

PEEL 2021/22

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Bedfordshire Police

Contents

Overall summary	1
Our judgments	1
Important changes to PEEL	1
HM Inspector's observations	2
Reducing crime assessment	5
Providing a service to the victims of crime	6
Victim service assessment	6
Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect	9
Main findings	9
Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour	12
Main findings	12
Responding to the public	15
Areas for improvement	15
Main findings	17
Investigating crime	20
Areas for improvement	20
Innovative practice	22
Main findings	22
Protecting vulnerable people	26
Area for improvement	26
Main findings	26
Managing offenders and suspects	29
Innovative practice	29
Main findings	29
Disrupting serious organised crime	33

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce	34
Area for improvement	35
Main findings	35
Strategic planning, organisational management and value for money	39
Area for improvement	39
Main findings	39

Overall summary

Our judgments

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

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

We also inspected how effective a service Bedfordshire 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 this year has seen the most significant changes yet.

We are moving to 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 will now include 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 this year with those from previous PEEL inspections. 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

Bedfordshire Police continues to improve and I congratulate the force on its performance in keeping people safe and reducing crime. But it does need to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service.

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

The force's approach to integrated offender management has had impressive results

I congratulate the force on being the first to achieve an outstanding grading for the way it manages offenders and suspects.

Its approach to [integrated offender management](#) is highly effective. It has demonstrably reduced reoffending for serious offences like burglary and those involving domestic abuse. The force works well with other organisations to achieve these reductions. Together, the organisations involved in the approach have an in-depth understanding of the financial benefits of reducing reoffending in Bedfordshire.

High-risk child abuse investigations are benefiting from effective investment in technology

The force's digital triage vans reduce the need for officers to seize multiple electronic devices from suspects and have dramatically reduced long-standing delays in [digital forensics](#).

The force's commitment to invest in this technology, using financial support from the Bedfordshire police and crime commissioner, is impressive. We have identified this as innovative practice so other forces can learn from it.

The force's approach to stop and search is open and effective

I am pleased to see that the force is still performing well in relation to stop and search.

Its external scrutiny panel is important in making sure officers act with integrity and maintain public confidence. The panel consists of local residents. It provides robust scrutiny of stop and search encounters, reviewing footage from officers' [body-worn video](#) and giving feedback on this. The force is very open to this feedback and monitors trends so it can find ways to improve.

These arrangements have again led to the force having impressive results in our stop and search audit. I congratulate the force on this achievement.

A new community policing model is helping to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour

The force has geographically reorganised its community policing model since our last inspection. It is now aligned with local authority area boundaries and is helping to prevent a range of crimes and [anti-social behaviour](#) throughout the county.

I am encouraged to see that because the force has a properly resourced response team, community policing officers aren't now routinely being removed from problem-solving work for other tasks.

The force contact centre is not able to provide a consistently effective service to the public

The public isn't always well served by the force contact centre (FCC). Staff shortages mean that emergency calls are prioritised. This leads to frequent and sometimes lengthy delays in handling non-emergency calls.

FCC staff work in a stressful environment. They don't always identify vulnerable callers or give advice on preventing crime or preserving scenes when this would help.

The working arrangements within the FCC don't allow time for regular staff training and important updates. Indeed, there is a reliance on staff receiving training on days off. This isn't sustainable, especially as the force has identified the FCC as a department with higher staff welfare risks.

I am encouraged that the force recognises these problems and is currently recruiting experienced staff into the FCC.

Investigations still lack appropriate oversight

The force is still not supervising investigations enough, to make sure their quality is consistently high and that their outcomes comply with national crime recording standards.

In our last inspection of the force, we noted a lack of supervision of investigations and identified this as an area for improvement (AFI). I recognise that the force has recently made efforts to improve the quality of its investigations through better supervision.

It is important that the force now prioritises this. It has a lack of detectives and an increasingly inexperienced workforce which needs support and guidance.

Tri-force collaboration still isn't providing a consistently effective occupational health service

The force's long-standing collaboration with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire constabularies is still not providing an effective occupational health service.

The force's approach to protecting the health and wellbeing of its staff is effective. But too often when its staff need help and support from occupational health

professionals, they face delays. This risks undermining the high levels of confidence the staff have in the force. It also leads to inefficiency as the delays could mean some staff aren't used on the front line.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MP' followed by a stylized flourish and a diagonal line.

Matt Parr

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.

Bedfordshire Police has a good understanding of demand for its services, based on regular analysis of each area of its work. This helps it assess risk accurately and focus its resources where they are most needed.

The force has a problem-solving culture which is most developed in its community policing teams and the units that work on serious and organised crime.

It engages well with all its communities, including those that the police sometimes find it hardest to reach. Its strong links with third sector organisations help it achieve better lives for vulnerable people by reducing their risk of harm. The force is good at diverting young people away from gangs and exploitation. It welcomes new opportunities to work with other organisations on shared objectives.

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

- Its excellent approach to reducing reoffending through the Bedfordshire Integrated Offender Management process.
- Its effective involvement of communities, which helps it understand what is important to local residents.
- Its effective community policing model, which is aligned to local authority boundaries and follows the College of Policing Neighbourhood Policing Guidelines.

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

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

- Not always identifying vulnerability or repeat victims when people contact the force.
- Not always taking opportunities to give people advice on preventing crime or preserving scenes when they contact the force.
- Not completing initial needs assessments in all appropriate cases, which could lead to victims not receiving the care they are entitled to and losing confidence in the investigation.

Providing a service to the victims of crime

Victim service assessment

This section describes our assessment of the service victims receive from Bedfordshire Police, from the point of reporting a crime through to the outcome. As part of this assessment, we reviewed 130 case files as well as 20 cautions, [community resolutions](#) and cases where a suspect was identified, but the victim didn't support or withdrew support for police action. While this assessment is ungraded, it influences graded judgments in the other areas we have inspected.

The force answers emergency calls quickly but needs to answer non-emergency calls more quickly and make sure it identifies repeat or vulnerable victims

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

The force answers emergency calls quickly. But it needs to reduce the time it takes to answer non-emergency calls as it isn't meeting national standards for these. When calls are answered, the victim's vulnerability isn't always assessed using a structured process and repeat victims aren't always identified. This means these factors may not be taken into account in the response given to the victim. Not all victims are being given advice on preventing crime or preserving evidence. This may lead to losing evidence that would support an investigation and make it harder to prevent further crimes against the victim.

The force doesn't always respond to calls for service in a timely way and doesn't always identify victims' needs

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 information obtained after the call.

We found that the force wasn't always responding to calls within appropriate timescales. This was due to not having enough staff available and a lack of clarity over response targets. The force used three categories for responding to incidents: 'fast', requiring an immediate response; 'fixed', where an appointment was made; and 'no response'. But within the 'fast' category, no distinction was made between incidents that needed an immediate response and those that were a lower priority.

This meant victims couldn't be given even an estimated time of arrival, and may have increased the risk they faced. In some cases, calls that needed an appointment were incorrectly categorised as 'fast' due to a lack of appointment slots. This situation increases the pressure on staff and may make it harder for the force to respond effectively to incidents.

