



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Crime inspection 2014

Suffolk Constabulary

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How effective is the force at cutting crime?

Overall summary

Suffolk Constabulary has seen bigger reductions in crime over the last four years than across England and Wales as a whole. Victim satisfaction with policing services is also higher than the level for England and Wales. The police work well with partners to prevent crime and reduce re-offending.

Neighbourhood policing remains at the heart of the force's approach and safer neighbourhood teams understand their local community concerns and priorities and use a range of tactics to fight crime and prevent it. There is a focus on identifying and protecting the most vulnerable victims.

HMIC found that there is room for improvement in the way the constabulary investigates offending. There is only a limited focus on monitoring and improving the quality of investigations and ensuring the continuing development of the professional investigative skills of officers. The constabulary also needs to improve the way it evaluates and learns from what works so that it can better drive improvements in service quality across Suffolk.

Anti-social behaviour is a clear priority for Suffolk Constabulary; there is strong leadership and good work taking place in the neighbourhood teams to work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour.

This year, HMIC undertook an inspection into the crime data integrity of all 43 police forces, to determine the extent to which police-recorded crime information can be trusted at a national level. HMIC has concerns about Suffolk Constabulary's approach to crime recording, which is not as accurate as it should be. Individual force reports are available at <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/>

How effective is the force at reducing crime and preventing offending?

Good

Suffolk is already a low-crime area and the constabulary has a good track record in reducing crime. Crime has fallen at a faster rate in Suffolk than across England and Wales as a whole over the past four years. The force has seen a relatively large decrease in domestic burglaries on the previous year.

Satisfaction levels among victims with the service from the police are also higher in Suffolk than for England and Wales.

How effective is the force at investigating offending?

Good

Suffolk Constabulary has a strong victim focus and is improving the way it identifies and deals with vulnerable victims to ensure that they receive an appropriate service from both police and partners.

The quality of investigation is generally good, but HMIC found that there is a limited focus on improving the quality of investigations or on developing professional investigative skills among officers.

Extensive analysis of crime types and offenders is undertaken which supports crime fighting, and there is evidence of effective and improving tactics. However, we found limited systematic evaluation of what works, which means that the constabulary is not making the most of opportunities to further improve services for the public.

How effective is the force at tackling anti-social behaviour?

Good

There is a clear and explicit focus on tackling anti-social behaviour with strong leadership within the constabulary. The constabulary continues to invest dedicated resources in anti-social behaviour within the neighbourhood teams through the operational partnership teams, anti-social behaviour officers and in jointly funded posts with partner agencies.

There is a good process in place for safer neighbourhood teams to engage with their communities and understand local concerns and priorities through local priority setting followed by good partnership engagement to secure partner involvement and a coherent response.

How effective is the force at reducing crime and preventing offending?

Good

Neighbourhood policing and staying close to communities is at the heart of how Suffolk delivers policing. The joint work of safer neighbourhood teams and local partners to reduce crime and offending is effective and valued. Local officers have a good understanding of local concerns and are able to focus their activity in joining up with partners to tackle local priorities.

There is strong and purposeful partnership working at both a local and a strategic level. HMIC found a particularly strong focus on joint working to identify, protect and support the most vulnerable victims.

How effective is the force at investigating offending?

Good

How effective is the force at tackling anti-social behaviour?

Good

We found a high level of awareness of the need to identify vulnerability, to assess the risk and provide an enhanced level of service for people considered to be vulnerable.

HMIC found little evidence of any meaningful measurement or evaluation of the effectiveness of the various tactics and activities in preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour.

Introduction

This inspection looks at how effective police forces are at cutting crime. The public expects the police to reduce, prevent and investigate crime, bring suspects to justice and, in conjunction with other services and agencies, care for victims. To assess each force's effectiveness, we looked at three specific areas:

- How effective is the force at reducing crime and preventing offending?
- How effective is the force at investigating offending?
- How effective is the force at tackling anti-social behaviour?

