent return rate. The responses brought the constabulary's attention to two issues that it then escalated for further action.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to treating people fairly and with respect.

The constabulary effectively monitors officers' use of force and use of stop and search

The constabulary monitors how officers carry out stop and search encounters and how they use force. Sergeants must check five stop and search records and five use of force records from each team every month. This includes reviewing officers' body-worn video footage. The reviews are submitted to the police powers board, where they are analysed. Inspectors also dip sample the sergeants' reviews to make sure they are of good enough quality.

The police powers board, which meets every two months, uses the data to consider disproportionality (the possibility that people with certain personal characteristics, such as their race or a disability, may be more frequently subjected to the use of police powers) and to identify officers that use these powers most often and any locations where they are frequently used. It develops insights into, for example, where more training may be needed or where greater community outreach may need to take place.

We saw positive examples of officers receiving feedback on their use of police powers. We also saw examples of the constabulary identifying the officers who use stop and search and use of force powers most often and scrutinising their use of these powers to make sure that they are acting fairly and appropriately.

The police powers board also identifies more general opportunities for improvement. One example we saw was the use of ethnicity prompt cards. The constabulary found that officers weren't always recording the self-defined ethnicity of the people they stopped. In April 2022, the constabulary issued reminder cards to officers to encourage them to do this. At the time of the cards being issued, the completion rate of the self-defined ethnicity field was 84 percent. By September 2022, it had risen to 90 percent.

In April 2022, during our inspection of Hertfordshire custody suites, we found that the constabulary wasn't reporting use of force incidents that took place in custody to the police powers board. This removed a level of oversight from these incidents. This has since changed, and both the internal and external scrutiny panels for use of force now see cases from custody.

The constabulary has effective independent panels that scrutinise the constabulary's use of stop and search and use of force

The constabulary and the PCC hold two external scrutiny panels – one for stop and search and the other for use of force. The panels are made up of volunteers from the community with an independent chair. A range of stop and search encounters and use of force incidents are reviewed by the two panels. The panels have access to officers' body-worn video footage and any relevant records about the incidents. Attendees grade the appropriateness of each encounter and decide whether they were in line with the constabulary's policy.

The constabulary makes sure the outcomes from these panels have a clear benefit for officers. It shares the results from the stop and search panel with the officers whose encounters are scrutinised. Where it identifies officers who could improve their stop and search practice, it invites them to attend the scrutiny panel. Officers we spoke to who had been involved in the process were positive about the experience, even if they had been a bit anxious about attending the panel.

Training about police powers and procedures is given to members of the scrutiny panels, with regular refresher training made available. The chair of the scrutiny panels also attends the internal police powers board to make sure any learning is shared.

At the start of our inspection, the constabulary was examining the diversity of the panel participants. This has been effectively managed by the PCC, which commissioned an external review of the panels, along with an accompanying communication and recruitment plan.

The minutes of both the use of force and stop and search panels are published on the constabulary's website. The panel also publishes an annual report of its findings.

The constabulary doesn't always record the grounds for stop and search encounters effectively

During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 177 stop and search records from 1 January to 31 December 2021. On the basis of this sample, we estimate that 80.8 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 5.7 percent) of all stop and searches by the constabulary during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. This has slightly reduced compared with the findings from our previous review of records from 2019, where we found 86.9 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 5 percent) of stop and searches had reasonable grounds recorded. Of the records we reviewed for stop and searches on people from ethnic minorities, 29 of 41 had reasonable grounds recorded.

Our audit only measures the quality of the grounds as they are recorded on the stop and search form, not whether the grounds themselves were reasonable at the time of the encounter.

The constabulary has already examined this issue in its internal monitoring of stop and search. The measures it took included examining the stops of the 20 officers who recorded the most stops. These efforts identified issues around stop and search that suggest the problem is poor recording rather than poor practice.

For example, the constabulary found that officers weren't recording all the information about a person or location which contributed to a decision to stop and search. Or they were recording that a person matched a description but didn't state what that description was. In another case, the smell of cannabis was listed as the only reason to stop and search.

These findings are supported by the external stop and search scrutiny panel's annual report. In the year ending 31 March 2021, the panel examined 4.5 percent of the constabulary's stop and search records (337 out of a possible 7,461). The 2021 report noted that the panel was happy with 66 percent of the examined records. The overwhelming reason for a lack of confidence was the recording of grounds (the reason for stopping and searching) rather than the actions of the officers. This has been addressed by the most recent training given to officers.

At the time of this inspection, the constabulary had already refreshed its forthcoming round of stop and search training to address the recording of reasonable grounds. This should contribute to an improvement in this important measure of performance.

The constabulary analyses disproportionality in stop and search and makes the results available to the public

The constabulary regularly examines disproportionality at both its external and internal scrutiny panels. The external panel notes and discusses any perceived disproportionality in an encounter and receives data which highlights trends that have become apparent since the last panel.

The constabulary considers disproportionality at its internal scrutiny panel as well. The police powers board has carried out extensive analyses (which it calls deep dives) in specific areas. The constabulary carried out a deep dive in St Albans. It told us that between 1 April 2021 and 31 December 2021, the area had the highest level of disproportionality in the county: Black people were 9.6 times as likely to be stopped than White people.

The deep dive noted that many of the stops came from an ongoing operation that was tackling offending in local parks. Disproportionality was also higher among people travelling into the county compared to local residents.

Importantly, the constabulary makes the results of all of its deep dives available to the public online.

The PCC is also commissioning research to compare its stop and search data to the latest census data to better understand disproportionality.

The constabulary gives training to frontline officers on stop and search, use of force and effective communication skills

The constabulary provides a range of training on stop and search and use of force to its frontline staff. This includes but isn't limited to:

- sessions in probationer officer training;
- annual recertification of officers' defensive skills training;
- annual recertification of specialist skills, such as taser use;
- inputs on stop and search included in training days for intervention and safer neighbourhood officers;
- workshops and roadshows conducted by stop and search tactical advisers;
- targeted sessions for teams or officers identified as needing extra training through internal monitoring or external scrutiny of stop and search;
- one-to-one sessions with sergeants covering powers, procedures and a dip sample of their own auditing of stop and search encounters; and
- video resources covering key issues around stop and search, made available to all officers.

Interpersonal communication skills, including conflict management, consideration of unconscious bias and how to de-escalate situations, are included in several of these training sessions. Officers we spoke to told us that training encouraged them to consider how they approach stop and search encounters or incidents that result in the use of force.

We also found that the constabulary's internal and external monitoring of stop and search and use of force considered officers' communication skills. We saw evidence of the police powers board considering how effective officers' communication was during encounters with the public. We also saw that the constabulary's auditing of body-worn video use showed whether their communication skills contributed to positive encounters.

The constabulary could extend the range of communication skills considered in training by including practical guidance on subjects such as trauma-informed responses.

The constabulary interacts with communities through its network of community advisers but could make more consistent use of them

The constabulary has rebranded its key individual networks (KINs) as community advisers. KINs are made up of volunteers who consult with the constabulary on matters that might affect the communities they represent. KINs should represent a range of identities across the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010. The constabulary can use that diversity of opinion to make sure approaches to those communities, and responses to incidents that affect them, are appropriate and effective.

The constabulary found it was often only contacting KINs in response to incidents that had already occurred. As such, the networks weren't routinely updated and might include people no longer suitable to represent their community or who might no longer be motivated to help. The constabulary addressed this by refreshing the KINs, removing those people who were no longer appropriate and recruiting new people.

The constabulary contacts its community advisers at least once per quarter, rather than only in response to an incident. This is an opportunity for the community adviser to raise any issues. This contact is primarily managed by the constabulary's central hate crime team and is monitored by a database that alerts the team if a quarterly contact is missed.

We saw good examples of the positive relationships created by this renewed approach, including praise from members of the community when, in September 2022, the constabulary reached out to its community advisers following the serious disorder in Leicestershire. It did this to check for any similar tensions in Hertfordshire.

We also saw some evidence of safer neighbourhood teams using community advisers. But this wasn't consistent, with some teams being more aware than others of the community advisers in their areas. The hate crime team that takes responsibility for the community adviser network has clearly been effective, but safer neighbourhood teams would also benefit from knowing who they might approach for advice or assistance in their areas.

Preventing crime and antisocial behaviour

Good

Hertfordshire Constabulary is good at prevention and deterrence.

Area for improvement

The constabulary should make sure that problem-solving plans are routinely assessed and evaluated and that learning is made available to staff

We found that the constabulary effectively identifies problems and develops problem-solving plans to tackle them. It also discusses problem-solving plans with other organisations in the Hertfordshire County Council-led SafetyNet+ partnership group.

But we found that the officers and staff managing or supervising the problem solving plans carry out only limited evaluations of them and aren't always aware of how they can learn from successful problem-solving plans used in the past.

The constabulary must better evaluate its problem-solving activities and make sure staff are aware of what works.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to prevention and deterrence.

The constabulary provides neighbourhood policing teams with analytical tools to help identify problem-solving opportunities

The constabulary has invested in software to produce analytical tools for safer neighbourhood teams. This has resulted in several IT dashboards (digital user interfaces) being made available to safer neighbourhood teams. These cover a range of crime and incident types and allow officers to quickly understand the data in their local area.