Following our victim services assessment, the force has introduced a five-tier response model, which is covered in the ['Responding to the public'](#) section below.

The force allocates crimes to appropriate staff and victims are promptly informed if a crime is not going to be investigated further

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 that the force's arrangements for allocating recorded crimes for investigation aligned with its policy, and crimes were always allocated to the most appropriate department for further investigation. Victims were always updated promptly if their report wasn't going to be investigated further. This is important to give victims an appropriate level of service and manage their expectations.

The force doesn't always carry out effective or 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 investigations were sometimes not carried out in a timely manner, and that relevant lines of enquiry were often not completed. There was often a lack of effective supervision of investigations and investigation plans, which resulted in some ineffective investigations. And victims weren't always kept updated about the progress of an investigation. This failure to carry out effective and timely investigations means that in too many cases victims are being let down and offenders aren't being brought to justice.

When domestic abuse victims withdrew their support for a prosecution, the force didn't always consider the use of orders designed to protect the victims (such as a [Domestic Violence Protection Notice](#) or [Order](#)). These are an important way of safeguarding against future abuse. The [Victims' Code of Practice](#) requires forces to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage to decide whether victims need additional support. The force isn't always doing this, which means not all victims get the appropriate level of service.

The force doesn't always follow national guidelines and rules when finalising reports of crime

The force should make sure it follows national guidance and rules for deciding the outcome 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.

Some offences can be dealt with through a caution or community resolution, if this is appropriate for the offender and the views of the victim are considered. We found that the force's use of these outcomes mostly met the relevant national criteria. But in some cases relating to domestic violence, the force used community resolutions incorrectly and didn't seek or consider victims' views.

Where a suspect is identified but the victim does not support (or withdraws support for) police action, a force should keep a record of the victim's decision so it can close the investigation. In some cases we found no evidence of this happening. This creates a risk that victims' wishes may not be fully considered before the crime is finalised. Investigations were sometimes incorrectly finalised due to difficulties with evidence when investigative opportunities hadn't been taken. This means that victims may be denied justice and offenders not held to account.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Good

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

Main findings

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

The force engages with all its diverse communities to understand and respond to what matters to them

The force is effective at involving its diverse communities in its work. Its community cohesion team has kept up strong links with local residents despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This team also monitors local and national community tensions so the force can respond quickly to them.

The force works effectively with groups traditionally considered harder to reach. It has worked with charities to help keep homeless people and sex workers safe and reduce their harm – for example, through drug and alcohol support programmes.

The force is developing its digital engagement. Staff are using social media more frequently and effectively, creating more opportunities to understand and respond to what matters to communities.

Discussions with the local community influence policing priorities. Officers establish an understanding of local priorities with the community and local elected representatives at quarterly meetings. Some of these priorities, such as the inconsiderate parking of HGVs, are acted upon by officers despite not being force priorities. The community policing inspector gives progress updates for each priority at these meetings.

The force offers the public a wide range of ways to get involved in its work. About 350 local people take part in its 'citizens in policing' initiative. This includes police support volunteers, police cadets, student internship programmes and community watch schemes. Volunteer special constables give the force important support and are deployed effectively.

The force makes sure its workforce understands unfair behaviour

Unfair behaviour from police forces can damage public confidence. The force offers a range of training opportunities to its workforce to address unfair behaviour, including material on unconscious bias and stereotyping.

Probationary constables are given comprehensive training on stop and search, including communication skills training.

The force has recently introduced an annual stop and search training event for all officers. This includes material on unfair behaviour, provided by a community representative who has professional experience of working with the police in this area.

The overwhelming majority of stop and searches are carried out on reasonable grounds

During our inspection we reviewed 135 stop and search records from between 1 January and 31 December 2020. Based on this, we estimate that 94.8 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.7 percent) of all stop and searches by the force during this period were reasonable. This is slightly lower than in our review the previous year, when the force had the highest proportion nationally of stop and searches with reasonable grounds at 95.8 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.6 percent).

All 32 records we reviewed for stop and searches on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people had reasonable grounds recorded. This suggests that Bedfordshire Police is highly effective at making sure its officers use [stop and search powers](#) reasonably and give valid explanations to people who are searched.

The force understands and improves the way it uses stop and search powers

The force has a stop and search scrutiny panel consisting of trained members of the community. The panel reviews body-worn video footage of randomly selected stop and searches. It then gives the force and the officer who carried out the stop and search a graded judgment and feedback. If the panel has significant concerns, it refers the incident to the professional standards department so it can be assessed for any inappropriate behaviour.

The panel also recommends ways the force can improve this work. For example, some officers were switching on their body-worn cameras too late to record the beginning of stop and searches. In response, the force introduced an internal communications campaign to make sure officers switched the cameras on earlier.

We observed a panel meeting and found that its assessment of stop and searches was rigorous. But it only had enough time to assess four videos. The force should consider ways to increase this number without unduly increasing the burden for panel members. The panel is given data on stop and search, including ethnicity data, to help its members identify any disproportionate use of these powers.

The data also shows which officers use stop and search powers the most, which may indicate possible overuse. Officers who have used stop and search powers frequently and effectively have been trained as 'stop and search champions'. They advise and

support less experienced colleagues in using these powers, to help improve performance and strengthen community confidence.

Governance structures support effective stop and search

A quarterly stop and search meeting attended by senior leaders, including the force lead for stop and search, provides effective governance. Attendees are provided with a range of data which allows them to identify and act on any disproportionate use of powers.

Supervisors regularly review stop and search encounters, including assessing their officers' body-worn video footage.

The force understands and improves the way it uses force

Supervisors dip-sample encounters where force is used to identify learning opportunities and keep standards high. This includes assessing body-worn video footage.

The force has a use of force scrutiny panel consisting of trained local residents. The panel uses the same assessment method as the stop and search scrutiny panel and reviews officers' body-worn video footage.

In the meeting we observed, the panel assessed a range of encounters. These included the restraint of a man with a mental illness in police custody, and a man arrested following an armed policing operation at a residential address. The panel's assessment was rigorous and the force's willingness to allow scrutiny of armed operations indicates its openness.

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

Good

Bedfordshire Police is good at prevention and deterrence.

Main findings

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

The force prioritises the prevention of crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability through clear governance structures

The force has an effective approach to community policing that prioritises preventing crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability. It spent 10.4 percent of its total budget on community policing in 2020/21 – slightly more than the average across England and Wales of 8.8 percent.

The force has improved its approach to community policing since our last inspection. Each police neighbourhood area is now aligned to local authority boundaries. This means that where joint action between the police and local authority is required, it is clear which community team is responsible.

The force has a community policing strategy, and an effective senior management meeting structure. Senior leaders are given important information on crime trends, allowing them to compare areas and allocate resources effectively.

The force is effective at problem solving and works with other organisations to prevent crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability

The force uses problem-solving techniques to tackle a range of crime and anti-social behaviour. It has recently worked with retailers to address shoplifting and chronic anti-social behaviour that was affecting local businesses. This has significantly reduced these problems and improved links with retailers.

