HMICFRS

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

PEEL 2021/22

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Sussex Police

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Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how good Sussex Police is in 10 areas of policing. We make graded judgments in 9 of these 10 as follows:

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

We also inspected how effective a service Sussex Police 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 have concerns about the performance of Sussex Police in keeping people safe and reducing crime. In particular, I have concerns about how the force is responding to the public and about its crime recording standards. In view of these findings, I have been in contact with the chief constable and the police and crime commissioner, as I do not underestimate how much improvement is needed. I am pleased with the way the force has responded to my concerns.

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

The force needs to improve its crime recording

The force doesn't always record reports of violent crime, particularly behavioural crimes (harassment, stalking, controlling and coercive behaviour), rape crimes and incidents, domestic abuse and antisocial behaviour.

The force needs to improve how it identifies vulnerable victims at the first point of contact

The force is missing opportunities to safeguard vulnerable people. It needs to improve the way it assesses initial calls to the force so that vulnerable people and repeat callers are routinely identified.

The force needs to make sure that it carries out effective investigations, giving victims the support they need

From the outset, the force needs to complete investigation plans. Through regular supervision, it needs to set lines of enquiry to be followed and review the progress of investigations. The force is often failing to properly record the reasons why a victim doesn't support an investigation.

The force is good at preventing crime and antisocial behaviour

The force works proactively with other allied organisations to take action to reduce risk and harm, using a range of prevention and enforcement measures. These include a focus on reducing serious youth violence and on habitual knife carriers. There is also positive preventative work, such as the Sussex Early Intervention Youth Programme, which is a diversionary pathway for young people at risk for getting involved in crime.

The force is good at treating people fairly and with respect

The force works well with communities and has progressed involvement with some hard-to-reach communities. It has a good understanding of the effect that the use of force and stop and search powers have on different communities. Officers have a good knowledge of what constitutes reasonable grounds for using these powers and the force has put in place an effective system of external scrutiny of their use.

My report sets out the more detailed findings of this inspection. I will continue to check the force's progress in addressing areas for improvement in the coming months.

Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Constabulary

Reducing crime assessment

We have identified seven themes underpinning a force's ability to reduce crime effectively, which, taken together, allow an assessment of the extent to which the force 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.

The force has invested in and integrated several early intervention approaches. These aim to safeguard adults and children, reduce knife crime, tackle substance abuse-related crime and prevent serious harm. The force works well with partner agencies to achieve this.

Other factors contributing to the force's ability to reduce crime are as follows:

- The force has a proactive approach to getting local communities involved and partnership working in the prevention of crime.
- The force is using data analytics to understand where police resources are needed and is continuing to develop this to support operational delivery. Neighbourhood policing teams can view crime hotspots and map where policing activity is needed to prevent crime.

I am pleased that the force is addressing these areas of policing to reduce crime.

But the following areas may negatively affect the force's ability to reduce crime:

- The force doesn't always record reports of violent crime, particularly behavioural crimes (harassment, stalking, controlling and coercive behaviour), rape crimes and incidents, domestic abuse and antisocial behaviour.
- The force doesn't always identify repeat and vulnerable victims at the first point of contact.
- Call handlers don't consistently use the THRIVE risk assessment framework to prioritise the force's response to incidents.
- Investigations aren't always thorough. Investigators have high caseloads and don't always have capacity to deal with investigations, including high-risk cases.

Providing a service to victims of crime

Victim service assessment

This section describes our assessment of the service Sussex Police provides to victims. This is from the point of reporting a crime and throughout the investigation. 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 each when 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).
- The police decided that further investigation of a named suspect wasn't in the public interest (outcome 21).

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

The force answers emergency calls quickly on most occasions but needs to improve the time it takes to answer non-emergency calls. Repeat and vulnerable victims aren't always identified

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 force needs to improve the time it takes to answer non-emergency calls. When calls are answered, the victim's vulnerability isn't always assessed using a structured process. Repeat victims aren't always identified, which means this information isn't considered when deciding the response the victim should receive. Call handlers do, however, give victims advice on crime prevention and how to preserve evidence.

In most cases, the force responds promptly to calls for service

A force should aim to respond to calls for service within its published time frames, based on the 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 response should take into consideration risk and victim vulnerability, including any information obtained after the call.

On most occasions, the force responds to calls within appropriate time frames. However, victims aren't always informed of delays and therefore their expectations aren't always met. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage from the process.

Crime recording is inadequate when it comes to making sure victims receive an appropriate level of service

The force's crime recording should be trustworthy. It should be effective at recording reported crime in line with national standards and have effective systems and processes, supported by its leadership and culture.

The force needs to improve its crime recording processes to make sure that all crimes reported are recorded correctly and without delay.

We set out more details about the force's crime recording in the crime data integrity section below.

The force makes sure that investigations are allocated to personnel with suitable levels of experience

Police forces should have a policy to make sure crimes are allocated to appropriately trained officers or staff for investigation or, if appropriate, not investigated further. The policy should be applied consistently. The victim of the crime should be kept informed of the allocation and whether the crime is to be further investigated.

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

The force doesn't always carry out effective and timely investigations

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

We found that not all investigations were completed in a timely way and didn't always follow relevant and proportionate lines of inquiry to a conclusion. Investigations weren't well supervised, but victims were updated throughout. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when they receive regular updates.

A thorough investigation increases the likelihood of perpetrators being identified and a positive result being achieved for the victim. In most cases, victim personal statements were taken, which gives victims the opportunity to describe how that crime has affected their lives.

When victims withdrew support for an investigation, the force usually considered 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 force recorded whether it considered using orders designed to protect victims, such as a Domestic Violence Protection Notice or a Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO).

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime requires forces to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage to determine whether victims need additional support. The force didn't always carry out this assessment and record the request for additional support.

The force doesn't always assign the right outcome. The victim's wishes aren't always considered, and an auditable record of their wishes isn't always held

The force should make sure it follows national guidance and rules for deciding the outcome type of each report of crime. In deciding the outcome, the force should consider the nature of the crime, the offender and the victim. And the force should show the necessary leadership and culture to make sure the use of outcomes is appropriate.

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. However, victims weren't always informed of the decision to take no further action and close the investigation. The force used this outcome incorrectly on several occasions.

When a suspect has been identified but the victim doesn't support or withdraws their support for police action, an auditable record from the victim confirming their decision should be held. This allows the investigation to be closed. Evidence of the victim's decision was absent in some cases reviewed. This represents a risk that a victim's wishes may not be fully represented and considered before an investigation is closed.

When a suspect has been identified and the police decide that further investigation isn't in the public interest, the victim should be consulted and informed of the decision. Not all victims were consulted regarding the decision to take no further investigative action.

Crime data integrity

Inadequate

Sussex Police is inadequate at recording crime.

We estimate that the force is recording 91.5 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.7 percent) of sexual offences. This is broadly unchanged compared with the findings from our 2016 inspection, in which we found 95.6 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.6 percent).

Cause of concern

The force is too often failing to record reports of violent crime, particularly behavioural crimes (harassment, stalking, controlling and coercive behaviour), rape crimes and incidents, domestic abuse and antisocial behaviour

Recommendations

Sussex Police should immediately:

- take steps to identify and address gaps in its systems and processes for identifying and recording all reports made by victims of crimes, giving particular attention to behavioural crimes, rape crimes and incidents, domestic abuse-related violent crime and antisocial behaviour.

Within three months, Sussex Police should:

- provide specific training for all supervisors, officers and staff who work in crime-recording roles. This training should include the crime-recording requirements for violent crimes, including behavioural crimes, domestic abuse and antisocial behaviour; and
- set up a crime-recording audit process to complete regular audits. There should be governance and oversight to fully understand its crime recording performance.

We estimate that Sussex Police is recording 85.6 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.9 percent) of all reported crime (excluding fraud). We estimate this means the force didn't record over 20,200 crimes for the year covered by our inspection. Its performance is even worse for violent crime. We estimate that 79.4 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 5.2 percent) of violent offences are being recorded. Of the 47 unrecorded violent crimes we found, 19 were domestic abuse-related.