For example, the antisocial behaviour dashboard identifies the range of antisocial behaviour incidents by location, time and type of incident. Maps of hotspot areas and peak times for antisocial behaviour are then automatically produced. This data is frequently updated to give an accurate snapshot of the issue in question.

We saw good examples of officers accessing these dashboards to identify high-harm areas and to find ways to carry out targeted problem solving. The data also allows the constabulary to send its patrols to the areas in greatest need of police support. The constabulary's strategic hub has conducted an analysis of local areas to identify which would benefit most from hotspot policing.

The dashboards don't list everything that officers might need to know about their area. For example, they don't effectively display information about individuals such as registered sex offenders that live in an area. Nor do they easily display more complicated requirements, such as the constabulary's expectation that officers find and collect intelligence in their local area. But more traditional briefing materials provide this information.

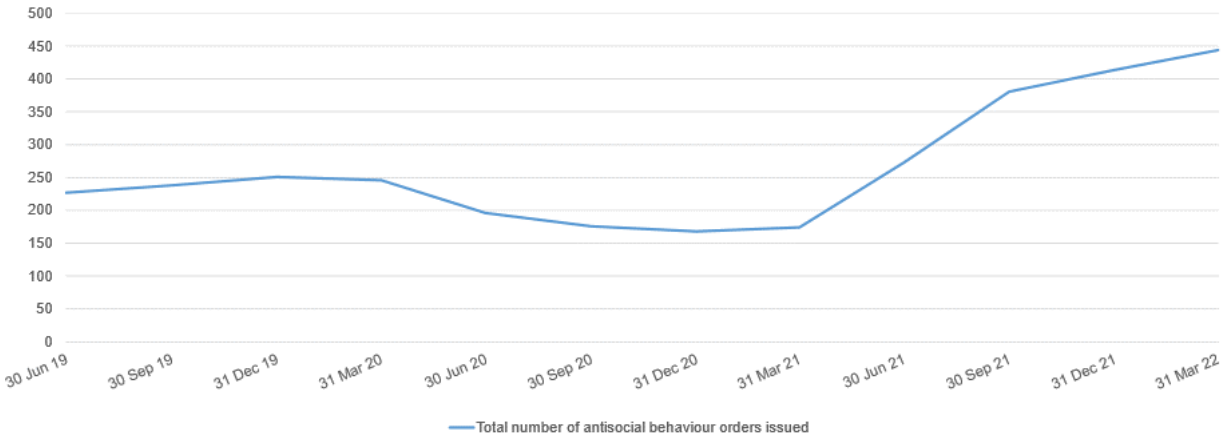
The constabulary works effectively with other organisations to solve problems in the community, supported by an increased use of ancillary orders

The constabulary works in partnership with several organisations, such as the local authority, housing agencies and social care, to tackle problems in the community. This work takes place in a variety of meetings, such as antisocial behaviour action groups or community multi-agency risk assessment conferences, depending on the area in question. We saw good evidence of partnership-working to identify and solve problems.

The constabulary supports its problem-solving activity by targeting antisocial behaviour with an increased use of ancillary orders, such as criminal behaviour orders, community protection notices, civil injunctions and dispersal powers. In the year ending 31 March 2021, the constabulary issued 174 of these orders. For the year ending 31 March 2022, this increased to 444.

One example of the use of ancillary orders we saw concerned the police response to a community dispute involving several residents. The dispute led to increased reports of crime and antisocial behaviour. The constabulary used its data to analyse the key times and locations of these reports and adjusted police foot patrols around them. The constabulary worked with housing associations to serve injunctions on the most disruptive people. It then provided community mediation so issues could be heard and resolved.

Antisocial behaviour ancillary powers (criminal behaviour orders, community protection notices, civil injunctions and dispersal powers) issued by Hertfordshire Constabulary between the year ending 30 June 2019 and the year ending 31 March 2022



But we also saw good examples of the constabulary prioritising support over enforcement. For example, when dealing with antisocial behaviour by a person in a block of flats, the constabulary identified that one of the triggers for this person's behaviour was the lights from passing vehicles shining into their room at night. The constabulary worked with the housing association to move the person into a flat that didn't face the road.

The constabulary is investing in early intervention for children and young people

We saw positive examples of the constabulary working with children and young people to divert them away from offending behaviours. For example, it has a team of youth and violent crime officers which works with schools in Watford and Bushy to provide early intervention. This includes providing educational sessions and arranging sporting events to connect with children and young people. The constabulary is also recruiting police community support officers for schools around the county.

The constabulary also runs a work experience programme with the county council for children identified as being at risk of offending. The programme attendees take part in investigating a staged diamond heist. The attendees are invited to a family barbecue at police headquarters and are also offered a ride along (where they join officers on shift in a police car) when they turn 16.

In East Hertfordshire, a small team of officers and police community support officers identifies young people who are at risk of becoming involved in crime. It uses data from partner organisations and officer referrals to identify these young people, before reaching out to them and their families. The constabulary holds strategy meetings with partner organisations to co-ordinate the approach and make sure the young people are referred for support and positive activities.

In May 2022, during our inspection of Hertfordshire custody suites, we saw an officer from the gangs and schools team approach two children in custody. The team visits all children in custody for offences related to weapons, drugs or drug-related allegations. It works with schools and local authorities to prevent further offending and provides ways for the children to become involved in sports, clubs and education. There have even been times when the team has helped relocate families from areas where a child is under pressure to join a gang.

Despite the team's good work, we found that the constabulary doesn't always evaluate these activities to see how successful they are. We will continue to examine this commitment to early intervention in future inspections.

The constabulary supports the development of its neighbourhood policing teams and makes sure they can focus on their core duties

Safer neighbourhood teams are at their most effective when they can dedicate time to their core duties of engaging with the public and problem solving. Early in our inspection, we were told by neighbourhood officers that they were routinely diverted from these core duties (which is called being abstracted) to attend emergency incidents.

The constabulary responded to the officers' concerns effectively. It tracked its levels of abstraction for two months, assessing the number of hours officers were abstracted and what activities they were abstracted to.

In July 2022, the constabulary introduced a clear abstraction policy. It restricts how often neighbourhood officers can be used for other activities. This was prompted in part by staff surveys and feedback from safer neighbourhood officers highlighting how often they were abstracted.

The success of this policy was confirmed in our discussions with safer neighbourhood officers, who reported greater satisfaction at work and said they could dedicate time to neighbourhood policing. It was also confirmed by the constabulary's own analysis, which showed the average crime workload of a safer neighbourhood officer had decreased and the number of problem-solving plans on the constabulary's case management system SafetyNet+ had increased.

Limiting abstraction makes sure neighbourhood teams can use the six-weekly training days built into the neighbourhood policing shift pattern. We found examples of positive use of this continuing professional development although on some occasions, meaningful training hadn't been given to all staff.

There is limited use of problem-solving methodology outside safer neighbourhood teams, but the constabulary is developing a positive culture around prevention

We saw limited evidence of a problem-solving methodology being used outside safer neighbourhood teams. For example, the missing person team works with a local charity to interview missing children who have returned home to establish options for early intervention. We saw good practice, such as the team developing clear guidelines for how staff should deal with missing children from care homes or missing persons from hospitals and training them in how to do this. But these efforts didn't follow a specific problem-solving model. Nor did the team record them for use in future problem-solving plans.

But the constabulary has invested in an impressive programme to develop the constabulary-wide approach to problem solving and prevention. The programme is called Prevention First. It is an ambitious and well-resourced initiative. It is designed to encourage greater attention to problem solving and early intervention across the whole workforce in tackling crime and harm. The constabulary has trained all of its frontline supervisors in this programme. We found considerable enthusiasm in the workforce for making positive changes and preventing crime before it happens.

At the time of our inspection, the training had only recently finished, and we saw limited evidence of officers using this new approach to prevent crime. But we did find officers and staff considering prevention more widely and submitting proposals for increasing efficiency and developing the workforce. While these proposals aren't in the form of a specific problem-solving methodology, they are clearly enhancing the constabulary's approach to problem solving more generally.

The constabulary now has a Prevention First prompt on its computer system for officers to consider actions that might prevent further incidents. This prompt – in the form of a tick box – must be acknowledged before an incident or crime report can be submitted for closure. But, again, at the time of our inspection, we saw limited evidence of clear outcomes from this.

The constabulary is investing in a prevention hub, which will advise officers on problem solving and encourage better evaluation and recording. We will monitor the outcome of this work in our future inspections.

The constabulary is making sure neighbourhood policing is consistent across all of its community safety partnerships

The constabulary has a neighbourhood policing strategy, which outlines the core objectives for safer neighbourhood teams. The constabulary is divided into ten community safety partnerships (CSPs). Each CSP is responsible for a different geographical area. The issues each CSP concentrates on vary, as each area is different in terms of population, demographics and levels of crime and antisocial behaviour. We found that officers across all areas understand the role of neighbourhood policing in protecting people and preventing crime via problem solving and reaching out to communities.