The force uses problem-solving plans which follow the [OSARA](#) (Objective, Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) model. The plans we reviewed were frequently updated, focused on prevention and well supervised.

Recently, the force has introduced three designing out crime officers (DOCOs). They advise the public and officers on making changes to the environment, such as building design, to help prevent crime and anti-social behaviour. Officers value

this specialist approach and routinely consider involving DOCOs in their problem-solving plans.

The force works closely with other organisations to help prevent crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability. In Luton, police community support officers and local authority staff have formed a priority anti-social behaviour team. To target its work, the team uses a 'community trigger' process. People who repeatedly experience anti-social behaviour within a six-month period are risk assessed, and high-risk cases are then allocated to the team. This means the people most at risk are identified quickly and receive early, co-ordinated support to address the problem. The force hopes to use this way of working throughout the county in future.

Community policing teams help reduce the harm caused by serious and organised crime

Community policing teams play an essential role in supporting the force's response to serious and organised crime, including by gathering intelligence. Some community policing staff are designated as [lead responsible officers \(LROs\)](#) for particular organised crime groups. Their role is to co-ordinate action against these groups to prevent harm to communities. LROs receive enhanced training. The force has now also trained local authority staff to raise their awareness of serious and organised crime in Bedfordshire.

The force uses community policing officers effectively to manage demand

We found that Bedfordshire's community policing teams have often been asked to help their colleagues in response teams to deal with spontaneous incidents. In the past, this has led to community staff being removed from their duties and deployed in urban centres at very short notice. Sometimes this has limited their ability to carry out problem-solving work. But since our last inspection this has changed. Response teams are fully staffed and a new force response model is better at establishing priorities for response officers' work.

And the force is now using volunteer officers from its special constabulary more effectively to manage demand. Many of these officers are now assigned to community teams and provide valuable support, particularly when those teams are short staffed.

Analytical support to community teams has improved

The analytical resources available to community policing operations have improved. An analyst now supports community teams by identifying incidents involving high-volume callers, and those with repeat victims and locations. Frequently these incidents involve vulnerable people. Officers then work in partnership with other organisations to prevent further incidents and safeguard people where necessary.

The force now has a sergeant responsible for evaluating problem-solving activity and highlighting effective examples of this. This helps other departments less experienced in problem solving learn from the work of community teams.

Community officers sometimes struggle to prioritise their workloads

Tasking requests to community teams from other areas of the force are frequent and not always accompanied by clear instructions about what is expected of officers. This is causing frustration.

Briefings for community staff starting their shifts can be more than 30 slides long. Some of the information they contain is important and some is routine. But the sheer amount can be overwhelming and doesn't help officers determine the most urgent priorities.

Responding to the public

Requires
improvement

Bedfordshire Police requires improvement at responding to the public.

Areas for improvement

The force should improve how it responds to non-emergency public calls for service and reduce the abandonment rate and wait times

The number of calls to the force switchboard and the force [101](#) service that are abandoned is above the national required standard.

Our victim service assessment found the force has a high level of abandonment of calls to its 101 service. This occurs at the first point of contact or later when a caller is transferred.

The force has a performance framework which monitors abandonment rates for these calls on a daily, monthly and annual basis. But this framework doesn't lead to improvements being made because staff shortages within the force contact centre (FCC) mean there aren't enough staff to take both emergency and non-emergency calls.

Understandably, the force prioritises emergency calls. But until staffing shortages in the FCC are addressed, victims of crime will continue to experience delays. Delays in calls being answered will lead to more calls being abandoned and reduce public confidence in the force's ability to respond.

The force should make sure that repeat callers, and those that are vulnerable, are routinely identified

Some callers may be repeat victims of crime or anti-social behaviour. But the force doesn't routinely check whether people who call them are repeat callers or are vulnerable.

Our victim service assessment found that checks to identify repeat callers and vulnerable callers were not always completed, and that the force didn't always record that a victim was vulnerable when this would have been appropriate.

This means that callers who are repeat victims of crime may not get an appropriate response because FCC staff passing information over the radio to response officers may not be aware of their situation. This could lead to the force missing opportunities to prevent incidents of repeat victimisation.

The force should make sure that alternative methods of contact are well publicised, adequately resourced, and subject to performance management, risk assessment, and quality assurance which is consistent with traditional methods of contact

The force's response to online contact has been too slow for some time. In [our last inspection in 2018/19](#) we found that the FCC had no dedicated web chat team, so the force wasn't always responding to this method of contact. This has not improved.

Delays happen because there are not enough staff dedicated to alternative methods of contact, such as digital communication. These delays could result in victims abandoning their attempt to contact the police.

The force should make sure it has the capacity to meet demand, and that its online response is consistent with the response to other methods of contact. This includes having a timely and effective process to identify risk and vulnerability. The force hasn't developed a way of assessing risk or vulnerability in the alternative methods of contact it offers. This may lead to people at risk or those with vulnerabilities not being appropriately assessed and responded to.

The force should make sure that call takers give appropriate advice on the preservation of evidence and crime prevention

Force policy states that staff taking calls must give advice on preserving crime scenes, but this is not being applied.

Our victim service assessment found that callers were not always being given advice on preserving forensic evidence when this would have been appropriate. This means that evidence could have been lost or degraded, setting back investigations. And advice on preventing crime was not being given effectively and consistently to victims of crime. This means the force is not routinely taking opportunities to prevent further crimes.

Advice on preserving scenes, when it is appropriate, will increase the chances of successful investigations by securing better forensic evidence. Crime prevention advice reduces repeat victimisation and may reduce victims' fear of crime.

Main findings

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

Call handlers are not using THRIVE to identify risk

The force uses a structured triage process called [THRIVE](#) to prioritise calls based on risk. THRIVE risk assessments are carried out when callers contact the FCC. But we found that these were often superficial, with single-word responses given for each of the risk areas. This makes it difficult for staff to decide which calls need an immediate response and which are less urgent.

The force's crime and incident management policy explains how control room staff should apply THRIVE to calls for service. The policy says staff should carry out the necessary and proportionate checks to understand the wider context of the incident being reported and who it involves. This information must then be given to the officer attending the incident so they can understand the situation.

Without an accurate THRIVE assessment, important information about the vulnerability of people involved in the incident may not be given to officers attending it. This could mean those people don't get the right safeguarding or support.

Working hours in the control room don't yet achieve the right balance between flexibility and needs

Staff shortages in the FCC mean that staff must prioritise emergency calls over requests that tend to be less urgent, such as 101 calls or web chats. This may be unavoidable given current resources, but it leads to delays in answering non-emergency calls. The force has also determined that staff are sometimes not available at busier times because they have flexible working hours, which don't meet the needs of the public or the force.

Work is taking place to reach the right balance between meeting the demands of the FCC and allowing staff to work hours that suit them. At the time of our inspection the force was recruiting 20 police constables to help reduce staff shortages in the FCC.