The force doesn’t always record rape crimes and N100s (reported incidents of rape). We reviewed 63 reports of rape, with 52 of these correctly recorded. Five rape crimes hadn’t been recorded at all and six rape crimes were incorrectly classified as other crimes. Of the 52 crimes of rape that we found were recorded, 33 were recorded within 24 hours. Only 6 out of 15 N100s we reviewed were recorded. The force should improve its recording practices to make sure that rape crimes and incidents are recorded correctly, and victims receive the appropriate level of service from the police.

The force doesn't always record crime against vulnerable victims, particularly vulnerable adults. We reviewed 69 vulnerable persons cases and found 28 crimes that should have been recorded, but 21 were. Some of the unrecorded crimes were serious crimes, such as rape, assaults, modern slavery, and controlling and coercive behaviour. When the crime wasn't recorded, there was often no investigation and sometimes no safeguarding of the victim.

We reviewed 50 antisocial behaviour incidents. From these incidents we found 34 crimes should have been recorded but 21 were recorded. Failure to record a crime often results in a victim not being properly safeguarded, no investigation taking place or people living in fear in their own homes while being victimised by neighbours and the local community.

The force carries out limited crime recording audits and, as a result, wasn’t able to estimate accurately its crime recording compliance. The force did not understand its performance was poor so hadn’t put in place measures to improve crime recording. As a result, senior leadership wasn’t aware of the force performance and areas of crime recording that needed to be improved. By carrying out regular audits the force will identify where crimes aren’t being recorded and take action to record the crime and address the reason for the crimes being missed.

Area for improvement

The force doesn’t always record equality data for victims of crime

The force’s data for victims of crime shows that age and gender are well recorded, ethnicity is less well recorded and other protected characteristics are almost never recorded. The force should be collecting this information to understand the extent to which each protected group is affected by crime, how this differs from those without the protected characteristics and whether a different response is needed for these victims.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Good

Sussex Police is good at treating people fairly and with respect.

Innovative practice

The force has conducted an internal legitimacy review of the use of police powers, with a focus on stop and search

The force, with members of the Race Equality Network, reviewed 149 incidents involving the use of force. The aims of the review were to identify potential reasons for the reduction of stop and search activity, to examine the appropriate use of force in the form of tasers and to identify any disproportionality in the selection of people who were subject to force or stop and search, based on their ethnicity.

The incidents included a representative sample of children, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and females. Crime records, use-of-force forms, witness statements and body-worn video footage were reviewed. There were 115 deemed to be of a high standard, 8 were of an acceptable standard, 14 were deemed lawful but a degree of improvement was required, and in 11 cases it was judged that the officer's conduct was of such a questionable standard that it warranted a referral to other departments, such as officer safety training and professional standards.

The force also reviewed 89 stop and search encounters with a focus on the quality of the encounter rather than the outcome.

Several recommendations have been implemented following the reviews. These include: training and guidance for supervisors in reviewing stop and search encounters for the quality, professionalism and legality of the encounter; and the force's expectation that every supervisor – up to the rank of chief inspector – will complete at least one use of force and stop and search review per month.

The overall impact of the supervisor review process is better scrutiny of stop and search and use of force. Supervisors are better equipped to give meaningful feedback to officers to improve their encounters with the public. In addition, the increased data collection associated with this is fed into the external scrutiny panels, which drive improvements that build trust and confidence.

Main findings

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

The force works well with the communities it serves, and understands and responds to their priorities

The force consists of three divisions, each led by a chief superintendent: West Sussex, East Sussex, and Brighton & Hove.

The divisions are sub-divided into districts, each led by a district commander at chief inspector level. The districts are sub-divided into neighbourhood hubs, each led by an inspector, who creates a local identity for neighbourhood policing. Local neighbourhood policing teams have a visible and online presence in local communities and are therefore able to reach more people. Police community support officers (PCSOs) are assigned a ward within the neighbourhood hubs. They create their own ward plans based on neighbourhood information and information from partner organisations. These plans drive neighbourhood policing activity.

The force has introduced an online messaging system, Sussex Alerts. Members of the public can sign up to receive information and messages from the force. They can also ask questions and give information or feedback. This structured and co-ordinated approach means that the force has a good understanding of the issues facing local communities.

The force also works with an extensive network of volunteers. This ranges from the youth cadet force to the special constabulary and police support volunteers.

The force is working hard to support victims by working with partner organisations to build trust and confidence in policing

The force has run a series of focus groups to help understand cultural barriers affecting how the public interacts with the police. This has resulted in several recommendations being implemented by the force, which are helping it to tailor support to victims.

Besides the focus groups, the force conducted research with young people aged between 11 and 18 years to understand their views on the police and what matters to them. The lack of research responses led to the force changing its method. It is now obtaining views from this age group through the charity Fearless. This demonstrates that the force wants to understand what matters most to people with regard to policing and will adapt its style of public interaction to get the best results.

The workforce understands the importance of treating the public with fairness and respect

In July 2022, the force introduced its new race and inclusion action plan, which is aligned to the National Police Chiefs' Council police race action plan. The force has also introduced a new non-executive chief officer role for trust and legitimacy.

The force has trained the workforce on unconscious bias. This helps officers and staff to identify stereotypes and cultural influences, so these don't affect their behaviour and decisions.

All police officers have received training in stop and search, effective communication and the use of force. The force reinforces this training through annual officer safety training, where body-worn video footage is used to show the expected standards. Officers must activate body-worn video devices to record stop and search encounters, and when they anticipate confrontation or the use of force. Compliance is good. The force's legitimacy review, described above, identified that there are times when officers activate their body-worn video late; the importance of recording the full encounter is being reinforced at officer safety training.

The force issues a paper receipt to every person it stops and searches. On each receipt there is a QR code. The person can scan this to give feedback on their experience and to join the stop and search external scrutiny panel. The force told us that its aim is to use this data to further improve its training to officers and to understand concerns from its communities regarding the manner with which stop and search encounters are conducted.

The force has good systems in place to monitor and scrutinise use of force and stop and search powers

During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 166 stop and search records from 1 January to 31 December 2021. Based on this sample, we estimate that 88.0 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.9 percent) of all stop and search encounters by the force during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. This is broadly unchanged compared with the findings from our previous review of records in 2019, where we found that 87.8 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.5 percent) of stop and search encounters had reasonable grounds recorded. Of the records we reviewed for stop and search encounters with people from ethnic minorities, 19 of 24 had reasonable grounds recorded.

There are internal and external scrutiny meetings every six weeks that review data on stop and search, and the use of force. The external meetings have independent chairs, who also attend the internal meetings to ensure crossover of information and consistency. All the meetings consider a range of data to identify any potentially disproportionate application of stop and search, or use of force, on people who have protected characteristics. Body-worn video footage is also reviewed. The panel members are given the same training as supervisors with regard to conducting reviews. We heard positive feedback from the external group on how the force was scrutinising its stop and search disproportionality.

Since August 2021, the force has recorded protected characteristics data related to section 163 Road Traffic Act 1988 stops. The force scrutinises this data to help inform and address disproportionality. The data is also scrutinised by external scrutiny panels. The force has significantly improved its ability to use data to understand disproportionality at a force level and team level.

The force will address the unjustified reduction in use of stop and search by junior officers

During our interviews and focus groups with personnel, we learned that some junior officers were unsure of their stop and search powers or feared receiving a complaint. This has resulted in a reduction of self-generated searches, which happen when an officer becomes suspicious about someone they come across. The force has said it will address this with additional training.

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

Good

Sussex Police is good at prevention and deterrence.

Innovative practice

The Habitual Knife Carrier index has dramatically reduced possession-of-weapons offences

With Home Office serious youth violence funding, the force developed the Habitual Knife Carrier index. It is part of the force's response to preventing knife crime and serious violence. Its aim is to identify individuals currently involved in, or at risk of becoming involved in, knife-related offences, in order to better target multi-agency interventions and support services to divert them from current or future involvement in crime.