Methodology

During our inspection we analysed data and documents from forces, and conducted in-force inspections. We interviewed the senior officers responsible for crime, neighbourhood policing and victim care in each force. We held focus groups with frontline police officers, investigators and police staff, and observed their activities first hand. We also reviewed 20 crime investigations in each force and interviewed heads of partner organisations such as local authorities. We focused on anti-social behaviour and the offences of burglary dwelling; serious sexual offences; and violence with injury on this inspection. We chose to focus on these offences because they cover the areas of acquisitive and violent crime and the protection of vulnerable people. This has allowed us to make an assessment of how well the force treated the victim throughout the investigation – examining in particular how well officers gathered evidence and how well they were supervised.

Victims are at the heart of this inspection. Victims are entitled to a service from the police; this includes regular information about their case, an opportunity to provide an impact statement where relevant and to be consulted on potential criminal justice outcomes. When the police provide this service to victims, it increases victim satisfaction and builds trust and confidence in the police.

As part of this inspection, we considered how well forces deal with domestic abuse, alongside other offence types. HMIC published a report in March 2014 on how well forces tackled domestic abuse and provided support to victims. As a result of that inspection all forces were asked to provide an action plan setting out how they were improving services to victims of domestic abuse and we have reviewed the action plans developed by forces. The action plans have not informed the judgments made in these reports.

The crime inspection provides HMIC with the first opportunity to test whether the force's approach to improving how it tackles domestic abuse is beginning to have an effect and this forms part of our overall assessment of the force.

How effective is the force at reducing crime and preventing offending?

HMIC looked at how the leadership of the force deploys its resources to reduce the volume of crimes being committed, maximise the quality of victim contact, and ensure that the force focuses on community priorities while mitigating national threats.

We looked at how the force prevents crime, how it uses police tactics such as stop and search powers to prevent and detect crime and reduce offending. We also looked at how the police work with other agencies such as social services to reduce crime.