But the way the key aspects of the neighbourhood policing strategy are overseen in each local area differs. For example, we found the use of community advisers varies considerably and that officers differ in how they use SafetyNet+ to record problem solving. Officers we spoke to sometimes weren't as aware of the requirement to collect intelligence as colleagues in other areas. And the constabulary has only very recently been able to measure how many submissions of intelligence come from neighbourhood teams.

But we also found some consistency. Most of the officers we spoke to had good awareness of registered sex offenders in their area, and most were positive about working in communities. We found that neighbourhood officers were routinely allocated crime investigations suitable for their role.

We saw good examples of very thorough and effective tasking meetings held at CSP level, but local oversight and governance varied across the constabulary. The constabulary was aware of this issue prior to our inspection and has been developing action plans for each CSP to promote consistency. The constabulary has also examined the tasking process for each CSP to identify examples of good practice.

Responding to the public

Requires improvement

Hertfordshire Constabulary requires improvement at responding to the public.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should attend incidents within its published time frames based on the prioritisation given to the call. Where there are delays, it should make sure the reasons are recorded and victims are updated

As part of our victim service assessment, we found that in 51 of 57 cases we reviewed the constabulary graded calls for service to the correct grade. But in 24 of 52 cases we reviewed, it didn't respond to calls within its required time frames.

Failure to attend incidents in time can cause victims to lose confidence in the constabulary and withdraw from any investigation. Victims may be put at risk and evidence may be lost.

The constabulary should make sure that repeat and vulnerable callers are routinely identified

The constabulary isn't routinely identifying repeat or vulnerable callers. We found that checks were made to see if a caller was a repeat victim in 28 of 60 cases we reviewed and that checks were made to see if the caller was vulnerable in 29 of 58 cases.

The constabulary does have secondary teams that quality assure incidents and which might identify repeat victimisation and vulnerability later on. But by not identifying repeat or vulnerable victims consistently at the first point of contact, the constabulary can't make sure the victim receives the most appropriate response. It is missing out on opportunities to understand and reduce vulnerability and repeat victimisation.

The constabulary needs to make sure that call takers give appropriate advice on crime prevention and the preservation of evidence

The constabulary doesn't routinely give advice to callers regarding preserving evidence or the prevention of crime. We found that crime prevention advice had been given to callers in 18 of the 31 appropriate cases we reviewed. Advice on preserving evidence was given in 9 of the 26 appropriate cases we reviewed.

This means that the constabulary is missing opportunities to preserve evidence that would greatly help investigations. This is exacerbated by the constabulary not routinely attending incidents on time, increasing the amount of time in which evidence could be lost. It also means that the constabulary is missing opportunities to reduce repeat victimisation at the point of call.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force responds to the public.

The constabulary is under-resourced in the force control room but has managed this effectively through short-term postings and longer-term recruitment and retention activity

The constabulary has had problems recruiting and retaining staff in the force control room. The constabulary attributes some of this to the high cost of living in the county. When a gap in staffing appears, it can be difficult to fill due to the long recruitment process, with more delays caused by vetting and training.

The constabulary addressed this in early 2022 by:

- revising its recruitment campaign;
- cancelling non-mandatory training;
- encouraging skilled officers and staff from across the constabulary to temporarily relocate to the force control room; and
- increasing the intake size of new starters.

In May 2022, the constabulary told us there were approximately 70 vacant posts in the force control room. The constabulary set up a gold group where senior officers work together to solve a problem. The constabulary worked with the human resources unit (which is shared with Bedfordshire Police and Cambridgeshire Constabulary as part of a tri-force collaboration) to speed up recruitment processes. It worked with the collaborated vetting unit to prioritise force control room staff where appropriate.

These efforts have resulted in improvements to the vacancy rate. By September 2022, the constabulary told us that the number had reduced to approximately 40 vacancies. It forecasts that all posts will be filled by February 2023.

The constabulary also introduced operations to support the force control room, allowing officers to work overtime, redeploying officers on restricted duties and reallocating groups of 25 officers for 5 weeks at a time to answer calls. The groups of officers answering calls volunteered for the role and were given support as well as a one-off payment.

The constabulary generally understands the demand on resources from 999 and 101 calls

The constabulary monitors how many 999 or 101 calls are waiting to be answered, as well as the longest waiting time for either line, through a dashboard in the force control room. Supervisors have easy access to live information that allows them to direct their resources to the line with the greatest need. This data also allows forward planning around busy periods, so supervisors can increase staff numbers ahead of busy periods.

There are some gaps in the constabulary's full understanding of demand. Calls that don't result in an incident record being created, such as requests from the public for advice or some requests from other organisations, may not be reflected in performance data. And the constabulary doesn't record the same level of caller information for 101 calls as it does for 999 calls.

We also reviewed the constabulary's grading and appointment system. We saw no evidence of incoming calls being inappropriately diverted to disguise the level of incoming demand. Nor did we find calls being inappropriately resolved in the force control room to avoid sending officers to attend an incident.

We did find an issue regarding the use of the appointment system, where some incidents would have been better allocated to specialist officers rather than intervention officers. The constabulary has introduced improvements to how it identifies threat, harm and risk in these specific calls. These deployments will now be checked by a supervisor and prioritised for specialist officers to attend.

The constabulary is improving how long it takes to answer 999 calls

On 31 May 2022, the Home Office published data on 999 call answering times. Call answering time is the time taken for a call to be transferred to a force and the time taken by that force to answer it. In England and Wales, forces should aim to answer 90 percent of these calls within 10 seconds. We have used this data to assess how quickly forces answer 999 calls. We note, though, that this data has only been published recently. As such, we recognise that forces may need time to consider any differences between their own data and the data published by the Home Office.

According to this data, the constabulary hasn't always been able to answer 999 calls promptly. Between 1 November 2021 and 30 June 2022, the constabulary answered 71.8 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds, which is below the target of 90 percent in 10 seconds.

But we note that data released during our inspection shows an improvement in August 2022. The improvement in call answering may be a result of the increased recruitment into the force control room.

Abandonment, when callers hang up before the call is answered, is still low. The constabulary told us that abandonment of 999 calls is at about 1 percent and changes on a daily basis.

The constabulary surveys callers to assess the quality of service that is offered

The constabulary's customer feedback platform, echo, is used in the force control room to get feedback on the quality of the service callers receive. Callers are asked to score the constabulary between one (the lowest score) and five (the highest score) on:

- how satisfied they were with the time taken to answer their call;
- how well their problem was addressed;
- how satisfied they were with the service given by the call handler; and
- the overall service.

There is also a space for callers to add any comments.

The constabulary sets a minimum threshold of four out of five for the service it provides. Since September 2019, a total of 60,566 items of caller feedback have been gathered. This is approximately 22 percent of all callers, and the constabulary consistently scores between four and five out of five.

The constabulary is investing in its frontline supervisors

The constabulary makes several training opportunities available to its frontline supervisors, who are responsible for managing the teams that first attend incidents. The Prevention First programme provides training for all frontline supervisors on leadership skills and the Prevention First ethos. Supervisors we spoke to were very positive about the quality of this training. The constabulary also approached participants and surveyed them on the quality of the course. Thirty-one percent of participants replied, with 71 percent of those who responded saying they felt they were better leaders because of the training.

The constabulary also makes training on managing welfare, leadership and key policies and procedures available to sergeants. But it doesn't just limit training to substantive sergeants – versions of the sergeant's course are available to those temporarily in post. We did find some isolated examples of this training not reaching

some officers, but the constabulary is clearly committed to making sure all supervisors are given continuing professional development.

The constabulary doesn't currently have a dedicated digital desk to monitor webchat and social media messaging

The constabulary has a webchat function for the public to make contact and report incidents and crimes. This is monitored by call handlers in the force control room, who are also answering 999 and 101 calls, with 999 calls being the priority. But the constabulary doesn't have a dedicated digital desk. This means there isn't a member of staff dedicated only to answering webchat enquiries or monitoring social media replies.

The constabulary's corporate communications team does monitor social media replies, but it only works during office hours. It also isn't a suitable first point of contact, as team members aren't trained to understand the risks that might be communicated in social media responses.

The constabulary plans to introduce a dedicated digital desk in 2023.

Investigating crime

Adequate

Hertfordshire Constabulary is adequate at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should set investigation plans where needed, with supervisory oversight to make sure that all investigative opportunities are taken

The constabulary doesn't supervise investigations effectively and doesn't consistently set initial investigation plans. We found that where it was appropriate for investigation plans to be created, this was done in 35 of 63 cases we reviewed. We found that where it was appropriate for supervisors to give advice and direction to the investigation, this took place in 49 of 79 cases we reviewed.

The constabulary should make sure that investigation plans are created where appropriate. Supervising officers should be involved in developing these plans and in outlining the objective of each investigation.

We also found that, in cases where delays in investigations resulted in statutory time limits being exceeded, supervisors didn't always identify and lessen these delays well enough. The constabulary should make sure that supervisory involvement in investigations is consistently applied and carried out to recognised standards.

The constabulary needs to make sure that victim needs assessments are routinely completed and recorded

We found that victim needs assessments weren't completed in 40 of 63 cases we examined.