The index combines knife crime and knife-related intelligence data with known lifestyle factors associated with serious violence, such as drug use or involvement in gangs. Individuals are assessed in terms of their likely involvement in knife crime, based on knife intelligence and associated lifestyle factors. The index is refreshed quarterly to ensure that individuals are added and removed in a standardised and timely manner.

Youth offending teams, children's services and the probation service work with police to support the provision of tailored safeguarding interventions. These help prevent harm to the individual or prevent them causing harm to others. A regular meeting provides an opportunity for these organisations to agree a multi-agency, targeted response to those individuals identified on the index as higher risk.

The force told us that, as a result, in the year ending 31 October 2022 there was a 57 percent reduction, compared to the previous year, in the number of possession-of-weapons offences involving the project cohort.

The index has been recognised by the College of Policing as "smarter practice".

Main findings

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

The force uses an evidence-led approach to problem-solving using data analysis to focus activity

All neighbourhood officers are trained in problem-solving approaches. The force has introduced a problem-solving hub on its intranet, which contains guides, tactical menus and best practice cases.

All officers and staff taking part in problem-solving work use the same model, referred to as a SARA plan. The model uses four stages: scanning, analysis, response and assessment.

Analytics dashboards are available to neighbourhood officers and PCSOs to identify high-harm prolific offenders and vulnerable victims in their area. Crime hotspot analysis means neighbourhood officers can review recent antisocial behaviour and offending on their wards, and map incidents by geography, result type, date and individual.

The force uses data from partner organisations and health agencies to guide activity. In particular, the violence reduction unit makes effective use of this collective data: a licensing dashboard provides insight into the impact of the nighttime economy of any chosen area, providing intelligence and data to support partnership intervention.

The force works successfully with a wide range of other organisations to problem-solve antisocial behaviour, prevent crime and make early intervention

We found multiple examples of good partnership working with successful outcomes. In Brighton, there had been a history of crime and antisocial behaviour at the level playing fields. Families said that they didn't want to spend time there any longer. Police and partner organisations problem-solved the issue. They installed a community engagement hub, increased police patrols and involved various outreach services including drug and alcohol teams. The force told us that over a period of three months, antisocial behaviour was reduced by 34 percent, violent crime by 48 percent, drug-related crime by 45 percent and sexual crimes by 25 percent. The force produced a YouTube video highlighting the success.

The force ran a knife safety campaign using the charities Fearless and Crimestoppers. The force told us that the campaign resulted in an 11 percent decrease in knife crime and a 23 percent decrease in the carrying of knives for 2020 compared to 2019. Crimestoppers received a 50 percent increase in reports. This good work won the force the top public sector award from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations.

Another successful example of positive preventative work is the Sussex Early Intervention Youth Programme, known as Reboot. This is a diversionary pathway for children and young people aged between 11 and 17 years who are at risk of getting involved in crime. Between April 2021 and September 2022, 554 young people have become involved with the programme. They are monitored for 12 months. The force told us this resulted in an 83 percent reduction of young people coming to police notice.

To cope with a significant mental health demand, the force has invested in a mental health team and works with partner organisations to care for people in mental health crisis

The force has employed a trained mental health social worker as its mental health lead. The lead has been in post for two years and is making significant progress in improving services. They are now supported by three police constable mental health liaison officers.

The force has conducted activity analysis in relation to detentions in East Sussex under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 for the month of August 2022. The force told us that 800 hours of police officer time were spent protecting detainees. This averaged 22 hours per officer. Officers must stay with the person in crisis until an emergency mental health bed becomes available but there is a shortage of such beds in Sussex. This data is assisting the force to understand mental health demand on frontline personnel. It is also helping to inform other agencies regarding the impact on policing and helping to support cross-agency change.

We learned of a positive initiative in West Sussex, which is co-ordinated as part of multi-agency safeguarding hub arrangements. The area has seen an increase in suicides in young people, which required a multi-agency co-ordinated response. Operation Warren was introduced to improve the force's response to children and young people in West Sussex who are suicidal or in a mental health crisis. The force works with key partners in health and social care to identify and respond to some of the most vulnerable children and young people. The force told us that in 12 months, Operation Warren had effectively safeguarded 466 children and young people, which is positive. The operation was nationally recognised by the Health Service Journal Patient Safety Awards 2022 as mental health initiative of the year, for the positive impact that it has had on communities.

The force values and rewards the contribution of those involved in problem-solving, including volunteers

The force values effective problem-solving, and it actively recognises personnel for their work. It nominates suitable candidates for national problem-solving Tilley Awards and local awards. It also offers several opportunities for volunteering, including speedwatch volunteers, the special constabulary and the cadet scheme. Neighbourhood constables, PCSOs and volunteers we spoke to told us they felt valued and rewarded by the organisation.

PCs are often diverted from neighbourhood policing and there are PCSO shortages

We found that neighbourhood PCs were often taken away to cover response duties to help meet demand. This means they aren't seen on their wards and are unable to work on problem-solving. The force is aware of the issue and the impact that this can have on neighbourhood policing. It would benefit the force to consider how it can better balance response demands with visible ward policing.

PCSOs and youth engagement officers are the cornerstone for communities. Several PCSOs have been recruited as student officers as part of the Police Uplift Programme. This has left the force with a shortage of PCSOs, which, along with PCs being taken away to cover elsewhere, is likely to affect its neighbourhood policing effectiveness. The force told us that it was planning significant recruitment of PCSOs in 2023.

The force's special constabulary is an asset but would benefit from greater tasking and co-ordination

We spoke to some experienced special constables who told us that they were keen to do more but frequently had to decide for themselves what tasks to do or approach a sergeant to be allocated work. The force should look to structure the special constabulary activities so that they are used to provide policing support where it is needed most. The special constabulary is an asset to the force and, with better tasking and co-ordination, would be able to provide an enhanced service to the community.

In recognition of this issue, the force plans to introduce a rank structure to the special constabulary, and to provide development opportunities for its members.

Responding to the public

Inadequate

Sussex Police is inadequate at responding to the public.

Cause of concern

Non-emergency callers often have to wait in a queue or for a call-back, and call handlers frequently fail to use a structured approach to assess their risk or vulnerability

Recommendations

Within three months, Sussex Police should:

- make sure a structured triage approach is used to assess risk and consider the needs of the victim;
- improve the process of risk-assessing callers to identify those who are vulnerable or at risk; and
- make sure that repeat callers are routinely identified.

Within six months the force should:

- make sure it can answer a greater proportion of non-emergency 101 calls so that caller attrition levels are reduced and kept as low as possible.

The force operates a switchboard function from 8am to 10pm daily. During these times, people who first contact the force on the non-emergency 101 telephone number reach the switchboard. The operators aren't trained to assess the victim's vulnerability, which is needed to inform the prioritisation of the call so that it receives an appropriate response.

The switchboard operators can internally transfer callers to a call handler in the force contact command control department, where they may wait again to make a report. This creates a risk that callers will abandon their call due to the wait and their information will be lost. The force told us that from 1 September to 30 November 2022, 29.4 percent of callers abandoned their call while waiting for a call handler.

The switchboard operators can also place people that call the non-emergency number into a call-back queue. This means that the call is concluded and a call handler from the control room will call them back at a later stage. The force introduced this system to reduce its numbers of abandoned calls and to improve service. While there has been some improvement in this area, there is more work to be done. This process means that callers don't report their concerns at first point of contact and vulnerable people are waiting in control room queues for a long time or for a call-back. The call-backs are made in the order that they are received, and not prioritised according to risk.

During the night there is no switchboard or call-back function. Callers to the force wait in a queue for a control room call handler.