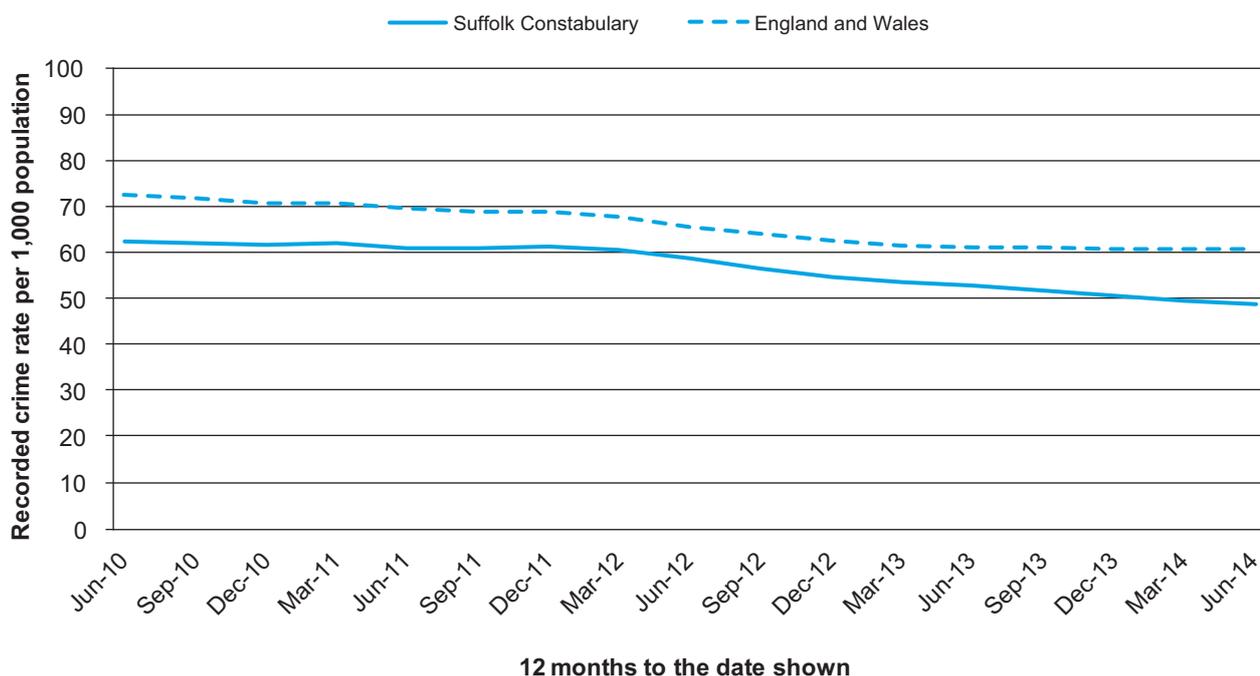
Crime

In 2010 the Home Secretary set a clear priority for the police service to cut crime. When compared with the 12 months to June 2010, recorded crime (excluding fraud) in the 12 months to June 2014 reduced by 22 percent in Suffolk compared with a reduction of 16 percent across all forces in England and Wales.

Over this period, victim-based crime (i.e., crimes where there is a direct victim such as an individual, a group, or an organisation) decreased by 23 percent in Suffolk, compared with a reduction of 16 percent across England and Wales.

Looking at the 12 months prior to the end of June 2014; recorded crime (excluding fraud) in Suffolk reduced by 7 percent, compared with a 1 percent reduction across England and Wales.

Figure: Recorded crime rate (per 1,000 population) between June 2010 and June 2014.



By looking at how many recorded crimes and incidents of anti-social behaviour occur per 1,000 population, we get an indication of how safe it is for the public in that police area. The table below shows crime and anti-social behaviour rates in Suffolk (per 1,000 population) compared with the rest of England and Wales.

12 months to June 2014	Suffolk Constabulary rate (per 1,000 population)	England and Wales total rate (per 1,000 population)
Crime excluding fraud	48.7	60.7
Victim-based crime	42.4	53.9
Sexual offences	1.1	1.2
Violence with injury	5.0	5.9
Burglary in a dwelling*	4.3	8.9
Anti-social behaviour incidents*	32.3	36.8

***Note that anti-social behaviour data is for the 12 months to March 2014 and the rate for burglary in a dwelling is the rate per 1,000 households, not population.**

We have chosen these types of crime to give an indication of offending levels in the force area. We are not judging the effectiveness of the force on recorded crime rates only. For information on the frequency of other kinds of crimes in your area, go to www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmic/crime-and-policing-comparator

Suffolk’s detection rate (for crimes excluding fraud) for the 12 months to the end of March 2014 was 28 percent. This was higher than the 26 percent for England and Wales.

The new crime outcomes framework was introduced in April 2014. It replaces a previous framework for recording how the police finalise investigations through what was known as ‘sanction detections’ (e.g. charges and/or summons). The new crime outcomes framework is designed to support police officers to use their professional judgment to ensure a just and timely outcome which reflects the harm to the victim, the seriousness of the offending behaviour, the impact on the community, and which deters future offending. Data on the full range of outcomes achieved as a result of investigations (not just detections but also, for example, community resolutions such as mediation known as restorative justice) will be available from July 2015 and used in future HMIC inspections.

Meeting the needs of the community

The constabulary is working hard to deliver the strategic objectives in the police and crime commissioner's police and crime plan for the county. The objectives include preventing and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, caring for the most vulnerable victims and solving crime. There remains a commitment in the constabulary to sustaining the neighbourhood policing structure with a strong focus on understanding and responding to local communities' priorities and concerns, in a joined-up way with partner agencies.