The force is unable to train its staff to make its initial contact with the public more professional

There is a lack of consistent training and development in the FCC. This means it is more difficult to make sure FCC staff have the skills to identify vulnerable callers, or give advice on preserving evidence or preventing crime.

The current staff shift pattern doesn't include any time for training or continuous professional development. Some staff are being given brief training during their shift, but sometimes this isn't possible because the FCC is too busy.

The force asks FCC staff to attend training days on their rest days on a voluntary basis. Some staff attend these and others don't. This leads to inconsistent levels of training in the FCC workforce.

And importantly, staff receiving training on rest days isn't consistent with the FCC's status as priority area for force wellbeing measures. It may increase the current wellbeing risks in the FCC. The force is seeking ways to address this gap.

The force has identified wellbeing risks in the FCC and begun to address them

The force identified that workloads in the FCC and staff shortages were causing low morale and stress among staff. It acted quickly to assess the risks to wellbeing in the FCC and introduce a wellbeing action plan. This plan provides practical measures to support staff such as more comfortable desks and visits to the FCC from wellbeing dogs to reduce stress.

But until staffing levels in the FCC are improved at busy times and staff are given training opportunities which they don't have to sacrifice their days off for, risks to staff wellbeing are likely to continue.

The force is improving its response to incidents so it can more effectively protect victims and secure evidence

At the time of our victim service assessment, the force used a response model with three categories for incidents: 'fast', requiring an immediate response; 'fixed', where an appointment was made; and 'no response'.

We found that there weren't enough appointment slots available. This led to some incidents being categorised as 'fast' when they would be better dealt with through an appointment. In these cases the response grading was based upon the availability of appointments rather than THRIVE assessments.

We also found that the FCC wasn't routinely passing important information to the officers attending incidents. This led to officers carrying out their own research on force systems before attending an incident to find the background information they needed. This caused unacceptable delays in the police response.

Before our victim service assessment, the force had already decided that its response model was ineffective and made plans to introduce a new response model with five response categories.

The force has now introduced the new response model and incidents are now managed more effectively. This is because risk and vulnerability are being determined more accurately using all five categories. Supervisors in the FCC now manage incidents based on risk and have a better understanding of what is urgent.

Importantly, the FCC is now passing information to officers over the radio. This may improve response times because officers aren't delaying their attendance to research force systems. Better response times may lead to better end results for victims by making it more likely that suspects are detained and evidence is secured.

Investigating crime

Requires
improvement

Bedfordshire Police requires improvement at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The force should make sure investigation plans are created where applicable, with supervisor oversight. This is to make sure that all appropriate investigative opportunities are pursued in a timely way

Our victim service assessment found that too often investigations did not have an investigation plan and were not regularly reviewed by a supervisor to make sure enquiries were carried out in a timely manner. We found that some investigations were delayed and some had lines of inquiry that were not completed. And some of these investigations related to serious crimes. All may have benefited from more robust supervision.

Not using an investigation plan means that potential lines of inquiry may not be identified or pursued. This makes it more likely that investigations will not achieve the best outcomes for victims.

The force needs to put in place appropriate governance and monitoring processes to make sure that the use of outcomes is appropriate and complies with force and national policies. The force should make sure that where required, victims' views are recorded

In our victim service assessment, we found that ineffective governance and monitoring of crime outcomes mean the force is not consistently complying with national standards for recording crime.

The force has carried out its own audits of crime outcomes to identify where it is not complying with national standards. But these audits don't always lead to better compliance. For example, an audit of community resolution outcomes found the force was not compliant with national standards in most cases. But our victim service assessment found that community resolution compliance hadn't improved despite this audit. Following our assessment, the force has introduced a scrutiny process to improve its use of out-of-court disposals such as community resolutions. We will assess its progress.

The force doesn't always apply community resolutions appropriately, as victims aren't always consulted before a community resolution is finalised. The force must make sure that all victims are consulted about the use of community resolutions, so they have an opportunity to raise concerns. And their views must be recorded.

We also assessed how well the force finalises investigations where the suspect had been identified but the victim didn't support further police action (outcome 16). We found too many cases which lacked written confirmation from the victim that they wanted to withdraw their support for the investigation. This confirmation is required to justify outcome 16.

These examples demonstrate how a lack of effective governance and monitoring of crime outcomes means investigations aren't consistently being finalised correctly.

The force needs to make sure it complies with the Victims' Code of Practice

The force doesn't consistently comply with the Victims' Code. For most cases we looked at in our victim service assessment, we found that victim needs assessments were not completed. These assessments make sure that any special measures required by the victim are identified at an early stage of the investigation, so the victim receives appropriate support. The victim's needs should be reassessed as the case progresses, to identify any change in need.

Victim personal statements provide an opportunity for victims to explain how a crime has affected them. But we found the force wasn't completing them in most cases. The force has added a declaration on its witness statement form which it asks victims to sign. This explains that a victim personal statement wasn't taken at that time, but that the victim understands their right to provide one at any time.

Sometimes the impact of a crime won't be felt at the time, and it is appropriate to give victims the opportunity to provide their victim personal statement later. But the force has no process to make sure such opportunities are given to victims as investigations progress. And inconsistent levels of supervision are unlikely to provide reassurance to the force that these opportunities are being taken.

Innovative practice

Digital triage vans attend scenes to assess and secure digital evidence in high-risk investigations

Bedfordshire Police has a fleet of four digital triage vans. The vans are routinely deployed to specialist units carrying out searches to investigate the possession and distribution of child abuse images. They are equipped with specialist technology and staff.

This resource is used for an initial examination of digital devices at the scene. The examination identifies devices which are likely to hold evidence and means officers are far more likely to seize devices which can be used as evidence to prosecute offenders. It has significantly reduced the number of devices seized which don't hold evidence. Examining such devices was causing significant delays to investigations.

This routine forensic 'triage' has ended unnecessary delays and significantly reduced the time these high-risk investigations are taking.

The digital vans are also used to secure child abuse material stored by suspects on cloud-based technology. Previously some suspects had deleted this material before police could secure it. We were given examples where this approach had helped secure convictions, which may have failed if the force had relied on the presence of images stored on physical devices. The new approach recognises that cloud storage is increasingly used in this type of offence.

Technology on board the digital vans allow staff to make sure this material is secured as evidence before it is deleted by suspects.

Main findings

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

Workloads are still high in some investigation teams and there is a shortage of detectives

The force has identified its Emerald team, which investigates domestic abuse, as a 'critical' risk because of high demand and a shortage of staff. The force reports that domestic abuse cases are increasing in number, as well as in their complexity and in the level of violence involved. But shortages in the number of qualified detectives mean domestic abuse cases investigated by Emerald are often managed by inexperienced investigators who are not detectives. The high levels of demand mean that staff are responsible for too many investigations. Staff routinely manage between 25 and 30 investigations at once.

This may have contributed to poor end results for domestic abuse victims. Only 6.6 percent of domestic abuse offences recorded in the year ending 31 March 2020 resulted in a charge or summons.