We did note that, due to how the constabulary currently records assessments, they might be carried out but not be recorded in full on crime reports. But this doesn't resolve the issue. Victim needs assessments should be recorded effectively so the effect of the crime on the victim is understood and is available during the full scope of an investigation.

Victim needs assessments determine whether a victim needs support, such as a referral to a victim support service, whether the victim is vulnerable or intimidated and whether they are eligible for enhanced rights, including special measures at court.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force investigates crime.

The constabulary understands its investigative demand and allocates resources according to the control strategy

The constabulary includes the workloads of its investigative teams in its integrated performance framework. This framework is the range of outcomes, such as crime outcomes, that the constabulary measures to determine how well it is performing. Data on the average workload of each team is scrutinised in local and force-wide performance meetings. Any areas of concern are raised and addressed.

We did see teams with high workloads, particularly the sexual offence investigation team, the child online safeguarding team, and the domestic abuse investigation and safeguarding unit (DAISU). But we also noted that the constabulary monitors these workloads and saw specialist investigative teams, such as the DAISU, being supported with additional short-term and longer-term resources, particularly at the supervisory level.

The constabulary considers how non-specialist investigation teams, such as the crime investigation team, would benefit from including accredited detectives. We found investigators were positive about the support and guidance given by experienced detectives in these teams. The constabulary also reviewed how the shift pattern of frontline teams, such as the intervention and safer neighbourhood teams, might affect how supervisors can monitor team activity, including crime supervision.

The constabulary's control strategy, which determines its priorities and incorporates considerations including the Strategic Policing Requirement and the PCC's police and crime plan, is clearly conveyed from the top level of the organisation to frontline teams. The constabulary's highest priority is to address vulnerability. We saw this in its daily demand meetings, which determine how resources are divided between teams.

We also saw this in the constabulary's longer-term planning. It provides for more accredited detectives to investigative teams dedicated to safeguarding and vulnerability.

The constabulary has a clear plan to address its shortage of detectives

The constabulary doesn't have detectives in every required post. As of 31 March 2022, accredited detectives filled 61 percent of the 366 PIP level 2 investigator roles. The constabulary has introduced some measures to tackle this issue. They include:

- applying to keep the Fast Track detective pathway open for longer so that more detectives are recruited;
- introducing training and a promotion grade for staff investigators so they can better support investigative units;
- introducing a targeted variable payment, which is a financial supplement to make working as a detective more attractive;
- running events at which detectives hold sessions for frontline officers about the experience of being a detective; and
- interviewing officers who have been temporarily posted to investigative units so they can better set expectations for other officers and encourage them to consider secondments.

The constabulary monitors several of these measures, as well as the sustainability of its investigative teams, through its investigations capacity and capability group.

The targeted variable payment process has been well received by detectives, particularly as moving to a detective role can mean a financial loss in real terms as officers no longer get the unsociable hours allowance that is paid to uniformed response staff. We did find some frustration from frontline staff who don't receive the targeted variable payment, but we found that the constabulary has effectively communicated the reason for the payment to its workforce, which is generally understood.

The constabulary routinely updates victims regarding the progress of investigations in accordance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

All forces have a responsibility to update victims on the progress of their cases in accordance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. How often this is done should be agreed with the victim in a victim care contract.

We found that not only did the constabulary engage well with victims in 37 of 43 appropriate cases we examined, but it also kept to 48 of 49 of the victim care contracts we examined.

This shows its dedication to keeping victims informed about the progress of their cases. This can be vital in ensuring a quality service to victims.

The constabulary has improved its waiting times for analysing digital forensics

The constabulary's digital forensics investigation unit (DFIU) examines phones and computers seized during investigations. The digital downloads provided by the unit are important evidence in many investigations. Early in our inspection, we heard some dissatisfaction from investigators about how long it takes the DFIU to examine phones and computers submitted to it. But we also heard that this situation is improving, in no small part due to the constabulary investing in extra staff and resources.

Investigators told us that it used to be common to wait for up to nine months for a forensic download to be returned. The wait time has clearly improved. At the end of our inspection, the constabulary told us that the oldest outstanding computer download was two months old. And from January 2022 to November 2022, the overall backlog had been reduced from 1,207 items to 550 items. In our victim service assessment, we found 2 of 29 relevant cases we reviewed had delays in investigations due to a wait for digital forensics.

We also saw good use of a 'digi-van'. This vehicle is used to carry out initial examinations of digital devices while officers are at a scene. These examinations can help determine the likelihood of whether there is relevant evidence on a device. This means the seizure and examination of phones, computers and other devices can be targeted and are more likely to yield results.

There is still work to be done. The constabulary has only one digi-van, which limits how often this resource can be used. But the constabulary is planning to increase the number of technical kiosks in local stations where qualified investigators can process their own downloads. The constabulary is also exploring how to make better use of automation and cloud storage to process submissions faster and more effectively.

The constabulary also told us that 69 percent of its submissions to the DFIU don't result in relevant evidence. It is planning to improve how it triages digital devices to make sure that submissions that are more likely to return evidence are prioritised.

Some submissions need a level of technical analysis that the constabulary can't carry out. These submissions are outsourced to another provider.

We also heard from some officers that they are frustrated by the amount of time it can take to get evidence back from the forensic imaging unit. The forensic imaging unit is part of the tri-force collaboration. It processes CCTV and other images. We heard that the waiting time is primarily because of an increase in demand and loss of staff.

The constabulary has now recruited more staff into the forensic imaging unit, which should alleviate the problem.

The constabulary is sustaining its crime outcomes but must make sure improvements to capacity and capability in investigations produce better outcomes for victims

The constabulary has maintained its crime outcomes since our last inspection, with a similar proportion of crimes being assigned each outcome type. In the year ending 31 March 2022, 6.5 percent of crimes were assigned an outcome of charged/summonsed, and 33.8 percent had evidential difficulties and the victim didn't support or withdrew their support for police action.

The constabulary is in the normal range compared to other forces in England and Wales for these specific outcomes. But the constabulary is increasing the number of detectives it has and is improving its targeting of resources into high-harm crimes like sexual offences and domestic abuse. Therefore, it must make sure these efforts result in positive outcomes for victims.

The constabulary doesn't routinely document victims' wishes when it discontinues investigations, and it doesn't routinely proceed with evidence-led prosecutions

We reviewed 20 cases where a suspect was identified, but there were evidential difficulties, and the victim didn't support or withdrew their support for police action. It is important that the constabulary creates auditable records of victims' decisions and their reasons for withdrawal of support. This helps it understand why victims might not support a prosecution. In 5 of the 20 cases we reviewed, there wasn't an auditable record approved by the victim.

Even when victims do withdraw their consent to proceed, the constabulary has the option to pursue an evidence-led prosecution. This isn't suitable in all cases, but we found that in 16 cases we reviewed where this would have been suitable, the constabulary had considered and recorded it in 4 of them.

The constabulary should make sure it documents whether evidence-led prosecutions have been considered, even if this option isn't pursued. This will help the constabulary to fully understand whether opportunities to protect victims from future abuse and to bring offenders to justice have been missed.

Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

Hertfordshire Constabulary is adequate at protecting vulnerable people.

Area for improvement

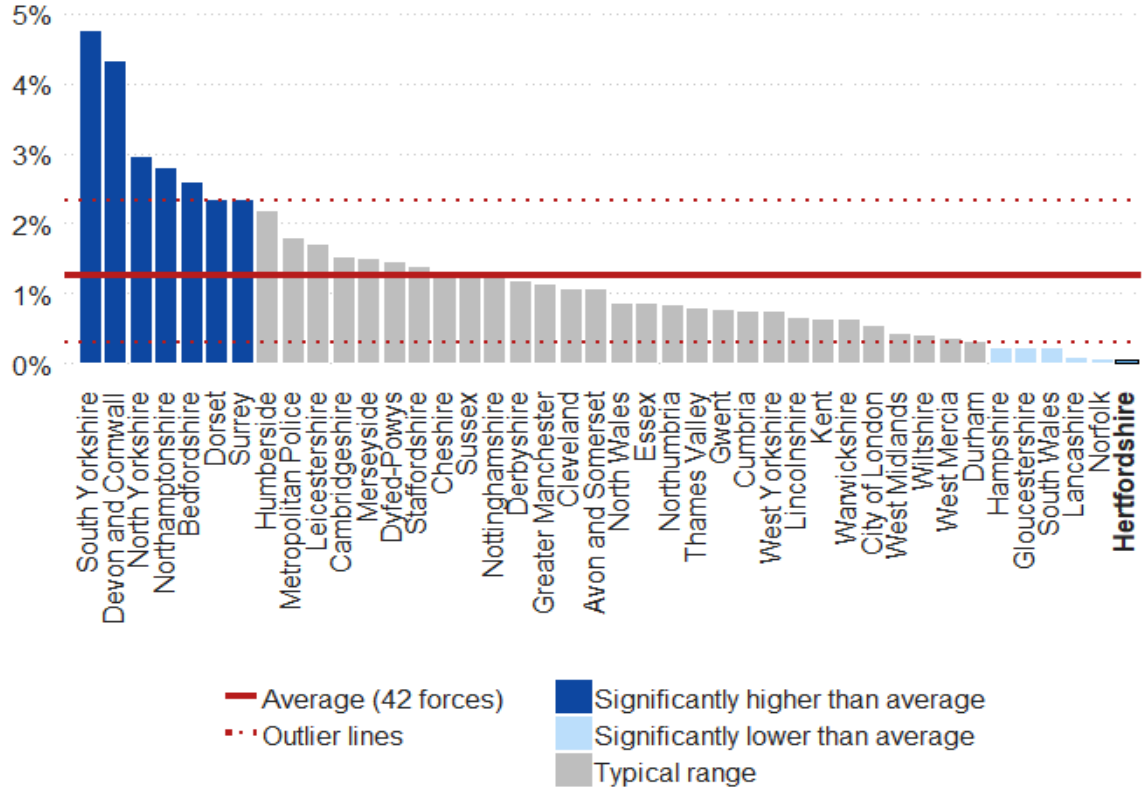
The constabulary should make sure that protective orders are considered in all appropriate cases

To support the safeguarding of victims, investigators can seek to use ancillary orders to protect victims and keep perpetrators from contacting them. Of the 20 relevant investigations we reviewed, the constabulary considered the use of ancillary orders such as domestic violence protection notices, domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) or stalking protection orders in 2 cases.