Despite severe financial constraints the constabulary has striven to protect frontline policing from cuts. The operational partnership teams and the safer neighbourhood team (SNT) structure are effective in ensuring that the force works well with local communities and partners to understand community priorities and concerns. The SNT staff have a strong ethos of protecting their communities and responding to local needs. The SNTs have well-established mechanisms in place to consult with local communities and then to ensure that they share information with partner agencies to ensure that local priorities are widely understood and there is a more joined-up response for local people.

Quality of victim contact

The close working relationship with the SNT officers and their local communities provides a strong foundation for a victim-centred approach. We found frontline staff to have a clear victim focus, particularly so for vulnerable victims. There is a good process for risk assessing the vulnerability of victims in order to ensure that they receive an appropriate response from the police and any other partner agencies which need to be involved.

The constabulary has introduced an eight-point plan, which officers must follow when investigating any incidents; one of the requirements of the plan is that the officer provides a 'victim contract' which includes clear commitments about keeping the victim updated.

Suffolk Constabulary uses many different methods to contact the public including Twitter, Facebook, email and text messages.

An important measure of the impact of changes to service delivery for the public is how satisfied victims are with the overall service they receive when they seek police assistance. In the 12 months to the end of June 2014, Suffolk had a victim satisfaction rate of 87.7 percent (\pm 1.7 percent) which is higher than the satisfaction rate in England and Wales of 85.0 percent (\pm 0.2 percent). Its current rate is broadly in line with the 87.5 percent (\pm 1.8 percent) recorded for Suffolk in the previous year.

Use of police tactics

Suffolk Constabulary uses a broad range of tactics to prevent crime and offending. The constabulary works particularly well with partners, and the operational partnership teams, which are multi-agency, have a specific remit to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour. The constabulary uses analysis of crime and offending to produce a range of intelligence products which provide local teams with information that can be used to direct their activities to target crime hotspots and the worst offenders. It is encouraging to see that domestic burglaries are down by almost 30 percent over the last year in Suffolk, one of the largest reductions in the country. However HMIC found that the force could have done more to understand the reasons behind this reduction and ensure that tactics are systematically evaluated so that good practice and learning can be shared throughout the force.

Suffolk Constabulary has established processes for identifying and managing organised crime groups. The most serious crime groups, those who pose the greatest threat to the community, are effectively dealt with in collaboration with regional police partners via the regional organised crime unit. However HMIC found there was limited involvement of staff from neighbourhood and response teams. The force plans to introduce training to provide better understanding and ensure greater involvement of managers at a local level to improve the way it tackles organised crime groups.

Partnership working and information sharing

There is strong and purposeful partnership working across the county at both strategic and operational levels, producing some local projects and initiatives which are having a positive impact on crime reduction, for example the Challenge for Change programme and a range of diversionary activities targeting young people. Partnership working is particularly strong in dealing with safeguarding vulnerable victims. The constabulary and its partners in Suffolk have recently established a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), which brings together police, children's and adults' social workers, health staff and voluntary sector organisations to share information, and develop joint approaches to supporting and protecting vulnerable victims. Partners work well with the constabulary's rape investigation team, known as Gemini, to ensure that rape victims are given the support and help that they need, at the same time as ensuring that the offender is brought to justice as quickly as possible.

HMIC found that the approach to local partnership working is improving; as all partners recognise that to maintain and improve service quality and outcomes for local people during a period of reduced spending needs different approaches. There is clear evidence that Suffolk Constabulary is proactive and keen to explore new approaches with partners. The 'Lowestoft Rising' project is an excellent example of police and local partners working together. They are developing an ambitious and radical new approach to deliver long term and sustainable change to the town of Lowestoft making more effective use of existing capacity and resources.