The force has tried to reduce the workload of Emerald officers by reallocating domestic abuse investigations involving people in non-intimate relationships to its crime investigation team. But at the time of our inspection, workloads were still high and staff were struggling to manage their cases.

The RASSO team, which investigates serious sexual offences, also experiences significant workload pressures, and the force has identified this as a risk. The force, like other forces, is struggling to tackle a shortage of detectives. As at 31 March 2021, only 56 percent of PIP2 detective roles in the force were filled.

The force has a new detective resilience action plan and is actively encouraging constables to consider investigative careers. Officers from response teams are given the opportunity to complete attachments with investigation teams. This gives them experience of investigations. But it also means that many investigators need considerable support and supervision, which increases the workload of busy supervisors.

The force has an accelerated detective programme to attract new detectives and offers financial incentives for existing staff through targeted bonuses for detectives. It is committed to increasing its number of detectives, but at the moment there is still a significant shortage.

The force is taking steps to improve the quality and timeliness of its investigations

The force is trying to improve the quality and timeliness of its investigations through better supervision by:

- dip-sampling crimes each month to check for supervision and investigation quality;
- using development plans to monitor supervisors who repeatedly fail to supervise crimes; and
- making sure investigations are supervised regularly by sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors.

Following several recent appointments, the senior management team now provides robust and effective oversight of investigations. But it is too early to assess the impact of this on end results for victims of crime.

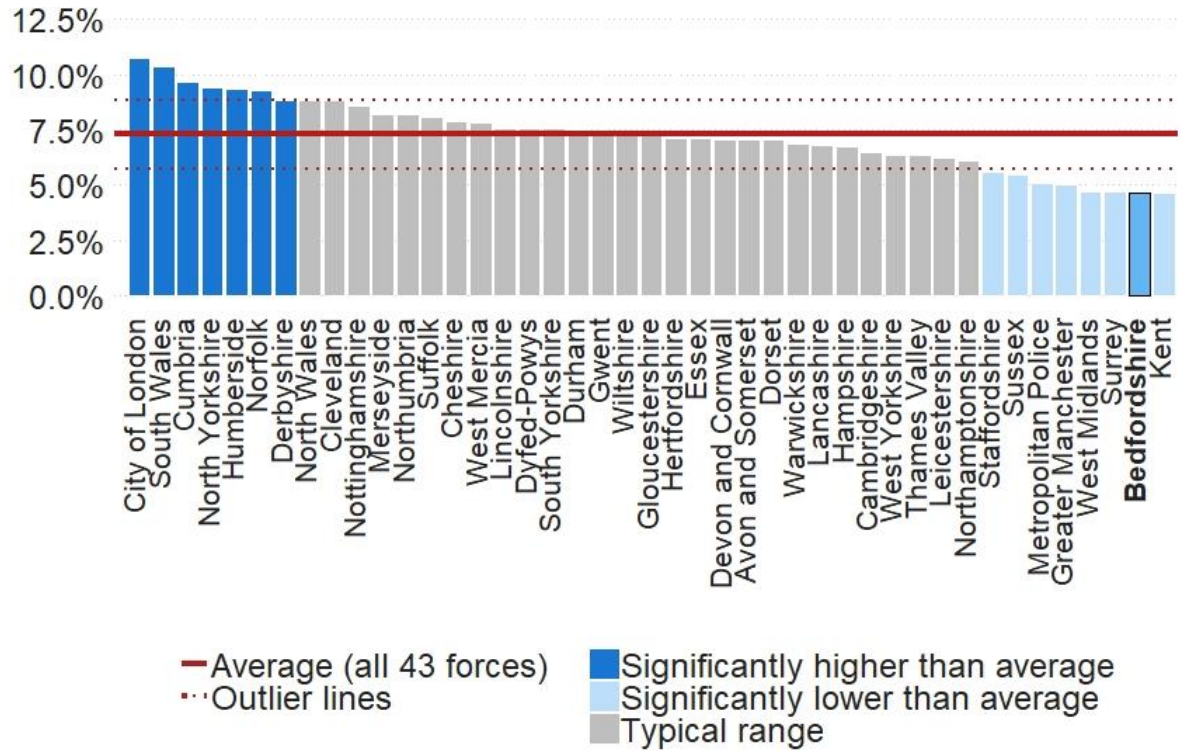
Senior officers meet quarterly at the force detective capability board, which seeks solutions to important issues that affect the quality of investigations. The board considers recurring themes identified through the new crime supervision arrangements. These arrangements set out clear directions for supervisors and senior officers about the timeliness and process of crime supervision. They also make sure there is oversight of training and that officers are given the development opportunities they need to improve their work.

The board also monitors trends in detective numbers and identifies barriers to filling detective posts, such as the length of time it was taking to recruit detectives from other forces.

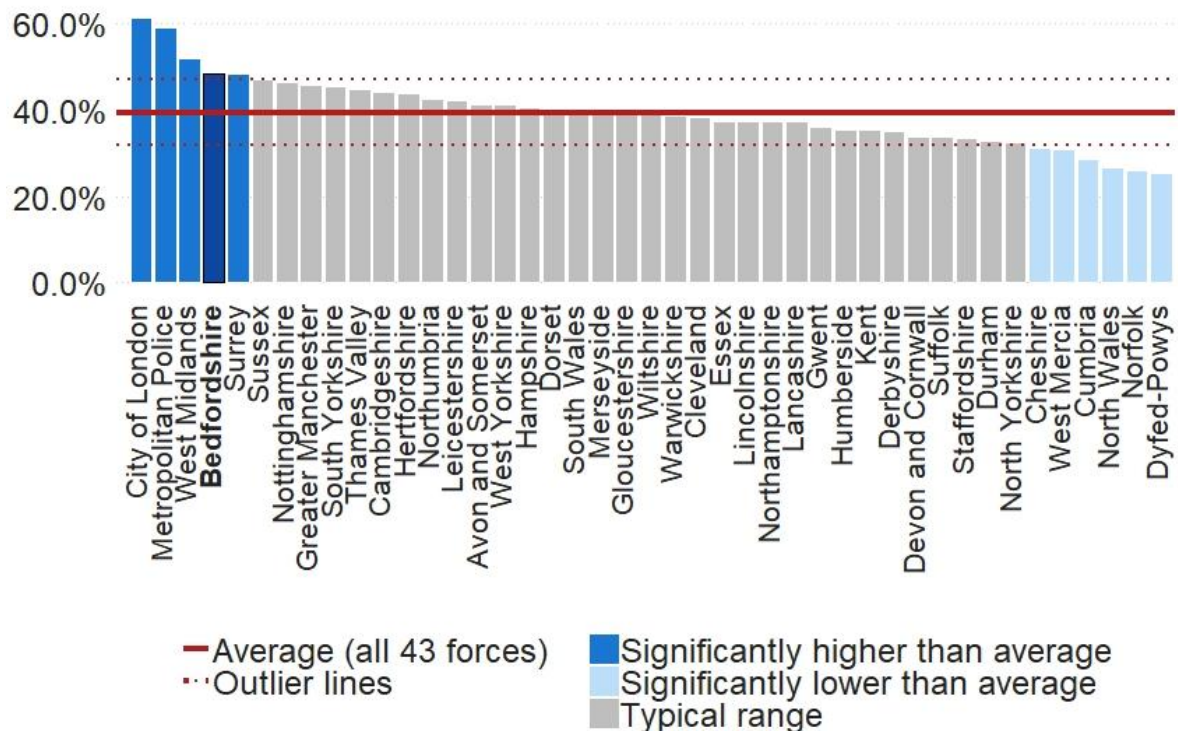
Since our victim service assessment, the force has introduced a new structure to improve outcomes for victims of crime. Compared to other forces, its investigations

are less likely to end with a suspect being charged or summoned to court. This is driven by low charge and summons rates for criminal damage and theft offences. The force finalises investigations under outcome 18 (meaning no suspect has been identified) more than most other forces. These trends indicate that victims of crime may not be consistently benefiting from thorough investigations.