When incident details were being taken by a call handler, we found in 25 of 61 cases we reviewed the victim's vulnerability wasn't assessed using a structured risk assessment (THRIVE). This should be done from the outset to make sure that any risk, threat and vulnerability relating to the caller is identified. The assessment should be used to inform the prioritisation given to the call so that it receives an appropriate response.

The force doesn't always complete checks to identify repeat and vulnerable callers, or always record that a victim is vulnerable when it is appropriate to do so. The force checked to see if the incident involved a repeat victim in 29 of 65 relevant cases we reviewed and checked if the incident involved a vulnerable victim in 47 of 65 cases. Failing to identify repeat or vulnerable callers means that the risk to the victim isn't always accurately assessed.

The force should ensure there is a consistent approach in the initial assessment and recording of risk when dealing with initial calls from members of the public to effectively evaluate the safeguarding and welfare needs of all members of the public from the first point of contact.

Main findings

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

The number of 999 calls answered within 10 seconds is below the national target

In May 2022, the Home Office started to publish data on 999 call answering times. Call answering time is the time taken for a call to be transferred from British Telecom to a force, plus 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 do acknowledge, however, that this data has been published only recently. As such, we recognise that forces may need time to consider any differences between the data published by the Home Office and their own.

According to this data the force hasn't always been able to answer 999 calls promptly. Between 1 November 2021 and 30 September 2022, the force answered 76.7 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds. This is below the target of 90 percent in 10 seconds.

Call handlers act professionally but could make greater use of THRIVE

We found that, although call handlers have a good knowledge of THRIVE, it was used in only 36 of 61 applicable cases we reviewed.

We were pleased to find that, in all 61 cases, call handlers acted politely, appropriately and ethically. Furthermore, some call handlers had provided an excellent service during difficult circumstances, when responding to callers who were extremely distressed.

Attendance times are generally good, but victims aren't always notified of delays

Where the deployment of police officers was required, times to arrive at scenes were within the target time in 44 of 49 cases we reviewed. Where there were delays, we couldn't find evidence, in two of six applicable cases we reviewed, that victims were being routinely updated of delays in the police response or in the police keeping pre-arranged appointments. Victims need reassurance that the police take reports of crime seriously. Any unexplained delay in responding can have a negative impact on the victim, causing potential disengagement and a loss of confidence in the police.

We found that, overall, in 39 of 44 applicable cases we reviewed, there was effective and appropriate supervision of how police resources were deployed and used to support victims.

The force could do more to improve support for, and development of, control room personnel

Some personnel told us that they found the workload pressured and that one-to-one meetings with supervisors were rarely held. This means that supervisors don't always understand the demands on personnel and aren't well placed to manage individuals' professional development. This can influence workforce well-being, limit the nurturing of talent and add to attrition rates in contact management.

People can contact the force through a range of channels

People can contact the force in person, by telephone, online and through social media.

The force told us that its online channels had become increasingly popular with people wishing to contact them, and this had meant that the number of 101 telephone calls had reduced from 376,916 in the year ending 31 March 2019 to 288,641 in the year ending 31 March 2022.

The force prioritises incidents correctly and allocates them to appropriate teams

From the information obtained, we found that call handlers prioritised incidents correctly in all the cases we reviewed, and they allocated incidents to appropriate teams in 75 of 77 cases we reviewed. In eight of nine relevant cases we reviewed, we found changes in response (downgrades) to be the right decision and all nine cases had received the appropriate level of supervisory oversight.

The force's focus on demand has improved incident response time

The force uses a live data dashboard to give an overview of control room demand. This includes incoming calls on 999 and 101, the lengths of calls and the number of unanswered calls. It also includes online and social media reports. The force also has a focus on daily demands across the control room and investigative teams. The data is displayed clearly and is easy to understand. The development team overseeing the data recording is innovative and refines the data requirement to improve services. The time it takes officers to attend incidents has decreased since the force has had greater focus on performance that is highlighted on the dashboard.

The force has staff vacancies in the control room and has moved officers there to help manage risk and reduce backlogs

The force told us that it had 37 police staff vacancies in the control room. In November 2022, the force temporarily moved 18 constables and 3 sergeants into the control room to help reduce backlogs of incidents waiting for police attendance and to ensure reassessment of risk and prioritisation. The force told us that it intended to keep the additional officers in the control room while it reviewed its operating model.

The force has improved response times for non-emergency demand

During our work in the force in August 2022, we found that non-emergency demand requiring police attendance was managed by response sergeants who allocated the incidents to their officers for investigation. Incidents could wait many days for attendance, especially if the officer was on night shifts or rest days. In October 2022, the force completely changed this process for the better. All non-emergency incidents that have been assessed as requiring police attendance are now retained in the control room. Further risk assessments are completed until an officer is available to attend the incident. This is a positive step and helps the force to have greater awareness of all incidents so that it can prioritise accordingly. Response officers we spoke to welcomed the new process and, since its introduction, the time it takes the force to respond to this non-emergency demand has improved.

The force is good at identifying and responding to vulnerability when it attends incidents

Officers we spoke to were confident they could identify indicators of vulnerability, hidden harm and risk at initial attendance. They complete in-person risk assessments for domestic abuse victims and others in the household. Officers have had training in the voice of the child and consider events from the perspective of a child present and their living conditions. They complete, at the right time, reports that assess a person's vulnerability and need for continuing support. Officers have a good understanding of their duty to immediately safeguard vulnerable people.

Officers understand the importance of gathering evidence immediately on attendance

It is important that officers gather evidence promptly. Action taken in the period immediately after the report of a crime may minimise the amount of evidence that is lost to an investigation. This is sometimes referred to as the golden hour principle. Video clips are available on officers' personal devices to help direct them with action to consider at types of incidents. This is good practice. Officers understand the importance of immediate evidence gathering and supervisors are confident they can provide adequate guidance and support. Response officers we spoke to reiterated this, describing supportive and knowledgeable supervisors. This is positive as it gives reassurance that those who first attend incidents are likely to act appropriately. It also shows that the most vulnerable are likely to be protected and referred to the right organisations for support. But the delays in attendance that we have identified will affect the quality of service victims receive.

Mental health specialists, paramedics and staff from other agencies help the force respond to incidents

Personnel have access to round-the-clock advice from mental health professionals about people in distress. At peak demand times, mental health specialists join officers on patrol to respond more effectively and attend incidents to provide immediate care and referral.

The force has an established process known as Operation Northwood for managing reports of medical concerns and welfare requests. This is aimed at ensuring the most appropriately trained agency attends.

The force also has a joint response unit vehicle in Brighton and Hove. The vehicle is staffed by Sussex Police and South East Coast Ambulance Service. It allows a response police officer and a paramedic to work together to respond to incidents that require both services.

The force uses technology to interview some victims of domestic abuse

The force has a team of specialist officers who complete initial enquiries with victims of grade 3 non-emergency domestic abuse. (Grade 3 calls require a scheduled police response, with an appointment.) Interviews are completed using a video platform called Visionable. Appointments are made with victims, and they are sent a video link. During interviews, officers take statements and give safeguarding advice. The force told us that interviewing victims in this way meant the interviews were completed quickly and more evidence was gathered. There is a high satisfaction rate among victims who have been interviewed this way. It also leaves response officers free to respond to emergency incidents, while the specialist officers complete the enquiries.

The team won the Best Use of Digital and Technology bronze award at the Public Sector Transformation Awards 2022.

Investigating crime

Requires improvement

Sussex Police requires improvement at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The force doesn't always create investigation plans when needed or provide supervisory oversight

The force doesn't supervise investigations effectively and doesn't consistently create initial investigation plans. We found that where it was appropriate for investigation plans to be created, this wasn't done in 12 out of 50 cases we reviewed. We found an absence of effective supervision providing direction and oversight in 14 of 65 applicable cases we reviewed. The force should make sure that appropriate and effective supervisory involvement in investigations is consistently maintained and meets recognised standards.