Domestic abuse

In March 2014 HMIC published the results of its inspection of 43 forces on the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic violence, with a focus on outcomes for victims and whether risks to victims are adequately managed, this included clear recommendations for each force about improvements it should make. As a result of this inspection all forces were required to produce and publish an action plan setting out the steps they were taking to improve the services to victims of domestic abuse. This plan should demonstrate that HMIC recommendations are being addressed and also explain how:

- the leadership will ensure the changes necessary and hold the right people to account;
- the police respond when a victim first contacts them (by a 999 call or by visiting a police station) and when they first attend the scene of the incident is improved;
- the force will ensure there is a high quality investigation of all domestic abuse crime;
- victims will be properly supported and offenders properly managed; and
- the training and learning provided to officers ensures they can give the best available response to the victim.

HMIC has made an initial consideration of the action plan submitted by Suffolk Constabulary. We found the plan outlines activity that is in line with the agreed national priorities for forces outlined above. There is evidence of a number of actions with activity in progress, as well as a significant number of other areas where the force has met the national requirements. The HMIC force-specific recommendations are not directly referred to in the plan, but evidence within the action plan was identified to show activity in these areas.

The crime inspection provided us with our first opportunity to test whether changes in the forces' approach to domestic abuse were beginning to have a positive effect.

During the inspection, we found evidence that Suffolk Constabulary has prioritised domestic abuse. Serial offenders are being targeted through a specific initiative – Operation Comfort. The force has also conducted internal audits, which are helping it to evaluate the services it provides to victims of domestic abuse. However, there is no specialist investigation team for domestic abuse cases and HMIC found that there was a slightly fragmented approach to how the victim was contacted.

Summary

Good

- Suffolk is already a low-crime area and the constabulary has a good track record in reducing crime. Crime has fallen at a faster rate in Suffolk than across England and Wales as a whole over the last four years. There has been a relatively large reduction in the number of house burglaries on the previous year.
- The satisfaction level among victims, with the service from the police, is also higher in Suffolk than the England and Wales level.
- Neighbourhood policing and staying close to communities is at the heart of how Suffolk delivers policing. The joint work of safer neighbourhood teams and local partners to reduce crime and offending is effective and valued. Local officers have a good understanding of local concerns and are able to focus their activity in joining up with partners to tackle local priorities.
- There is strong and purposeful partnership working at both a local and a strategic level. HMIC found a particularly strong focus on joint working to identify, protect and support the most vulnerable victims.

How effective is the force at investigating offending?

HMIC looked at the range of police tactics and powers used by the force to investigate offending, including how investigations are conducted, whether persistent offenders are diverted from crime and how people vulnerable to repeat crime are supported. We looked at how the force learns from experience in order to improve professionalism in operational practice and leadership.

Vulnerability, risk and victims

There has been an improvement in the way the force identifies and deals with vulnerability. We heard some positive examples of the force working constructively with partners in identifying and developing new techniques for dealing with so called hidden crimes such as child sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

The staff in the force control room question callers and check any previous history to assess the level of risk, to determine if there are any factors which make a victim particularly vulnerable, such as age, mental health, or if they are a repeat victim. The speed and nature of the police response is determined by this assessment. When officers arrive at the scene they also make an assessment, if they identify any vulnerability, they complete a formal risk assessment which is then shared with partner agencies to ensure that any child or adult safeguarding aspects are addressed by all appropriate agencies.

The constabulary is trialling a new approach to better dealing with people with mental health problems. A police patrol car, staffed by a police officer and a mental health nurse, is available to be sent to any incident where mental health may be an issue. This means that a professional assessment can be made immediately, ensuring that the force can provide the most appropriate response as quickly as possible.

HMIC found a strong victim focus among frontline officers, who were very clear on the importance of their role in identifying and dealing properly with vulnerability. Although many staff are aware of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, there has been limited training so far to ensure that all officers understand the specific requirements of the Code. This means that the constabulary cannot be sure victims get all of their entitlements. However we did find that the specialist teams dealing with rape and sexual offences have a good understanding of the Code and work well with voluntary sector partners to provide specialist support to victims throughout any investigation and court proceedings.

Investigation

Officers are provided with effective briefing and intelligence to fight and detect crime. Resources are well-targeted to deal with the greatest threats and risks to the community from crime. We found some examples of high quality crime investigations in the specialist teams.