Proportion of victim-based crimes recorded in the year ending 31 March 2021 with an outcome of charged or summons



Proportion of victim-based crimes recorded in the year ending 31 March 2021 with an outcome of investigation complete – no suspect identified



The force determined that its crime investigation team was prioritising more serious crimes, meaning many investigations of high-volume crimes, such as criminal damage and theft, were delayed. This reduced opportunities to prosecute offenders.

The force has now introduced two separate investigation teams. One team manages serious crime investigations and is staffed mainly by more experienced investigators. Alongside this, a response investigation team manages investigations of high-volume crimes such as criminal damage and theft. This team is staffed mainly by uniform police constables.

The force is now monitoring outcomes for all victim-based crime to make sure the new structure prevents delays to investigations and leads to better outcomes for victims of high-volume crimes.

Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

Bedfordshire Police is adequate at protecting vulnerable people.

Area for improvement

The force should make sure its [multi-agency safeguarding hub \(MASH\)](#) is resourced effectively so that delays can be avoided in the assessment of child and adult cases

Current workloads in the MASH are unmanageable and this is leading to delays. Staff shortages have had a negative effect on the team for many months and it has been difficult to fill posts. While the force has recruited some new staff, the benefits of this will not be seen for some time.

At the time of our inspection many MASH staff were working overtime, including at weekends, to manage their workload. Despite this, assessments were still being delayed, with 389 child cases and 575 adult cases awaiting a full assessment. There is an initial assessment of cases to make sure those with immediate safeguarding risks are prioritised. But some lower priority cases will be delayed because information isn't shared quickly enough with other local agencies. This prevents vulnerable people getting the help they need when this is needed.

Main findings

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

The force should make sure that vulnerable people are routinely identified by the force contact centre

As discussed in the '[Responding to the public](#)' section above, we found that checks to identify vulnerable callers weren't always being carried out by the force contact centre (FCC). And the FCC didn't always record that a victim was vulnerable when it was appropriate to do this.

This means that vulnerable callers may not be getting the support or safeguarding they need to cope with and recover from their experience, or to prevent victimisation in future. It may also mean that the force's estimates about how much of its demand

relates to vulnerability may be inaccurate. This may result in allocating resources inefficiently or taking approaches that don't match demand.

The force has a clear governance and performance reporting structure for vulnerability

The force has a chief officer lead for protecting vulnerable people, and effective governance through the vulnerability and exploitation board. The force's strategy in this area is set by this chief officer, who holds to account the senior officer leads responsible for each type of vulnerability. Improvement plans are used to support better performance. These include the vulnerable adult improvement plan, which focuses on taking a multi-agency approach to support timely missing adult investigations.

The force performance board examines important data relating to vulnerable people, such as the number of times children and young people are taken into police custody. This data informs resourcing decisions, as senior managers can identify areas of increasing demand. But until vulnerability is fully identified by the FCC at the first point of contact, estimates will be incomplete.

Recent emphasis on using domestic abuse powers will protect more vulnerable people

The force uses [domestic violence protection orders \(DVPOs\)](#) less than most other forces. The force reported that only 14 DVPOs were issued in 2020/21, but said it is on track to issue about 200 in 2021/22. This follows more emphasis on using DVPOs, better quality supervision, and the creation of a separate safeguarding and intervention team.

This new team aims to prevent repeat incidents of domestic abuse by focusing on the most vulnerable victims and the highest-risk offenders. It uses a range of measures, including DVPOs and the [domestic violence disclosure scheme](#) ('Clare's Law'), to help prevent offences at an earlier stage. And it gives advice to less experienced officers to encourage them to use DVPOs when appropriate. Despite this, low staff numbers mean the force isn't yet focusing on the highest-risk offenders. And with its increasing use of DVPOs, the force will need to make sure resources are made available to tackle DVPO breaches.

The force has strong partnerships with other organisations, which help it protect vulnerable people

The force works with other local agencies to direct children and vulnerable people away from serious violence and gangs. Two examples of this are the Luton Multi-Agency Gang Panel (MAGPan), which is chaired by a senior officer from the force's gangs unit, and the Serious Youth Violence Panel covering the Bedford and Central Bedfordshire local authority areas. Both of these multi-agency panels identify high-risk young people and intervene to direct them away from serious violence and gangs.

Bedfordshire's violence and exploitation reduction unit (VERU) includes a range of organisations which work together on preventing children and young people being

harmed by gang criminality and exploitation. The force is an important partner in this. It identifies vulnerable people at risk and works with the other organisations on interventions to prevent further harm. Most of the cases open at the time of our inspection involved children being criminally exploited, such as through '[county lines](#)' drug gangs.

We found that the force's involvement in [multi-agency risk assessment conferences](#) held by local authorities was effective. These meetings consider interventions to protect domestic abuse victims. Interventions might include robustly dealing with offenders who breach non-molestation orders or making timely referrals to a domestic abuse perpetrator scheme.

Managing offenders and suspects

Outstanding

Bedfordshire Police is outstanding at managing offenders and suspects. In this section, we set out our main findings.

Innovative practice

The force works with partners to assess the risk presented by patients with mental health conditions due to be released from hospitals

The force understands the importance of making sure that its [multi-agency public protection arrangements \(MAPPA\)](#) include a multi-agency assessment of hospital patients with mental health conditions.

The force MAPPA co-ordinators and the offender management unit's detective inspector take part in a quarterly panel meeting which assesses the risk to the public from people who are due to leave hospital. The panel decides whether patients meet the criteria to become subject to MAPPA when they leave hospital.

Hospital staff responsible for the care of the people assessed contribute to this process. Where appropriate, the force carries out actions, such as enhanced monitoring and risk assessment, available under MAPPA.

Main findings

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

Integrated offender management is reducing offending and its cost to society

The force actively contributes to a highly effective integrated offender management (IOM) approach which is in line with the government's Integrated Offender Management Strategy 2020. The force has a chief officer lead responsible for IOM. It works closely with You Turn Futures, a charity responsible for managing Bedfordshire's multi-agency IOM programme.