The force should make sure that every appropriate investigation has a plan. Supervising officers should be involved in developing these plans and in outlining the objective for each investigation. The force should then make sure that supervisory involvement in investigations is consistently applied and carried out to recognised standards.

There are delays in allocating crimes to investigators and many investigators can't cope with demand

We found delays in allocating crimes to an investigator were leading to significant delays to the start of investigations. Investigations aren't always progressed in a timely manner. An example of this is in the force investigation resolution centre (IRC). The IRC is a desk-based team that conducts remote investigations. The IRC supervisor initially contacts victims to check the case is suitable for remote investigation. There is often a time delay of over 14 days before the case is then allocated to an IRC investigator. We found the team worked hard to provide the best outcomes for victims of business crime and theft, robbery or burglary. However, delays in investigations can result in the loss of evidence and cause victims to disengage.

Some criminal investigation department and public protection staff have high workloads. We saw some investigators with over 30 serious crimes to investigate including rape and domestic abuse. We even met some staff with 70 investigations listed on their caseload. Officer workloads and working hours have increased, and many are struggling to keep up with this demand. This means that the force isn't currently balancing demand with its obligation to look after its staff and officers.

The force must make sure that investigators have an appropriate and manageable number of investigations, and that they are able to provide a good service to victims and to conduct their enquiries with speed and efficiency.

The force is changing its operating model and plans to introduce new response investigation teams, with significant growth of officer posts, to support implementation.

Where a victim has decided to withdraw support for police action, this is often not recorded in an auditable record

When a suspect has been identified but there are evidential difficulties and the victim doesn't support or withdraws their support for police action (outcome 16), an auditable record from the victim should be obtained confirming their decision and their reason for making it. As part of our victim service assessment, we found that evidence of the victim's decision was absent in 19 of 20 cases we reviewed. This represents a risk that the victim's wishes may not be fully represented and considered before the investigation is closed.

The use of recorded crime outcomes is often inappropriate and supervisory consultation and oversight are often absent

We found that in 13 of the 20 outcome 16 cases we reviewed, the use of this outcome was inappropriate. In addition, supervisory consultation and oversight to the required standard wasn't routinely evident and there seemed to be no justification recorded for the premature closure of these investigations.

We found that 4 of the 20 outcome 15 cases we reviewed were suitable to be administered in this way. In 12 cases we found that not all investigative opportunities had been considered.

The force needs to put in place appropriate governance and monitoring processes to make sure that the use of recorded crime outcomes is appropriate and complies with force and national policies.

Innovative practice

A YouTube video gives advice to burglary victims

The force has produced a five-minute YouTube video that aims to help minimise the amount of evidence that is lost to an investigation before police attend a burglary. It explains how a burglary victim can preserve the scene of their burglary and secure evidence until the police arrive. The video is clearly presented by a crime scene investigator and has subtitles. Control room call handlers forward a link to the video to victims when they report a burglary.

As a result, victims are more likely to know what to expect, to not tidy up and to leave more evidence in place for crime scene investigators. This leads to a greater chance of linking the crime to a suspect.

Main findings

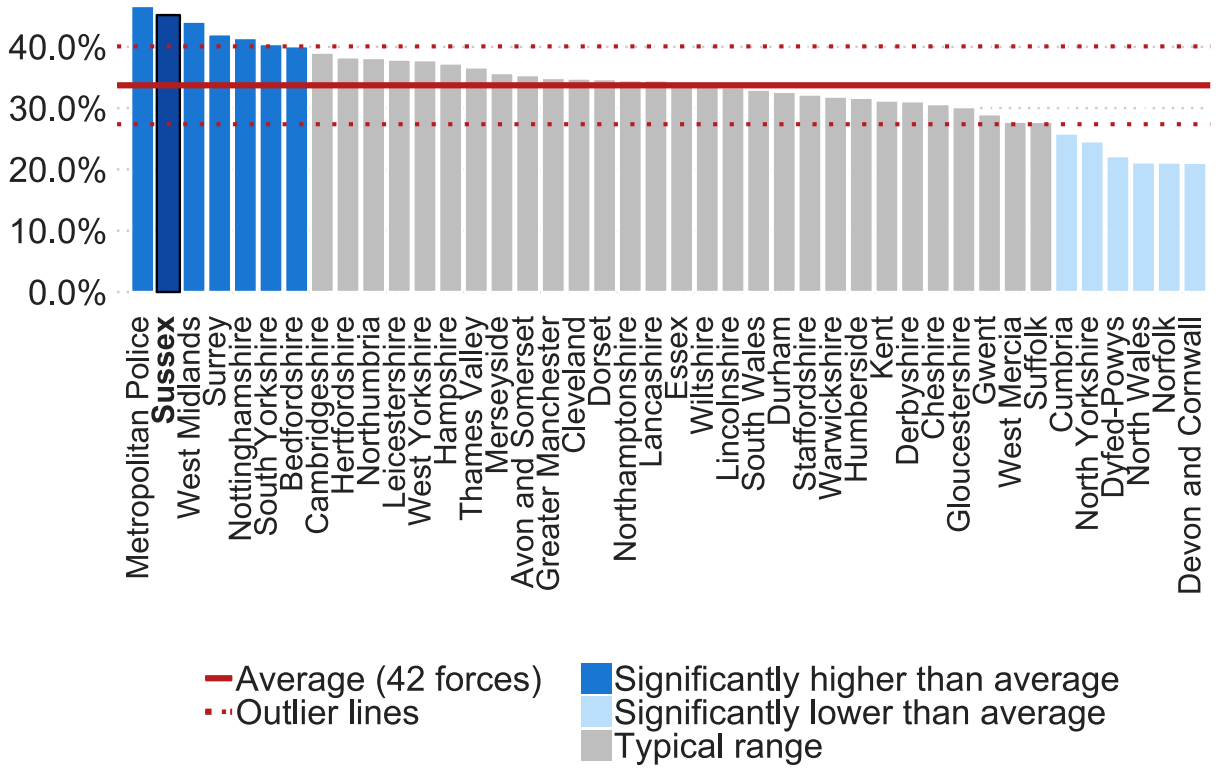
In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force investigates crime.

The force has changed its allocation process for lower-level crime, which should reduce delays in attending incidents

The force changed its allocation process for lower-level crime in October 2022. Prior to this, we found that a lot of lower-level crime was placed in Niche queues for response sergeants to allocate to their officers. Crimes could wait many days for sergeants to allocate officers to attend incidents. Officers told us that they tried to complete investigations in between responding to emergency calls and when working appropriate shifts. Such delays reduce the opportunity to recover further evidence, such as CCTV. This may suggest why so many cases are closed by Sussex Police without a suspect being identified and held to account.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, 45.2 percent of cases investigated by Sussex Police were assigned an outcome of "investigation complete – no suspect identified" (outcome 18). This was statistically significantly above the average across all forces in England and Wales of 33.7 percent, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Proportion of offences assigned an outcome of "investigation complete – no suspect identified" (outcome 18) across forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2022



Note: City of London Police has been excluded from this chart due to the unique makeup of crime in the force area.

In October 2022, the process changed so that lower-level crimes requiring attendance by an officer are allocated, by the control room, to response officers when they are available. This should improve crime investigation standards and provide a better service to victims of crime.

High caseloads and investigative delays are affecting positive outcomes

We spoke to hard-working, committed officers and staff working in criminal investigation department and safeguarding investigation units. They told us that they were struggling with the workloads and were unable to progress investigations in a timely way and give the service to victims they wanted to. Crime demand is outweighing the staff trained and available to investigate it.

We found that officers and staff also had many closed investigations still present on their workload lists. They told us that they were waiting for the crime management unit to complete the admin to finalise them. This caused them frustration because their already full caseloads appeared heavier with all the closed cases still listed. We saw that it was difficult to differentiate between a closed case and an open case, and staff were having to examine each case to check if it was still open.