The constabulary does promote the use of restraining and non-molestation orders, but to use these, the victim must support their use or, in some instances, arrange for their use themselves. We mentioned the constabulary's low use of evidence-led prosecution in the previous chapter, which again places the responsibility of pursuing justice on the victim.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, the constabulary had the lowest rate of use of DVPOs across all forces in England and Wales. During this period, the constabulary applied for ten DVPOs, which represented 0.5 per 1,000 recorded domestic abuse-related crimes. The constabulary must make sure that victims are effectively safeguarded using the range of protective orders available to investigators.

DVPO applications as a percentage of domestic abuse crimes, for forces in England and Wales, in the year ending 31 March 2022



Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force protects vulnerable people.

The constabulary has strong governance and understanding of demand in safeguarding and has addressed under-resourcing

The constabulary examines the workloads of its safeguarding investigation teams, such as the DAISU, the joint child protection investigation team (JCPIT) and the safeguarding adults from abuse team, in its integrated performance framework. The framework is scrutinised by the chief officer team. We saw examples of shortfalls in staffing being resolved, such as extra officers and staff being placed in the DAISU and the safeguarding hub. Temporary redeployments are also being authorised to meet short-term needs. The constabulary has records of the different skills held by its safeguarding teams so it can understand how best to make use of their different attributes.

The constabulary has thematic task and finish groups that determine what actions need to be taken to address priority areas such as rape, child protection and violence against women and girls. We saw useful and effective work being carried out by these groups. They have made considerable improvements to public protection teams

and how the constabulary understands and records the voice of the child at the scene of domestic abuse incidents, which means it talks to and engages with children.

The constabulary also considers the well-being of its officers and how this might affect the work of those safeguarding teams. It does this by including the welfare of safeguarding teams in its strategic risk register. The constabulary ran an investigators' focus week, with training and resources that target the well-being of investigators, including those in safeguarding roles.

The constabulary contributes to an effective safeguarding hub but should make sure that joint working practices are more widely used by its workforce

The constabulary's safeguarding hub receives all referrals made by the constabulary concerning safeguarding issues such as child protection and vulnerable adults. The staff in the hub research and risk assess the referral and assess what further action needs to be taken to safeguard the person. They then work in partnership with a wider selection of statutory safeguarding partners, including children's social care and adult social care, to make sure this takes place.

The safeguarding hub also assesses requests from statutory partners (such as adult and children's social care) for information held on police systems and operates the Operation Encompass process, which informs schools about children in homes affected by domestic abuse. It also quality assures the constabulary's domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence assessments.

We noted that the safeguarding hub has developed its Operation Encompass process to notify schools not just about children in households affected by domestic abuse but also about children who go missing from home. The first time that a child goes missing, a referral is sent to the school to make sure further safeguarding opportunities can be explored.

In 2021, when we last inspected the safeguarding hub, we found that it had backlogs of unassessed referrals, with the largest being in reports of domestic abuse incidents that responding officers had initially graded as standard risk. In this inspection, we found that backlogs had been effectively cleared, with a queue only in the lowest-risk incidents. And even then, these cases had been triaged for immediate assessments of risk.

Safeguarding referrals increased during COVID-19 and have stayed high. The safeguarding hub has relied on staff overtime to deal with this demand but has recently secured more investment and resources to make sure it can continue to operate effectively.

We explored how effectively the constabulary makes decisions with partner organisations. Many forces adopt the multi-agency safeguarding hub model, where the police and statutory partners, including children's social care, adult social care and

others, work together to share information and make joint decisions, often working from the same premises (called co-locating).

At the time of this inspection, Hertfordshire Constabulary didn't fully co-locate with its partners, although the JCPIT works from the same office as children's social care and has social workers in its team. So, while we saw that information sharing was prompt, the constabulary and its partners might not benefit from shared decision making early on in a case in the way a more traditional multi-agency safeguarding hub might.

The constabulary invests in both child protection and adult safeguarding and has effective partnership arrangements

The constabulary's JCPIT leads on investigations concerning the safety and welfare of children. The team includes social workers from children's social care, which means it can immediately access necessary safeguarding information. This also means that joint procedures, such as strategy meetings, take place promptly and effectively. The team is suitably resourced and supported despite the challenging nature of its work.

The constabulary also has a dedicated child sexual exploitation team. We saw good joint working with a range of external agencies to disrupt child sexual exploitation. One good example of this approach was the constabulary and county council licensing teams taking action against a local hotel when it didn't promptly give the constabulary CCTV of a possible incident. This resulted in them identifying a licensing breach, negative press coverage for the hotel and a willingness from the hotel chain to work with the constabulary on future incidents. The team also provides bespoke child protection training to hotel chains and taxi drivers.

The constabulary also dedicates resources to vulnerable adults through its safeguarding adults from abuse team. This team of accredited investigators investigates offences against vulnerable adults, often in care settings. We found its workload is manageable and the team is well supported. While it doesn't have social workers in the way the JCPIT does, it has meaningful links with adult social care. This means social services records are shared promptly.

We spoke to staff at both children and adult social care services and were impressed by how positively they described their relationships with the constabulary. Both services have access to a range of staff at tactical and strategic levels and could give examples of working together with the constabulary on resolving issues.

The constabulary doesn't meaningfully use victim feedback to develop its services

The constabulary has several ways to collect feedback from victims about their experiences of its services. These include but aren't limited to:

- the echo feedback platform;
- victim surveys;
- working with the victim services team and the Hertfordshire Victim Care Centre; and
- feedback from victims provided by investigating officers.

We saw the constabulary use all these platforms to get insight into victims' experiences. But we didn't see evidence of this insight being used to meaningfully affect how services are provided or to give victims a say in the planning and development of victim-centred initiatives.

Frontline officers understand the constabulary's approach to vulnerability but don't always have in-depth knowledge of safeguarding post-referral

Frontline officers showed an appreciation of the constabulary's prioritisation of vulnerability. We found officers are aware of their responsibility to identify and record vulnerability and understand when they should refer people to the safeguarding hub for further support. Guidance for officers about child protection in particular is readily available on the constabulary intranet. Advice from specialist safeguarding officers is always available.

In our December 2021 report *Hertfordshire – National child protection inspection post-inspection review*, and in a subsequent revisit, we found an increased understanding of the importance of getting and recording the voice of the child. This was also the case in this inspection. But we did find that the constabulary didn't always give officers feedback on safeguarding referrals. This is important for officers so that they can better understand the effect of the constabulary's actions and to learn from them.

We also noted that, despite good work in recording the voice of the child and understanding how first responders might record evidence of abuse or neglect, the constabulary's audit of body-worn video cameras and footage showed that the cameras aren't always used at the right time and for the right incidents. This is important, as otherwise the cameras may not effectively record all evidence.

The constabulary also doesn't routinely offer frontline officers Domestic Abuse Matters training. Frontline officers do get guidance from the DAISU team, and the constabulary does have domestic abuse champions who have received Domestic Abuse Matters training in the past. But these officers aren't always in first responder roles so can't always offer immediate support at the scene of an incident.

The constabulary works in partnership with other organisations to respond to those in mental health crisis and has supported its officers to act beyond the limits of statutory powers

The constabulary has a mental health triage car, staffed jointly with officers and mental health professionals, that attends incidents where people are in mental health crisis. The initiative, which has been positively evaluated, is designed to divert people in crisis away from needing to be detained for further assessment.

Officers have recourse to a 24-hour-a-day first responder helpline, which can offer support and guidance and take mental health referrals. But there are times when the mental health triage car can't attend an individual, and officers may have no choice but to detain someone in crisis under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Doing this requires officers to stay with the person concerned until a mental health assessment can be arranged. A health service worker must carry out these assessments, which means officers may stay with a detained person for a long time, waiting for someone to be available. On one particularly demanding day across the county, 17 officers at once were prevented from attending other incidents because they were staying with people detained under the Mental Health Act 1983.