The force attends regular IOM meetings with other agencies involved in this programme. The meetings assess whether offenders should be included in IOM, using up-to-date intelligence. This process uses criteria including the risk someone poses,

the number of offences they have committed and the severity of these offences. Severity is determined using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) crime severity score. If the offender is included in IOM, a management pathway based on their needs is agreed at the meeting with the aim of preventing future offending. Pathway themes include drugs and alcohol, finances, and health problems.

Using this pathway approach, the force and its partner organisations have built a detailed knowledge of where there are gaps in local services. This has allowed them to focus on closing those gaps. For example, by working with housing providers the force has made more accommodation available for ex-offenders. It has also worked with a charity that has provided 'welcome packs', containing basic equipment such as cutlery and bedding, for this accommodation.

The force also prioritises working with people who don't meet the IOM criteria but despite this, commit crime which causes harm or a significant cost to society. In these cases, community officers are tasked with developing problem-solving plans to prevent reoffending. The force's tactical tasking and co-ordination group monitors the progress of this.

Evidence demonstrates that the force's approach to managing offenders is effective

Every year, the Bedfordshire IOM performance framework assesses how effective the IOM programme has been at reducing harm to society. The assessment includes data on reductions in reoffending as well as estimates of how much those reductions have saved society financially.

The decrease in reoffending and the savings to society have been significant. The annual IOM assessment for 2020/21 found that 72 percent of offenders taking part stopped or reduced offending. The approach was particularly effective for burglary, where 91 percent of offenders stopped or reduced their offending.

Using a crime harm savings model, the assessment found that Bedfordshire's IOM approach cut the cost of crime to society by more than £2.3m in 2020/21.

Online child abuse investigations are timely and thorough

The internet child abuse investigation team (iCAIT) leads investigations of offences involving the possession and distribution of child abuse material. The unit has a large workload but even so it is highly effective.

As well as considering what action to take in relation to child abuse images, iCAIT routinely assesses its cases to identify any other potential offences, such as the possession of controlled drugs. These other offences are considered when the team applies for search warrants so the full range of possible criminality is addressed. This is good practice.

iCAIT supervisors are given regular updates on each of the team's cases. They hold case progression meetings with investigators and intelligence officers every two weeks to make sure timely action is taken in line with risk. For example, in cases where suspects may have access to children, action (such as executing search warrants and safeguarding) is taken within 24 hours of receiving intelligence.

Any cases awaiting action are reassessed every 28 days and cases are re-prioritised if changes to the risk level are identified.

At the time of our inspection, the number of cases that had not been finalised was small (12). To keep up this level of performance staff routinely work overtime, despite a recent increase in iCAIT posts. Demand in this area of work is increasing every year. So we were pleased to see that the force is keeping iCAIT staff numbers under review in its priority-based budgeting process for 2022/23.

Online child abuse investigations are supported by an impressive digital forensic capability

The digital forensic capability of iCAIT is a strength of the force, which we highlighted as innovative practice in the 'investigating crime' section.

Using digital triage vans has significantly reduced the workloads of the digital forensic unit. As a result, the timescales for iCAIT's investigations have also been reduced. For example, most mobile phones are now examined within 24 hours of being seized. Previously this was only possible for high-risk cases, meaning low-risk cases experienced lengthy delays, sometimes taking months.

The force is effective at managing the risk posed by the most dangerous offenders

The force uses a nationally recognised risk assessment tool, [ARMS \(active risk management system\)](#), to risk-assess registered sex offenders.

Risk assessments are carried out by the force's offender management unit (OMU) in line with the College of Policing's [Authorised Professional Practice](#). OMU staff are effectively trained in using the ARMS tool, and receive further training through a regional collaboration which the force is part of. The OMU carries out more than 3,700 visits to registered sex offenders a year. This workload is increasing every year, in part due to iCAIT's success in prosecuting offenders who access child abuse images. OMU has a high workload, but only a small case backlog.

The force uses technology effectively to support its management of registered sex offenders

The COVID-19 pandemic didn't lead to an increase in backlogs for managing registered sex offenders, or reduce the quality of this management. This was because the force was proactive in using a system called Good Sam to support remote 'video visits' for these offenders. This system was used on a case by case basis, taking into account the risk posed by the offender and the health needs of the people involved. As COVID-19 restrictions lifted, the OMU followed up these remote interactions with in-person visits to make sure registered sex offenders were complying with their orders and to establish whether any offending behaviour was taking place.

There is a clear policy for addressing outstanding suspects and the force prioritises domestic abuse suspects

The force has a recently updated policy to make sure officers quickly find and arrest outstanding suspects (those who have been named but not yet tracked down and spoken to). Investigative departments carry out intelligence checks and visit addresses themselves, and are often successful in finding these suspects.

But despite this, sometimes high-risk outstanding suspects remain difficult to track down. The high-risk nature of these cases is quickly identified through the daily force management meeting chaired by a chief officer. The cases are treated as urgent as they involve suspects who pose a risk to the public. The force allocates extra resources to them, such as the dedicated force 'arrest car', staffed by officers tasked with finding and arresting high-risk suspects. The daily force management meeting tracks officers' progress in arresting these suspects and can deploy further resources if they are needed.

The force has recently adopted a policy where all outstanding suspects in domestic abuse cases are prioritised in this way. The daily force management meeting monitors these suspects until they are apprehended. And in the most urgent cases, the full range of the force's resources are made available to safeguard victims by bringing offenders to justice quickly.

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 \(ROCU\)](#). These units lead the regional response to SOC by providing access to specialist resources and assets to disrupt organised crime groups (OCGs) 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 Bedfordshire 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

Good

Bedfordshire Police is good at building and developing its workforce.

Area for improvement

The force should close skills gaps by using up-to-date and accurate information about the diverse skills its workforce has. This information should inform the effective matching of people to posts

In [our last inspection in 2018/19](#) we identified an area for improvement in this area and said that the force should develop a comprehensive skills strategy to identify what future capabilities its workforce will need.

In this inspection, we found that the collaborated human resources team now has a better understanding of current skills gaps and a strategy to address them through recruitment. But it still doesn't have a good understanding of skills within the force's own workforce. This means the force isn't effectively making use of its existing staff to address skills gaps.

The human resources team has tried to improve this, but progress has been slow due to ineffective IT systems which do not record the full range of skills the workforce has. But there is now better recording of operational skills on the force skills database, iLearn.

The force has introduced a workforce development unit to make sure its workforce needs are met. This unit works alongside and with the collaborated human resources team.

These teams are working together to find ways to make sure the force's computer systems include the diverse range of skills its workforce has, including police accreditations and other skills such as sign language. If successful, this will give the force the ability to accurately match people to vacant posts. It will also help it deploy the right people to incidents to improve the quality of its response.

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

Main findings

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

The force prioritises the wellbeing of its workforce

The force has a concise health and wellbeing plan, which uses a 'prepare, promote, protect' model to make sure workforce health and wellbeing is prioritised.

The force wellbeing board is effective, and quick to act when wellbeing risks are identified. For example, it responded to high workloads and staff shortages in the contact centre by producing an action plan and providing a range of wellbeing measures to staff to prevent further risk.