The force told us that the crime management unit had high backlogs of crimes waiting for finalisation processes to be completed. This was because the force wanted to ensure correct outcome codes were used. The force told us that, as of 17 November 2022, there were 16,291 crimes awaiting outcome codes, which was down from 24,232 the previous month. And 9,941 crimes were awaiting validation.

The force has activated a Gold group and has developed a plan to address its shortcomings in managing investigations and calls for service. The plan is named Operation Unify. While the force implements the plan, it has temporarily moved some of its officers – from other departments – to provide response and control room support.

Arrests are usually timely, but investigations aren't always thorough

We found that investigations were allocated to appropriate teams and in accordance with the crime allocation policy in 89 of 90 cases we reviewed. Overall, effective investigations were carried out in 76 of 90 cases, with the remainder not achieving the investigative standards expected.

Where an arrest was necessary, these were made in an acceptable time, and at the earliest opportunity in 22 of 25 relevant cases we reviewed. We found that there were delays in 6 of the 90 investigations, and in 13 of 87 relevant cases we reviewed, not all appropriate investigative opportunities had been taken. This means that, potentially, some investigations were insufficient, victims had been let down and offenders may have been able to evade justice.

The force is working hard to fill vacant detective posts

As of 31 March 2022, the force had 69 percent of its 635 PIP2 detective posts filled with accredited investigators and 67 percent of its 98 police staff investigator posts filled. There is a national shortage of detectives, and the force is working hard to attract officers to become detectives. One successful way the force has achieved this is by providing student officers with six-month attachments to the criminal investigation department and public protection teams. As a result, several of the student officers have chosen to remain on the teams and train to become detectives.

Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

Sussex Police is adequate at protecting vulnerable people.

Main findings

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

Failing to record crimes and not checking for repeat/vulnerable victims at initial contact affect the force's ability to protect vulnerable people

Earlier in this report we highlighted the significant deterioration in crime recording in Sussex Police. The significant decrease in the recording of violent offences is of most concern and affects the force's ability to protect vulnerable people. Failing to record crime can lead to missed opportunities to prevent further crime, safeguard victims and bring offenders to justice. When considering repeat victims, understanding cumulative risk is important. This means not just viewing the most recent crime or incident in isolation, but also what, if anything, has happened before. This helps the force and multi-agency partners to understand if there has been an increase in risk to the victim or frequency of offences. Given this, failing to record crimes can affect the timeliness and appropriateness of safeguarding activity.

Missed crime recording also means the force's own understanding of its demand may lead to inaccurate resource allocation, or safeguarding and preventative approaches that don't match levels of demand or the nature of it.

We also assessed the force to be inadequate in its response to the public, in particular vulnerable people. It doesn't always check for repeat or vulnerable victims at first contact. We assessed its investigation of crime to require improvement too.

These are significant issues that affect the force's ability to protect vulnerable people. However, we did find examples of positive work the force is doing.

The force contributes positively to multi-agency safeguarding hubs

The force safeguards children and vulnerable adults by working in partnership with other agencies in multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs), one in each division of the county.

Despite increasing demand over the past year, referrals are dealt with promptly. We visited the MASH at Horsham. There were few backlogs of cases to be shared with partner organisations, and each case was triaged within a short time of a referral being made. We saw cross-agency discussions taking place.

We found the MASH environment to be a hive of activity with professionals from different agencies working together to safeguard those most vulnerable.

This positivity extended to the various other safeguarding activities carried out in the MASH. For example, Operation Encompass shares information with schools about children in families affected by domestic abuse, and in the multi-agency risk assessment conference, partner organisations convene to manage high-risk cases of domestic abuse.

Investigators recognise vulnerability and use available powers to protect and safeguard vulnerable people

When officers attend incidents, they complete a single combined assessment of risk form (SCARF) for domestic abuse victims and others in the household. (A SCARF is a form used to complete an assessment of vulnerability and make a referral to external safeguarding organisations.) Officers have had training in the voice of the child and consider events from the perspective of a child present and their living conditions. We reviewed eight SCARF risk assessments. They were detailed and included the voice of the child. Officers have a good understanding of their duty to immediately safeguard vulnerable people.

We found that investigators in the criminal investigation department and safeguarding investigation units had good knowledge of the use of Domestic Violence Protection Notices to give victims immediate protection following an incident of domestic violence. And DVPOs are considered in all appropriate cases, and in many of those cases a DVPO application is actually made. The force outsources to a legal practice for all civil orders and told us that the process was efficient and effective.

To ensure compliance with DVPOs and bail conditions, officers are tasked to attend victims' addresses to check that the perpetrators aren't present and the victims are safe. We spoke to a police officer who had just discovered a breach of conditions and made a swift arrest of the perpetrator.

Victims of high-risk domestic abuse and serious sexual offences are supported by dedicated specialist case workers. These case workers give them timely updates on investigation, point them to further support and consider what ancillary orders and other safeguarding measures are required.

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme is operating well without delays

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) gives a victim the right to ask if their partner might pose a risk to them. This is managed in the victim's hub in each MASH, which ensures prompt disclosure decisions are made with partner agencies. There has been a long-term increase in the number of applications the force receives under the DVDS right-to-ask scheme: from 146 in the year ending 31 March 2019 to 570 in the year ending 31 March 2022.

Despite an increase in DVDS right-to-ask applications over the past three years, the force continues to perform well in this area. Applicants are interviewed by specialist officers using a video platform called Visionable. Appointments are made with victims, and they are sent a video link.

The force told us disclosures were made to applicants within 31 days (21 days in West Sussex), within the national guidance limit of 35 days. Effective and timely operation of this scheme helps people receiving a disclosure to be aware of risks posed to them, and therefore to make informed decisions to protect themselves.

The force is co-ordinating its response to violence against women and girls

The force has created a project lead post for violence against women and girls (VAWG). The post has been funded by the police and crime commissioner for one year to ensure that VAWG is understood by everyone across different teams and departments. The postholder is supported by three VAWG police constables, one in each division. Their role is to ensure the force VAWG objectives are understood and applied locally. They carry out patrols that target the nighttime economy and aim to make streets safer for vulnerable women and target potential offenders. They identify women who may be vulnerable and make sure they come to no harm. In addition, they look to identify and target those who prey on those women. The force told us that in Brighton, over 4,000 VAWG patrols were carried out over the summer of 2022.

We saw bespoke governance plans for stalking, rape and serious sexual offences, and domestic abuse. Each plan had a senior police officer leading it, with action detailed and tracked. These plans should include oversight and assurance of accurate crime recording in relation to these serious offences.

The force collects victim feedback and uses it to improve services

The force collects victim feedback from several sources. It has held a series of workshops in relation to VAWG with hard-to-reach communities. Several recommendations are being implemented following the feedback, aimed at making the force more accessible and giving victims greater confidence in it. The workshops have also led to attendance at the weekly victim's hub meeting by Hersana, which supports black and Asian survivors of domestic abuse. This is positive.

The force, with partner agencies, has conducted a survey of women's experiences in Sussex. A partnership event is planned to take forward the issues raised from the survey.

The force routinely calls victims for feedback on the service they receive and how it might be improved. It also uses digital technology to send out high volumes of SMS text-based surveys for a high percentage of crime types. The force told us that they had 16,000 returns in 18 months. The data from the surveys goes into the force's data system and is used to improve services. It shared positive examples with us. For example, it told us it had introduced less ambiguous language, as victims had thought their case was still being investigated because officers had said the case had been filed, rather than saying the case had been closed.

The force has ordered that when personnel have one-to-one discussions with their supervisor, feedback from the calls and surveys that relates to them personally will be discussed.

The force is taking measures to reduce reoffending, change behaviour and safeguard victims

The complex domestic abuse and stalking unit is a multi-agency team of officers and workers from mental health and drugs/alcohol charities. It targets perpetrator behaviour at an early stage to uncover and address the reasons they offend. The team supports victims, manages a monthly stalking investigation clinic and sets conditions for stalking protection orders.