The constabulary has acknowledged the scope of the problem and is working in partnership with the local health service, Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust, to try and resolve it. We saw good examples of this work, with daily meetings to discuss the availability of secure placements for people in mental health crisis. The constabulary has also contracted a private company, SecureCare, to stay with detained persons so that officers are available to attend other incidents. This has saved a significant number of hours that officers would have otherwise spent with detained persons.

Despite these efforts, officers are still being delayed by this. It has reached the point where the senior leadership team has been forced to consider what should happen if officers stay with a detained person beyond 24 hours. Twenty-four hours is the statutory limit of how long a person should be detained for an assessment. But because the wait for an assessment is often over 24 hours, the chief constable has told officers they will be supported to stay with detained people, regardless of the time limit having been reached.

Some officers told us this has led to anxiety, as they feel insecure about being supported, however positively, to essentially act unlawfully. But the constabulary has been clear: this is a matter of preserving life, and officers receive the constabulary's full support. This approach has been reinforced by a recently introduced process of having a referral made to a superintendent once the 24-hour threshold is reached. The superintendent then confirms the constabulary's position and its support of its officers.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

Hertfordshire Constabulary is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force manages offenders and suspects.

The constabulary effectively monitors the use of bail to make sure victims are safeguarded

The constabulary prioritises the use of pre-charge bail for suspects where possible, rather than them being released under investigation (RUI). This is to make sure conditions can be set to safeguard victims. We spoke to frontline officers and specialist investigators who confirmed the constabulary's preference for using pre-charge bail over RUI where appropriate.

The constabulary also showed us effective oversight of pre-charge bail and RUI processes, with the use of both processes being monitored at local and strategic performance management meetings. The constabulary also monitors when RUI replaces bail because an extension to bail either hasn't been requested at the magistrates' court or has been refused.

The constabulary has increased its use of pre-charge bail when suspects are released from custody from 29 percent of all cases in the year ending 30 September 2020 to 45 percent in the year ending 31 March 2022.

The constabulary has dedicated bail management sergeants to improve bail processes. The constabulary also uses digital technology to automate this process through bail and RUI 'bots' that automatically produce performance data for scrutiny.

The constabulary has improved its approach to registered sex offenders

Specialist officers in the constabulary's management of sexual offenders and violent offenders teams monitor registered sex offenders and are responsible for assessing and managing the risk these offenders pose. The constabulary uses the active risk management system to assess levels of risk. We found the quality of its active risk management system assessments to be good, with effective supervision that identified the need for any further action.

The unit is responsible for visiting registered sex offenders regularly. How often these visits take place depends on the level of risk the offender poses. We found no visits were overdue. The constabulary carries out unannounced home visits in line with the College of Policing authorised professional practice for managing registered sex offenders.

We also noted good links between the management of the sexual and violent offenders unit and the safer neighbourhood teams. This includes the unit conducting joint visits with the neighbourhood teams to make neighbourhood officers aware of the registered sex offenders in their area. Inspectors routinely allocate registered sex offenders to individual officers to monitor during their patrols. This approach has provided the constabulary with extra intelligence and means officers can act to protect vulnerable people.

We did find that the constabulary allows low-risk registered sex offenders with enforceable court orders to be placed under reactive management, which isn't in line with authorised professional practice. But the constabulary has clear processes in place for this, including:

- making sure a current risk management plan is set;
- making sure an active risk management system assessment has been completed within nine months and was graded low; and
- offering a polygraph test to the registered sex offender to check compliance.

The constabulary could improve how it monitors registered sex offenders who have visits or assessments outstanding. It has a performance data dashboard that tracks outstanding visits and assessments. But at the time of our inspection, we found that staff weren't routinely using the dashboard. Instead, they were using a spreadsheet to sort outstanding visits in ascending order from the most out of date. But further improvement could be made to this spreadsheet to make sure it lists all of the relevant information in an easily comprehensible fashion.

The constabulary is consistent at recording breaches of notification requirements

Registered sex offenders are subject to restrictions on their movements and behaviour. These are called notification requirements. Requirements could include a registered sex offender registering a change of address with the constabulary or alerting it when they apply for a new bank card. We found that the constabulary consistently records all breaches of notification requirements and takes appropriate action where needed.

The constabulary uses its integrated offender management team to enforce serious crime prevention orders

The constabulary has adopted the refreshed national approach to integrated offender management (IOM) called the Neighbourhood Crime Integrated Offender Management Strategy. We found that the team has a good relationship with the Probation Service and is well resourced to deal with the number of cases it is allocated.

Officers are well trained. The constabulary gives all case managers training on managing professional boundaries as well as sessions on unconscious bias, suicide prevention and managing incidents affected by mental ill-health. All offender managers are 'Prevent champions' (a strand of CONTEST, the Government's counterterrorism strategy) and have had stop and search and counterterrorism training.

The constabulary also has a formal process for the team to monitor and enforce serious crime prevention orders. An offender who is subject to a serious crime prevention order is assigned an offender manager, who checks on the offender every month to make sure they aren't breaching the order. This process makes sure offenders subject to ancillary orders are given meaningful oversight so that they comply with the orders.

The constabulary also has an effective and established choices and consequences programme. Here it works in partnership with the Probation Service and other organisations to prevent the most prolific serious and acquisitive offenders (those that carry out burglaries, robberies and similar crimes) from reoffending.

Under the programme, offenders voluntarily work with the constabulary and its partners. They admit to any previously unknown or unsolved offences. They undergo drug treatment where appropriate and carry out work placements, unpaid work and other activities. Offenders in the programme have their sentences deferred for a period of time set by the courts. During that time, they must resolve any addiction issues and cease offending. If they do reoffend, they are resentenced.

The constabulary responds effectively to offenders accessing indecent images of children, but it should continue to support the child online safeguarding team

The child online safeguarding team uses intelligence tools to proactively identify people who are sharing indecent images of children. The constabulary uses the Kent internet risk assessment tool to identify the level of risk posed by offenders and then carries out appropriate enforcement action. We found minimal delays in the arrest of suspects. It shares information with children's social care promptly to make sure children are safeguarded effectively. The team also routinely applies for protective orders to limit the risk suspects pose.

But we also found that staff on the team have heavy workloads. While specialist officers have access to enhanced welfare support, such as annual psychological testing, they don't always have regular one-to-ones with supervisors to help track and support their welfare. The constabulary has secured more resources for the team to help lessen some of the workloads for individual officers but should continue to make sure that staff welfare is prioritised.

The constabulary has clear policies on arresting wanted suspects, but problems with data make robust management difficult

The constabulary has clear and appropriate policies regarding the pursuit of people who are wanted and marking them as wanted on the police national computer. The constabulary uses local performance meetings and lists of wanted persons, called rolling arrest lists, to monitor how it pursues suspects. Higher-risk suspects are prioritised so that further action can be taken if they aren't apprehended swiftly.

But while managing suspects at local performance meetings can be effective, the constabulary has difficulty accessing data to outline exactly how many wanted people it has at any one time. This leads to a lack of oversight of how many wanted people there are and whether the number exceeds an acceptable threshold.

The main reason for this difficulty is the lack of clarity on the constabulary case management system. This system has only two categories for suspects: whether they have been interviewed or not interviewed. This isn't detailed enough to determine whether a suspect needs to be arrested. The case management system also sometimes fails to distinguish between crimes with multiple suspects and multiple crimes with a single suspect.

The constabulary is exploring ways to increase the number of categories recorded against a suspect.

The constabulary has only recently developed a co-ordinated approach to disrupting high-risk domestic abuse offenders

In our last inspection, we saw that the constabulary had begun to explore using its IOM team to engage with and disrupt high-risk domestic abuse offenders, with IOM officers receiving training about coercive control. Since adopting the refreshed national IOM model, the constabulary has discontinued this approach. And an alternative option to which high-risk domestic abuse offenders could be referred for supervision and intervention wasn't established.

We did note effective interventions taking place in the constabulary's specialist safeguarding unit, which is part of the DAISU, but these rely on voluntary involvement from the offenders themselves and don't follow a specific national model or methodology.

The constabulary has started a multi-agency tasking and co-ordination meeting in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council. This has identified the top 15 high-risk perpetrators and will develop interventions to disrupt their offending. At the time of our inspection, it was too early for us to assess the effectiveness of this approach.

The constabulary has also secured funding from the PCC to refer offenders to a domestic abuse offender management programme.

Disrupting serious organised crime

We now inspect serious and organised crime (SOC) on a regional basis, rather than inspecting each force individually in this area. This is so we can be more effective and efficient in how we inspect the whole SOC system, as set out in HM Government's SOC strategy.

SOC is tackled by each force working with regional organised crime units (ROCUs). These units lead the regional response to SOC by providing access to specialist resources and assets to disrupt organised crime groups that pose the highest harm.

Through our new inspections we seek to understand how well forces and ROCUs work in partnership. As a result, we now inspect ROCUs and their forces together and report on regional performance. Forces and ROCUs are now graded and reported on in regional SOC reports.

Our SOC inspection of Hertfordshire Constabulary hasn't yet been completed. We will update our website with our findings (including the force's grade) and a link to the regional report once the inspection is complete.