During this inspection, HMIC reviewed a sample of 20 files from recent investigations carried out in Suffolk. We found some examples where house-to-house enquiries had not been carried out in the vicinity of the crime, which means that valuable sources of evidence may have been missed. Within the constabulary there is a limited focus on the improvement of investigative quality or the development of professional investigative skills among officers. Although supervisors recognise the importance of intrusive scrutiny in ensuring investigations are conducted effectively, HMIC found that there has been minimal guidance or direction for supervisors in carrying out this role, which means that in the absence of any other form of scrutiny or quality assurance, the force cannot be confident that investigations are consistently being carried out effectively.

The use of the eight-point investigation plan is a positive step in developing an improved approach to assuring that there is a consistent approach to investigations. It is widely understood and adhered to; and provides a solid framework within which officers can be clear what is expected of them in carrying out an investigation to the required standard.

Tackling repeat and prolific offenders

The force has good partnership arrangements in place for managing the most prolific offenders who pose a risk to the public. The force recognises that preventing re-offending requires a joined-up approach from all partners locally. It operates an integrated offender management (IOM)¹ approach which brings together the police and local authorities and also involves the probation service, the prison service, the Department for Work and Pensions and housing providers. The IOM service has been strengthened recently through a joint approach with Norfolk Constabulary, which has led to Suffolk Constabulary putting additional police officers into the IOM team, creating two IOM hubs in Suffolk where previously there was only one. According to the force's definition, Suffolk Constabulary had 99 prolific offenders as of 31 July 2014. The additional capacity from the joint approach with Norfolk means that Suffolk Constabulary expects to increase the numbers of offenders that it can deal with to a total of 150 offenders.

Learning from experience

HMIC found that there is evidence of effective investigation of offending in Suffolk, for example the constabulary has a higher rate of successful detections than the rate for England and Wales. There is also much good work going on through effective partnership working both at a strategic level and in the neighbourhood teams, although we found that the

¹ There is no standard national definition of who should be considered for integrated offender management arrangements. In Suffolk a multi-agency selection panel decides, using all available information together with a matrix system to identify the most prolific offenders.

force is not doing as much as it could to evaluate what works and share this learning so that good practice can be replicated. This means that the constabulary risks losing opportunities to improve services and outcomes for victims by not making the most of successful work. The force is aware that it needs to do more to understand what works and share learning and good practice. HMIC is encouraged by the recent move to join up with Norfolk Constabulary to jointly commission a project to develop an 'evidence-based' policing approach.

Recommendations

- Within three months, Suffolk Constabulary should develop and commence the implementation of an action plan to improve the quality of investigations which will ensure that:
 - (a) investigating officers are aware of the standard required and have the professional skills and expertise to fulfil their duties;
 - (b) supervisors know what is expected of them in driving up standards; and
 - (c) there is appropriate monitoring and oversight of investigative quality.
- Within six months, Suffolk Constabulary should ensure that there are methods in place to:
 - (a) systematically review and evaluate the benefits from both current tactics and new crime fighting and anti-social behaviour initiatives;
 - (b) systematically capture learning and good practice in crime prevention and local problem solving; and
 - (c) share learning and good practice across the force and with partners.

Summary

Good

- Suffolk Constabulary has a strong victim focus and is improving the way it identifies and deals with vulnerable victims to ensure that they receive an appropriate service from both police and partners.
- The quality of investigation is generally good, but HMIC found that there is a limited focus on improving the quality of investigations or on developing professional investigative skills among officers.
- Extensive analysis of crime types and offenders is undertaken which supports crime fighting, and there is evidence of effective and improving tactics. However, we found limited systematic evaluation of what works, which means that the constabulary is not making the most of opportunities to further improve services for the public.

How effective is the force at tackling anti-social behaviour?