The force told us that in an 18-month period, for the 48 perpetrators enrolled in the unit's high-harm perpetrator programme, there were positive results:

- 65 percent less domestic abuse-related crime
- 33 percent less non-domestic abuse-related crime
- 60 percent fewer arrests.

The force was awarded a silver award for Community Focus at the UK Public Sector Transformation Awards 2022, for the programme.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

Sussex Police is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Area for improvement

For cases of indecent imagery of children, the force doesn't maximise the benefits of bail

The force told us that bail was granted for the first 28 days and used to allow partner agencies time to manage and mitigate the risk to children. Once the risk had been mitigated, the force said that it allowed the bail to lapse into released under investigation (RUI). The force's current process doesn't maximise the benefits bail can provide. However, it is recognised that the force has introduced a risk management and safeguarding process, to those that are RIU, aimed at ensuring that suspects are monitored while under investigation.

The force should use pre-charge bail for cases of indecent imagery of children to allow police-initiated safeguarding measures to be put in place. Bail poses conditions on what a suspect can and can't do, which can prevent further offending.

Main findings

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

The force monitors people wanted for arrest, and prioritises the most harmful

The force arrests people in a timely way and different resources are available for this purpose. At the daily management meeting, chaired by a senior police officer, priority is given to police activity to seek and arrest suspects likely to cause the most harm to the public. Suspected perpetrators wanted for domestic abuse or stalking are always prioritised. Inspectors are responsible for making sure their teams carry out the arrests each day.

Each division has a priority arrest team and often it is this team that is tasked to make arrests. The divisions can also access the specialist enforcement unit, which is another force resource for arrests. The specialist enforcement unit was introduced in January 2021 and has carried out significant proactive activity to disrupt criminality on the roads.

The force is improving its arrangements to monitor the use of pre-charge bail and RUI

The force has invested in a new operational support team, which is part of the criminal justice and custody department. An inspector is already in place and other posts are being recruited too. Part of the team remit will be to have closer scrutiny of the use of bail, RUI and voluntary attendance for non-custodial interviews. An IT process has been created to manage all bail and RUI cases, with a dashboard that displays information from the custody system. The data is reported to the force improvements board, which senior officers and the Crown Prosecution Service attend.

The force has made efforts to reduce the number of people who are RUI. It told us there were 4,613 suspected perpetrators who were RUI, a reduction from over 14,000 the previous year. The force is aligning itself with changes to the Bail Act. It told us that during the month of October 2022, it bailed 381 people from custody and released 14 people under investigation. This demonstrates that the force now considers using bail for suspects who have been arrested instead of releasing them without restrictions. This is positive as bail conditions can pose restrictions on what a suspect can and can't do, which can prevent further offending and protect vulnerable people.

The force manages dangerous offenders in accordance with national guidance but could improve how it records licence breaches

The force follows approved professional practice by conducting double-crewed, unannounced home visits to registered sex offenders. However, it could improve its recording of breaches of notification requirements. Some of the records we reviewed didn't clearly detail how these breaches were dealt with.

The force prioritises referrals of suspects of indecent imagery of children offences using the Kent internet risk assessment tool

The force uses the Kent internet risk assessment tool to risk assess and prioritise action following referrals of suspects of indecent imagery of children. For cases that are awaiting enforcement action, the force places a 'notify if' marker on its Niche computer system. This will alert the force if the suspect is arrested or comes to police attention. Where child safeguarding concerns are present the force immediately submits a SCARF to inform children's social care. The force told us that when it was focusing efforts on higher-risk cases, it couldn't always action the low-risk cases efficiently. When cases have surpassed execution timescales, the force should ensure that an intelligence refresh is completed regularly to check for an escalation in risk.

The force works in partnership to safeguard children involved in youth-produced images

The force works in partnership, and has information sharing agreements, with Barnardo's and YMCA WiSE. The partnership is called Project Solar. It safeguards children involved in youth-produced indecent images, by collectively risk assessing the images, considering the young person's wider situation and using a multi-agency approach to take appropriate follow-up action. This not only prioritises safeguarding but also allows the appropriate allocation of police resources to high-risk cases.

Neighbourhood policing teams share intelligence about dangerous offenders in their policing area with specialist teams

The inspection found that the neighbourhood policing team constables and PCSOs shared information about dangerous people with specialist teams and vice versa. We were given examples of how the neighbourhood policing team could put safeguarding measures in place when a person was identified by a specialist team as being at risk of becoming a cuckooing victim. And we were told that where a search was being carried out in a neighbourhood by an officer from a specialist team, the local officer was able to share information with the specialist officer about a dangerous person living next door.

The force has proactive equipment to assist with monitoring and detecting breaches of ancillary orders

The force uses E-safe software to complement sexual harm protection orders. The E-safe app is added to offenders' devices and the force is sent an alert if there is an indication of a breach of licence by an offender. The force has increased the number of software licences to 400 and told us that it has had success in detecting breaches this way. A new digital team has been introduced as part of the specialist violent and sexual offender register team, managing the most dangerous offenders. The team has received enhanced digital media training and will support licence monitoring and detection of offences.

The force takes a multi-agency approach to its management of offenders to reduce reoffending and change behaviour

The force is part of the integrated offender management programme. This provides a framework at national, regional and local levels for organisations to work together to reduce crime and reoffending by improving risk management and rehabilitation. The force has good working relationships with probation colleagues to manage repeat offenders and, often, visits to offenders are conducted together. Regular meetings review those offenders currently in the integrated offender management programme, consider new referrals into it and assess the effectiveness of the risk management plan.

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 Sussex Police 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

Sussex Police is adequate at building and developing its workforce.

Area for improvement

Following staff sickness, return-to-work meetings aren't always held immediately on return or even at all

We found examples of when a return-to-work interview had either not been done or had been done some time after the employee returned to work. Consequently, staff felt unsupported when returning to the workplace after a period of absence that affected their well-being. For example, one officer told us that due to an illness that needed hospital treatment, they were absent from work for one month. When they returned to work there was no return-to-work meeting nor a referral to the occupational health unit. Another officer told us they were off sick following witnessing a traumatic incident but had no return-to-work meeting when they returned or consideration of the types of incidents they should attend, to ease back in. This resulted in them going off sick again.

The force contact, control and command department has automated reminders sent to supervisors to do return-to-work meetings, but this isn't the same in other departments.

We found positive examples of good support, but it wasn't consistent across the force.

The force should review its staff sickness policies and procedures. Return-to-work meetings should be formalised, held on the day of return to work where possible and centrally monitored for compliance.

Some supervisors don't have time to hold one-to-one meetings with their team members

In focus groups that we conducted with staff members, we were told that some supervisors didn't have time to conduct one-to-one meetings with staff members so well-being, sickness absence, restrictions, flexible-working arrangements and support required weren't always discussed.

The force has mandatory supervisor training, which is completed in modular format. But we found not all newly appointed supervisors or those in acting roles had attended the training.

The force should train all supervisors, including those in acting roles, with the skills to identify well-being problems in their team and make early interventions. The force should allow supervisors the time and space to hold one-to-one meetings with team members, where well-being is discussed.

Innovative practice

The force has produced interactive presentations to promote an ethical and inclusive culture where personnel feel valued and included

We found a strong feeling of team togetherness and support across the force. The workforce felt included and valued. The force has produced a series of interactive presentations called Let's Talk About. The aim is to help supervisors hold open discussions in their teams about ethical and inclusive issues. Let's Talk About Gender and Let's Talk About Race and Inclusion have been presented to the workforce. The force is planning Let's Talk About Legitimacy next. Staff that we spoke to had viewed the presentations and found them helpful. They gave positive feedback about the open conversations that they promoted across the team. This is good news as encouraging team members to be open about such issues helps promote an ethical and inclusive working environment. Overall, we found a strong feeling of team togetherness and support across the force. The workforce felt included and valued.