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Adequate

Hertfordshire Constabulary is adequate at building and developing its workforce.

Area for improvement

The constabulary should consider using up-to-date and accurate information about workforce skills to effectively enhance deployment throughout the workforce and meet any future skills gap

In our last inspection in 2019, we identified an area for improvement and said that the constabulary should develop a comprehensive skills strategy to determine what future capabilities its workforce will need.

In this inspection, we found that the collaborated human resources team now has a better understanding of the skills gaps and has a plan to address them. And the constabulary has also made progress locally in its workforce development unit in developing its understanding of skills, including databases for skills such as advanced driving, taser use, method of entry and specialist safeguarding. But this has primarily been limited to skills that require certification.

Until the constabulary can complete an up-to-date and accurate assessment of the skills of its workforce, decisions may not be made with the best information available. This means the constabulary is unlikely to effectively use the full range of skills its workforce has.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force builds and develops its workforce.

The constabulary has devoted considerable resources to an impressive and sustainable approach to cultural change

The constabulary has started an ambitious cultural change project called Prevention First. It focuses on enhancing crime prevention and organisational efficiency but also includes leadership and culture. The constabulary has trained all its frontline supervisors in leadership skills, organisational expectations and the constabulary's focus on prevention.

This training took the form of a week-long course, which was presented by a range of speakers including members of the chief officer team. It was also made available to police staff and to officers and staff in the tri-force collaborated functions, such as joint protective services. This training had finished just as we began our inspection.

We heard substantial approval from officers and staff about the content and provision of the training course. They also gave us several examples of the training's effectiveness. For instance, one staff member told us that they had been planning to leave the constabulary but were inspired to stay by the training. After making the decision to stay, they identified opportunities in their team to promote efficiency and were given support to make the changes needed. They felt that the training had given them the agency and authority to do this.

One police inspector told us of a long-standing issue in the workplace that they hadn't been able to resolve with their supervisor. But when a supervisor who had been on the Prevention First training course was made aware of the issue, it was quickly resolved.

The constabulary surveyed the staff who had attended the training and had slightly more mixed reactions. The constabulary told us that 32.3 percent of respondents felt their ability to use the learning was affected by their workloads or resources, and 23.6 percent specifically said that just having the time to use the learning was difficult. But 72 percent of respondents were confident they could use the Prevention First approach in their day-to-day work, and 70 percent already had ideas of what they could do.

It is clear that Prevention First is making a positive cultural change across the constabulary. And it is resourced well enough for this change to be long term. We expect to see more effects in the future, as officers and staff tackle issues and address dilemmas with the Prevention First ethos. We will continue to review the effectiveness of the programme.

The constabulary has responded effectively to concerns about workforce well-being, although the workforce is generally more aware of reactive well-being measures than preventative ones

The constabulary performed poorly in some areas of the 2020 and 2021 Police Federation surveys of workforce attitudes and perceptions. In 2020, it was ranked lowest across England and Wales for pay and morale. But the constabulary has responded effectively to this information.

The constabulary has increased the starting pay for new recruits and the South East allowance, a supplement available to officers in forces bordering the Metropolitan Police area, to its highest possible amount. It has also effectively supported police staff by increasing the speed with which they can reach higher pay points in their careers.

The constabulary makes good use of data to identify and monitor threats to workforce well-being. It monitors sickness and other absences and conducts surveys to understand the factors that might affect stress in the workplace. As of 31 March 2022, 2.3 percent of officers in the constabulary were on long-term sickness absence. This is in line with the average figure for other forces in England and Wales.

The constabulary has several welfare provisions, including:

- the tri-force occupation health unit;
- an employee assistance programme that directs officers and staff to organisations and services where they can find support;
- a comprehensive well-being toolkit; and
- a regular calendar of events aimed at promoting physical and mental well-being, covering problems such as stress, menopause and lack of sleep.

The constabulary offers staff who attend traumatic incidents trauma risk management and peer support, and it has made suicide intervention training available to staff.

Officers and staff we spoke to were aware of these measures and how they might be accessed. But in general, they were more aware of the resources available after an issue had been raised, rather than the constabulary's preventative efforts.

Well-being is supported by a network of staff members located throughout the county who have received training to support colleagues and direct them to services that can help them. They are called well-being champions. The constabulary has full-time well-being co-ordinators who speak with officers and staff to determine well-being trends. They work with the well-being champions to organise weeks of events around themes such as alcohol awareness, musculoskeletal health and managing finances. They also provide practical guidance to teams to develop physical and mental well-being.

Staff perceptions of the constabulary's culture can also affect welfare. Most officers and staff we spoke to were positive about the culture in the constabulary. Promotion is seen as fair and accessible.

But when the constabulary surveyed its staff after the Prevention First training, it found that some of its workforce felt it was still moving into a learning culture. Thirty-three percent of respondents disagreed with the statement: "I have noticed a change from 'blaming for' to 'learning from' mistakes." By contrast, we noted throughout our inspection how the constabulary promotes a learning culture through meaningful communication with staff and open and honest reflection on the issues raised.

The constabulary makes sure staff have a voice and can raise issues and suggest opportunities for organisational improvement

The constabulary has several ways for staff of all ranks and grades to raise issues or highlight opportunities for the organisation to become more efficient. These include the ask the executive panel, where staff can ask questions of the senior officer team, including the leads of tri-force collaborated functions, such as IT and human resources. We saw many examples of tactical issues, such as uniform and incident attendance policies, being raised at the panel as well as more strategic questions about welfare, fairness and other key concerns. A range of senior staff gave detailed and often very frank responses that were made available after the panel for the wider workforce to read.

We saw the constabulary make changes based on the concerns raised at the panel. For example, after an officer raised issues about poor airwave coverage, the constabulary put them in touch with the head of the information and communications technology department so that they could work together to develop solutions.

The constabulary also has staff councils which represent specific teams and can raise local issues. We saw these in action throughout the constabulary. For example, the child online safeguarding team said that the constabulary needs to improve the team's working environment and its ability to address welfare concerns and suggested a breakout room and new coffee machine.

The views of staff councils are also considered in decisions that affect the workforce. We saw evidence of the staff council being consulted about deploying extra staff into the DAISU.

The constabulary also has staff networks that can raise issues on behalf of staff and officers. These include the Police Federation, UNISON, the Black Police Association and others. These networks work closely with the constabulary's positive action team, and the constabulary gives them the time and resources they need to address the concerns of the officers and staff they represent. The representatives from these networks told us they have access to, and the support of, the senior leadership team and can deliver sometimes difficult messages to them if needed.

The constabulary also accepts suggestions for organisational improvement through Prevention First and helps staff make plans to achieve these improvements. For example, the constabulary has initiated projects to review how staff are supported on maternity leave, how staff are given discretionary leave for sporting events and to determine opportunities to increase the range of flexible working arrangements.

The constabulary also has internal and external ethics panels which discuss ethical issues that staff and officers might encounter. But we found that wider knowledge of these panels in the workforce is limited. The constabulary is working on submitting more practical ethical dilemmas to the panels, sourced from real-life examples, to increase the relevance of the discussions for frontline officers.

The constabulary is effectively addressing a shortfall in recruitment

The constabulary has faced challenges in recruiting enough officers to meet the Police Uplift Programme targets set by the government. As of 30 June 2022, the constabulary had recruited 63 percent of its allocated target up to 31 March 2023. The constabulary has applied considerable resources and effort to understanding and tackling this problem.

The constabulary was quick to adopt the police education qualifications framework compared to other forces. But it predicted that using only police education qualifications framework entry points meant it would fall short of the Police Uplift Programme target. Therefore, the constabulary has applied to keep the traditional police entry pathway of the initial police learning and development programme open. It has supplemented this with a range of recruitment events.

The constabulary also approached people at recruitment events and online who had expressed an interest in joining the police without necessarily making an application. At the time of our inspection, it had contacted 2,500 of these prospective candidates. The constabulary told us that in April 2022 it received only 51 applications, but in August 2022 it received 305. However, in the three days from 1–3 September 2022 alone, it received 83 applications.

The constabulary's recruitment and attraction processes have been assessed by the national leads for the Police Uplift Programme and had a favourable review.

The constabulary meaningfully engages staff to understand their reasons for leaving

The constabulary has been particularly successful in understanding why officers might leave the organisation.

The constabulary has an online exit interview process that gathers information on why leavers feel discontent and want to leave employment with the constabulary. It also intervenes before someone leaves the organisation. A 'potential leavers submission' (where the constabulary has become aware someone is thinking of leaving) is sent to a chief inspector, who then engages with that person to try and resolve or alleviate the identified issues. The constabulary has had 79 potential leavers referred into the process and has managed to retain 39 of them.

The constabulary also conducts traditional exit interviews with staff who leave. It analyses the data from these interviews and the intervention process to help it understand trends. It told us that the most cited reason for staff wishing to leave the constabulary was money, with the cost of living in Hertfordshire being a factor. This contributed to the constabulary's decision to increase the South East allowance and other supplementary benefits for staff and officers.