HMIC looked at how the force prevents and tackles anti-social behaviour; in particular the way victims are treated. We looked at the quality and consistency of victim contact across the force and whether victims of anti-social behaviour were dealt with in a comparable way to victims of other crimes.

Community contact and victim care

There is a clear and explicit focus on tackling anti-social behaviour with strong leadership within the force, which feeds down from the police and crime plan through the force objectives into operational delivery plans.

Suffolk Constabulary remains committed to the value of safer neighbourhood teams (SNTs) and despite severe financial constraints over recent years has protected neighbourhood teams as far as possible from cuts. In addition the police and partners in Suffolk have strengthened the SNTs through the operational partnership teams (OPTs), which are locally based teams made of joint police and local authority posts with a specific remit to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour. Each of the SNTs has a good understanding of their local community concerns and priorities. They engage well with local people through local forums where issues are discussed and actions agreed and followed up.

There has been, however, comparatively limited use of police powers to deal with anti-social behaviour; between 19 November 2013 and the end of July 2014, Suffolk Constabulary received reports from 9,716 victims of anti-social behaviour. One anti-social behaviour dispersal orders was issued, and seven anti-social behaviour orders made.

Partnership working

The SNT structure works well to enable neighbourhood officers to maintain close and regular communication with their communities. They are able to understand local concerns and priorities through local priority setting, followed by good partnership engagement to secure partner involvement and a coherent response. The operational partnership teams ensure that information is shared with the police and their partner agencies so that joined-up solutions can be found to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour. Local partnerships are strong and constructive and we found some good examples of joint work to divert young offenders away from crime and anti-social behaviour.

Improving services to the public

The incidence rate of anti-social behaviour is lower in Suffolk than the rate for England and Wales. In the 12 months to March 2014, Suffolk Constabulary recorded 23,744 incidents of anti-social behaviour. This is an increase of 2 percent against the previous 12 months.

Preventing anti-social behaviour and caring for vulnerable people are two of the four key priorities in the police and crime plan; this is reflected in a strong focus from the police leadership team and through the constabulary's operational delivery plans which set out a series of actions to improve the service. There are a wide range of tactics used by the force, many in conjunction with partners, to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour. We found a high level of awareness among neighbourhood officers of the importance of their role in intervening at an early stage to prevent an escalation of anti-social behaviour and identifying people who may be particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of anti-social behaviour or hate crime.

There is a joint approach to assessing risk with partners and developing problem solving approaches, using a shared database. However we found a lack of structure and clear purpose around these problem-solving plans, they tend to consist of a record of actions taken rather than directing a clear pathway to a solution. Once again we found that capturing and sharing learning from problem-solving techniques being used in the various neighbourhood teams is not consistent or systematic.

Summary

Good

- There is a clear and explicit focus on tackling anti-social behaviour with strong leadership within the force. The constabulary continues to invest dedicated resources in anti-social behaviour within the neighbourhood teams through the operational partnership teams, anti-social behaviour officers and in jointly funded posts with partner agencies.
- There is a good process in place for safer neighbourhood teams to engage with their communities and understand local concerns and priorities through local priority setting followed by good partnership engagement to secure partner involvement and a coherent response.
- We found a high level of awareness of the need to identify and risk assess vulnerability and provide an enhanced level of service for people considered to be vulnerable.
- HMIC found little evidence of any meaningful measurement or evaluation of the effectiveness of the various tactics and activities in preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour.

What each judgment means

HMIC uses four categories for making judgments, two are positive and two are negative. The categories are:

- outstanding;
- good;
- requires improvement; and
- inadequate.

Judgment is made against how well the force cuts crime. In applying the categories HMIC considers whether:

- the way the force is cutting crime and reducing offending is good, or exceeds this standard sufficiently to be judged as outstanding;
- the force requires improvement in the way it cuts crime, and/or there are some weaknesses; or
- the force's effectiveness at cutting crime is inadequate because it is significantly lower than is expected.