A trauma tracker demonstrates the force's focus on early intervention in its welfare provision

The force has created and introduced a trauma tracker with the aim of understanding the combined impact of traumatic-incident attendance on officers and staff. The trauma tracker provides a platform on which to record and monitor these experiences. This supports supervisors in knowing when to intervene and ensure help and support are made available. We spoke to response officers who had received support from the force after they had been highlighted by the trauma tracker for supervisor intervention. This followed their attendance at several traumatic deaths in a short space of time. The officers appreciated the support and care, and were positive about the process.

Main findings

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

The force has an established ethics committee but awareness across the force is limited

The force has an ethics committee that considers and reports on ethical issues raised by personnel. We found that those in leadership roles were aware of it, but it wasn't well known or understood across the force. Greater awareness will help the committee to provide advice, support and assistance to the force.

The force is building its workforce for the future and taking effective action to better reflect its communities

The force is making good efforts to improve the diversity of its workforce. It has increased the proportion of police officers from ethnic minority backgrounds to 3.8 percent as of 31 March 2022. Of the police officer joiners in the year ending 31 March 2022, 6.1 percent were from ethnic minority groups. The proportion of people from ethnic minority backgrounds in Sussex is 6.3 percent – according to the 2011 Census. Retention and progression for officers from ethnic minority groups is supported by a mentoring programme.

In the year ending 31 March 2022 the female representation of police officer joiners was 39.8 percent. The force told us that the detective degree holder entry programme had seen the most success in increasing female representation, with 71.9 percent of joiners from the programme throughout the year ending 31 March 2021 being female.

Recruitment initiatives such as university careers fairs are having a positive effect on recruitment.

The force is improving its well-being services, but some personnel don't have time to access them because their teams are overstretched

Sussex Police and Surrey Police have a joint personnel well-being strategy.

This includes an employee assistance programme, which provides support and counselling services. There are several support groups including multi-faith chaplaincy and groups for those with protected characteristics.

Personnel can access services through the well-being hub on the intranet, described as a one-stop shop for personnel well-being needs. TV screens throughout the police estates display well-being promotional material and signpost people to support. An internal fortnightly publication also provides information and advice.

The force is innovative with its well-being provision. Mini health checks, which check body mass index, blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose, are offered to personnel in the workplace. The sleep project (aimed at assisting shift work staff to sleep better) and the Beachy Head support protocol (giving any personnel involved in an incident at the cliffs an opportunity to talk about the experience and get support) both won awards at the 2021 Oscar Kilo awards. The force's mental health app, Backup Buddy, won a non-policing award for supporting colleagues' mental health (best innovation, Inside Out Awards, April 2021).

We found that personnel were positive about the range of services available and the services they had accessed. However, excessive workloads, teams with vacant posts and lack of supervisor one-to-one discussions are affecting general well-being.

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.

Sussex Police'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

Sussex Police is adequate at operating efficiently.

Areas for improvement

The force doesn't manage current demand effectively

The force has a good understanding of the demand challenges it faces. It has addressed high-demand pressures being experienced through its Operation Unify review, which includes focus on improved response to incoming calls for service.

We found that the force must still ensure that it understands and addresses the longer-term impact of moving resource. Lessons learned also need to be gathered and recorded to ensure the force can adopt a more sustainable approach.
The demand pressures are affecting several areas, often causing failure in service or increased workforce pressure.

The force has responded quickly by implementing changes to its operating model, which are aligned to its demand challenges. These changes can support the force in providing effective services to the public.

The force should make sure that, at an early stage, any changes implemented have an effective process of review. This should be considerate of the increased demand experienced by its workforce through incoming workload and vacancy management. This will make sure that they can provide what is expected or envisaged.

Staff vacancies and increased workforce pressure in several areas of the force are affecting how it meets demand

We found that there were demand pressures in several areas of the force, and staff didn't have effective support. Workloads differed across the force with some feeling more pressured than others. Overtime was often used to manage demand and vacancies were affecting how effectively the force met demand challenges. Solutions that the force had put in place to manage immediate demand lacked long-term planning and it wasn't clear that the plans in place were sustainable.

Innovative practice

The force is making efficient use of its fleet through the effective use of data

The force is using telematics to help it to understand driving behaviours and vehicle use by its personnel, and to manage its fleet more efficiently.

It has analysed data gathered from telematics with demand data. This has helped it to see how the fleet is being used, where vehicles need to be and how they can be used more effectively.

As a result of this in-depth analysis, the force can place vehicles where they are most needed. This, in turn, has allowed it to reduce the number of vehicles, without reducing vehicle availability. The changes have brought substantial savings.

The force constantly reviews the situation so it can adapt to any changes and make sure that there are enough vehicles to support demand.

Main findings

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

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

The force has an effective strategic planning process. There is clear alignment of force plans, its control strategy and the police and crime commissioner's plan. This is supported by effective meetings and decision-making.

The force uses data well to inform strategic leads of the challenges it faces, and there is a commitment to using the resources available to meet identified demand. It is updating its performance framework in line with its operating model changes and the learning from its force management statement process. This work was ongoing at the time of inspection and is being driven by the chief officer team.

The force needs to make sure that its revised performance framework is aligned to community needs.

The force is improving its understanding of capability and capacity

The force has conducted some work in understanding capability and capacity. It has found there are gaps across the organisation, specifically in investigative capability and investigative supervision. The force has demonstrated that plans are in place, but these will take time to have an effect.

We found that the force does respond to capacity issues and there was a good response to the challenges in its control room. However, it needs to assure itself that it can apply the same principles across wider operational areas. We found areas, such as neighbourhood policing and investigation teams, weren't providing what was expected due to a lack of understanding of the impact of moving resources from these areas to meet the force's incoming demand elsewhere.

Although the force has completed some work in mapping capability and capacity, officers are working overtime to manage workloads and are unable to take rest days owed. The understanding of capability and capacity needs to be supported by effective systems to allow the force to manage its resources effectively.

The force has useful data, but this needs to be supported by effective insight and a wider understanding of the pressures the workforce is under.

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

The force has a balanced medium-term financial plan, which is based on realistic assumptions about future costs with a sufficient level of reserves.

The force has identified that significant savings will need to be made over the lifetime of its medium-term financial plan. There is a savings board that has identified savings of £4.4m to achieve a balanced budget for the year ending 31 March 2023; the force is on target to achieve these. Work is ongoing to understand how the force can meet its future financial challenges through further savings. This is supported by work with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy to improve its financial leadership.

The force is developing a more detailed efficiency plan. It was able to demonstrate wider thinking on how it could use its workforce more effectively and has plans for improved collaboration in specific areas where value can be achieved.

The force collaborates to improve services

The force has a good record on supporting collaboration and works with forces in several areas to improve efficiency. There is a strong partnership with Surrey Police. This includes several areas of collaboration, all of which are reviewed to make sure they are driving efficiencies and achieving what was originally set out.

The chief officer group considers wider collaborative opportunities for improved services to the public. As we found during our Surrey Police fieldwork, efficiencies and savings have been made by having managers working across both forces. But there are potential opportunities for further savings, by collaborating at operational level during periods of high demand.

The force improves productivity through technological solutions

The force is committed to making savings and finding more efficient ways to work wherever possible. It has invested in its IT and provides its workforce with up-to-date technology to improve productivity.

The force has an established digital, data and technology department. It has identified where improvements need to be made and has work streams to make sure that these are achieved. It has invested in its dashboards and demonstrates a strong awareness of how the use of data can improve productivity.

The force has a plan to overcome the challenges in recruiting IT specialists

Although the force has challenges in recruiting the specialists it needs to implement certain programmes of work, it has taken steps to address these though a proactive, well-informed approach. By mapping out the specialist skills it needs and aligning these to demand, it has identified the resources required. The force intends to use funding for current vacancies to support the recruitment of highly trained individuals. This will effectively reduce the number of recruits but improve its capability through attracting the specialist personnel required. This piece of work demonstrates wider thinking on what the force needs in order to meet the challenges ahead and how it can improve retention of personnel with the required skills.

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