The constabulary also uses proactive retention measures in areas that see a higher rate of leavers. For example, the constabulary told us that student officers deciding to leave during their probationary period account for an average of 19 percent of all leavers. The constabulary's well-being co-ordinators have identified a lack of emotional and practical support as an issue affecting student officers. The constabulary has arranged for tutors of student officers to be trained in welfare management so they can better support the cohort of new officers.

The constabulary underrepresents its communities in terms of diversity but has developed an ambitious approach to positive action

The diversity of the constabulary's workforce underrepresents the communities it serves. The 2011 census shows that 12.4 percent of the resident population in Hertfordshire identify as coming from an ethnic minority background. But as of 31 March 2022, the corresponding percentage of the constabulary's workforce that identifies as coming from ethnic minority backgrounds was 6.2 percent.

This issue is also reflected in the diversity of the constabulary's supervisory ranks: there are no officers above the rank of chief inspector from an ethnic minority background. Also, only 2 percent of its intervention sergeants are female, and only 4 percent of its intervention inspectors are female.

But the constabulary is dedicated to improving this through its positive action team. The range of activities the team carries out is impressive.

The positive action team works with all applicants who have a protected characteristic that is underrepresented in the workforce. The team offers one-to-one meetings and online support to these applicants and assigns a mentor for the application process. This mentorship can continue after successful application if the applicant wishes.

The positive action team has also sourced private coaching for all Fast Track programme candidates and chief inspector candidates with underrepresented protected characteristics. The constabulary uses section 159 of the Equality Act 2010 in the promotion process, which means that when there is an equal number of successful applicants, applicants with underrepresented protected characteristics are prioritised.

The team also attends training for new officers and holds a session on positive action. This is to address any myths around the concept of positive action and to reinforce that the team increases opportunities for diverse candidates rather than disadvantages other candidates.

The team has also increased visible diversity on promotion boards and is setting up a racial inclusion council for local community members to scrutinise policies and procedures and to promote an anti-racist approach.

The constabulary has also progressed specific issues that might contribute to the lack of female officers in frontline supervisory roles. For example, the women's network has identified that this disproportionality might be linked to fewer female officers seeking a career in an intervention role, due to concern that they might be dispatched alone to incidents. As a result, the constabulary is reviewing the crewing policy for newly recruited officers.

The constabulary should make sure it understands and tackles workforce perceptions of unfairness

During our inspection, we found that some female intervention officers reported a perception that the way the constabulary allocates incidents to attending officers is unfair. These officers felt that they were more likely than male officers to be asked to attend sexual offences with female victims or incidents involving children.

This perception wasn’t universal and was only reported by some officers in some of the locations we visited. We found no evidence of a systemic bias in the incidents officers were asked to attend nor any specific person, team or location that was the source of the issue. The issue wasn’t recognised by female officers of higher ranks that we spoke to, nor had it been raised with the women’s network or any other staff network.

But despite the small number of officers with this perception, it does exist. Therefore, the constabulary should work to understand how this view has developed and make sure it tackles any underlying contributing factors.

Vetting and counter corruption

We now inspect how forces deal with vetting and counter corruption differently. This is so we can be more effective and efficient in how we inspect this high-risk area of police business.

Corruption in forces is tackled by specialist units, designed to proactively target corruption threats. Police corruption is corrosive and poses a significant risk to public trust and confidence. There is a national expectation of standards and how they should use specialist resources and assets to target and arrest those that pose the highest threat.

Through our new inspections, we seek to understand how well forces apply these standards. As a result, we now inspect forces and report on national risks and performance in this area. We now grade and report on forces' performance separately.

Hertfordshire Constabulary's vetting and counter corruption inspection hasn't yet been completed. We will update our website with our findings and the separate report once the inspection is complete.

Strategic planning, organisational management and value for money

Adequate

Hertfordshire Constabulary is adequate at operating efficiently.

Area for improvement

The constabulary should review its agreements under section 23 of the Police Act 1996 on the provision of collaborated occupational health to make sure it is doing what is agreed and that staff throughout the tri-force collaboration are supported by an effective occupational health unit

The constabulary has a proven track record of seeking collaboration, which has led to its tri-force collaboration with Bedfordshire Police and Cambridgeshire Constabulary and a seven-force strategic alliance. And we found that its work to promote and secure staff well-being is often highly effective and is well-regarded by staff. But not all three of the forces felt they were consistently well served by the tri-force collaborated occupational health function.

The Bedfordshire Police and Cambridgeshire Constabulary occupational health unit has experienced staff shortages, and this has reduced its service. We found that staff in one or more of the forces were routinely experiencing delays when they approached the unit for help. This has led to some staff seeking private medical support instead.

These delays put more responsibility on busy supervisors to manage the problem. They can lead to staff not being deployed because supervisors don't have the information on people's fitness to work that they need to make a decision on this. This may reduce the constabulary's ability to meet its demand.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force operates efficiently.

The constabulary has an effective strategic planning framework to make sure it tackles issues that are important locally and nationally

The constabulary has an effective strategic planning framework. It uses systematic processes to better understand threats and risks to the community. The constabulary's priorities are communicated to staff well, and they are understood at all levels. This is helping to drive the constabulary's operational activity. We saw good examples of the constabulary's priorities being addressed in local tasking meetings attended by frontline officers, rather than the priorities being restricted to strategic plans or documents.

The constabulary's framework is clearly aligned with constabulary plans, control strategy and the PCC's plan. This is supported by effective meetings and decision making. The constabulary also consults meaningfully with the public to determine local concerns. This approach is supported by an effective relationship with the PCC. The public can be assured that the constabulary's plans and priorities address what matters to them on a local and national level.

The constabulary has changed its operational-planning process since our last inspection. It now sets priorities which drive how the budget is allocated, rather than the other way around. This means the constabulary can more effectively meet demand in priority areas such as vulnerability and SOC. We will look forward to examining how this develops in the future.

The constabulary gives strategic leads (such as chief superintendents) the ability to financially manage their particular departments or policing areas. This power can be devolved to superintendents, chief inspectors and other senior managers.

We saw good examples of strategic leads feeling supported to make changes as a result of this. But the constabulary has provided limited training on how to manage budgets, and not all leads we spoke to felt meaningfully involved in the operational planning process. The constabulary should make sure the revised operational planning process addresses these issues.

The constabulary manages its current demand well

The constabulary understands its current demand well. It has a clear governance structure and robust oversight of its integrated performance framework. We found good oversight of how resources are allocated and how the allocations may change to respond to demand.

The constabulary is developing its use of data, but we found that this couldn't be relied on in all areas. For example, we found that the constabulary's resource information isn't always accurate. The constabulary also doesn't have a consistent process for gathering and using partnership data. It often depends on manual processes, but these aren't always reliable.

The constabulary's investment in data visualisation software is positive, but it is still developing the range of data it uses. Some areas lack qualitative information. This is something the constabulary is aware of. It is working to make sure that it has access to a wider range of data and information to inform the demand and resource picture.

The constabulary makes the best use of the money it has available, and its plans are both ambitious and sustainable

The constabulary has a balanced medium-term financial plan that is based on realistic assumptions about future costs with an appropriate level of reserves. It has identified savings through collaboration and through an efficiency plan, which includes changes to the structure of the force control room. The constabulary has taken meaningful steps to identify opportunities for efficiency, such as commissioning an external data platform company to examine the effectiveness of processes in the force control room.

The constabulary has also invested in its strategic hub, which uses data to forecast future demand. It looks to market leaders in both the public and private sectors to establish the best ways of working, determine efficient processes and generate value for money.

In 2021, the constabulary was audited by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The audit showed that the constabulary needs to improve aspects of its financial management. It has taken steps to address this. It has an action plan in place, and improvements are evident. The constabulary should continue to review its business-planning process to make sure it encourages fiscal awareness and responsibility for finances throughout its senior leadership team.

The constabulary needs to understand capability and capacity in more detail

In its force management statement, the constabulary has identified the need to improve its understanding of capability and capacity. Issues with capability and capacity include a need to increase detective numbers and challenges with the effectiveness of IT applications.

We found that the constabulary responds to capacity issues when they are identified as critical. Its comprehensive plan to improve recruitment and retention in the force control room is a good example of this. But it needs to assure itself that it can apply the same principles across wider areas.

The constabulary isn't able to map skills, capacity and capability effectively due to a lack of detailed information and interconnected IT systems. This is hampering its ability to meet wider demand effectively.

The constabulary is continuing to make savings but should do more to support efficiency savings and improve productivity in its IT systems

The constabulary is committed to investing in its technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness. It has identified several areas that would benefit from financial support, such as cybercrime and developing technological solutions, and invested in them. But at the time of our inspection, the effect of this investment was yet to be realised.

The constabulary needs to do more to make efficiency savings through its systems and processes. For example, although the constabulary has data on the skills and availability of officers and staff on several systems, these systems don't communicate with each other as well as they could. This means that the constabulary must manually access information to understand its resources and demand.

The constabulary is part of the tri-force collaboration on digital, data and technology. The digital plan used by the collaboration is clear on the need to derive benefits and improvements in the future. The constabulary must make sure it understands its current challenges. It should monitor and analyse any benefits from its new systems to improve its understanding of productivity.

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