The force works hard to prevent wellbeing risks in all areas, and staff recognise that it sees their health and wellbeing as a priority. The force has recently introduced 26 wellbeing champions. These are staff members located throughout the county who alongside their main role have received training to support colleagues' wellbeing and direct them to services that can help with this.

The force protected vulnerable staff in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. It made sure they could carry out their work safely from home where appropriate and provided wellbeing packs to support their mental health. Staff told us these actions were well received.

The force has effectively introduced remote and flexible working contracts

The force has maintained its response to the public through the COVID-19 pandemic by quickly bringing in flexible and remote working. This allowed some staff to work from home if that was appropriate for their role. This approach protected vulnerable members of staff and helped prevent the spread of the virus.

The force has introduced two types of 'smarter working' contracts. Staff in certain roles can now opt to work either from home or from police premises using a desk in a communal area. In addition, the force now has over 100 members of staff on home working contracts, mainly in support roles.

Throughout this process the force has communicated well to the staff it affects, who understood that switching to permanent home working was optional.

The force worked well with staff associations to make sure that any concerns the workforce had could be quickly addressed. It has set up a smarter working inbox where staff can submit their ideas for improvements.

Individual teams are continuing to find ways to make sure staff working remotely feel included, such as weekly informal meetings using online communication tools.

Senior leaders in the force promote ethical behaviour

The chief officer team leads by example and communicates regularly with staff about ethical behaviour. Overwhelmingly, staff told us that the force was ethical and that senior leaders set a good example in this respect.

The force has a strong learning culture which avoids blame. It takes opportunities to train staff on things that go wrong to ensure they don't happen again. This approach is highly effective for both stop and search and the use of force, where officers' body-worn video is used by external scrutiny panels to identify things to improve. The force responds to feedback from these panels positively and proportionately.

In March 2021 the force introduced the Be You programme. This aims to make sure the workforce is valued, supported, and feels included. Ethical behaviours are an important theme in the programme and the force is committed to preventing inappropriate behaviour. It has given staff channels for reporting concerns and a pledge that staff won't damage their career prospects by reporting concerns.

The force recently introduced the Blue Bell network, which provides a supportive way for staff to raise concerns about sexual misconduct within the force. Staff also

understand clearly the risks to the public posed by the abuse of a position of trust for a sexual purpose, and how to report any concerns about colleagues in this area.

Standards of behaviour are addressed in the force's annual performance development reviews for officers and staff. This happens through a mandatory conversation between staff and their managers about acceptable conduct.

The diversity, equality and inclusion strategy is an important part of the Be You programme. It is the force's response to the National Police Chiefs Council's EDI (equality, diversity, and inclusion) strategy. There is also a similar strategy for the tri-force collaboration with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire constabularies. To avoid confusion, the force should make sure the workforce understands how these approaches work together.

The force understands the need to improve its diversity and has an effective plan in place to do this

The force is taking steps to make its workforce better reflect its local communities. For example, it has recently used Equality Act legislation to guide some promotion decisions to make sure its senior ranks are more representative of the local community.

The diversity and inclusion board tracks the diversity data of people applying to join the police at each stage of the recruitment process. From this data it identifies parts of the process that may present a barrier to under-represented groups, to make sure selection processes are fair. The data is also used to identify areas of policing where there is under-representation, such as the need to recruit more Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and female firearms officers. The force offers mentoring to staff from relevant groups interested in these roles.

According to the 2011 census, 22.5 percent of the population of Bedfordshire is from BAME backgrounds. As at 31 March 2021, the comparable figure for the county's police officers was 10.1 percent. This is higher than the proportion of BAME officers across England and Wales (7.6 percent).

The force is building its workforce for the future

The force is on track to recruit police officers into posts allocated to it from the national uplift programme. In 2020/21 13.3 percent of the force's officers had joined that year, which is high compared to the 9.3 percent average new joiner rate for police forces in England and Wales.

But there aren't enough posts in response teams to accommodate the number of police constables available to work in them. To address this, the force has introduced a policy that once officers have gained some experience of response policing, they are given attachments to investigative units to gain further experience.

These officers are then posted to units which the force believes are most in need of staff and most appropriate for their experience. For many this will be investigative units, because high workloads and the shortage of qualified detectives mean these need more staff. Staff posted into investigative roles are given enhanced levels of support and supervision.

This has caused concern among some of these officers that policing isn't what they expected. Many were motivated to join the police to work in response teams. This situation has the potential to reduce police officer retention rates and the morale of the officers affected. The force should make sure this policy is kept under review as it continues to balance its benefits with its effect on staff.

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.

Bedfordshire 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

Good

Bedfordshire Police is good at operating efficiently.

Area for improvement

The force should review its S23 agreement on the provision of collaborated occupational health to make sure it is delivering what is agreed and that staff throughout the three forces are supported by an effective occupational health unit

The force has a proven track record of seeking collaboration, which has led to its tri-force collaboration with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire constabularies (BCH) and a seven-force strategic alliance. And we found that its work to promote and secure staff wellbeing is often highly effective and well regarded by staff. But the force still isn't consistently well served by the tri-force collaborated occupational health function.

The BCH occupational health unit has experienced staff shortages, and this has reduced its service. We found that staff were routinely experiencing delays when they approached the unit for help. This has led to some staff seeking private medical support instead.

The delays place more responsibility on busy supervisors to manage the problem. And they can lead to staff not being deployed, because supervisors don't receive advice on people's fitness to work before they have to make a decision on whether staff are fit for full duties. This may reduce the force's ability to meet its demand.

Main findings

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

The force's workforce development unit is bridging the gap left by shared human resources

In our last inspection we said the force should make sure future recruitment and staff development are supported by a functional and adequately resourced human resources team. We identified this as an area for improvement in [our 2018/19 inspection report](#).

The force has addressed this by creating its own workforce development unit (WDU). It sees this as a necessary step, because there hasn't been significant investment in the collaborated human resources team shared by Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire (BCH) constabularies. The WDU is reducing delays in recruitment by identifying inefficient ways of working.

But there has been little consultation between the force and BCH human resources about the role of the WDU. This has led to some confusion about how the unit's work fits alongside that of the BCH human resources team, and there is a risk that efforts will be duplicated.

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

The force has a robust approach to strategic planning. It uses systematic processes to better understand threats and risks to the community and the public's expectations.

The force uses the government's [MoRiLE \(Management of Risk in Law Enforcement\)](#) scoring system to assess how effectively it could respond to emerging threats. The force's priorities are communicated to staff by circulating documents and through internal channels such as the force intranet. Operational meetings align operational decisions with these priorities to make sure the force is focusing on what is important.

The force manages its current demand well

The force has an established and rigorous approach to understanding and managing demand. This is underpinned by the Bedfordshire Demand Management Strategy 2020–25. This clearly sets out the governance structure used to monitor demand.

The force's police demand steering group is responsible for making sure the objectives of the strategy are achieved. This group reports directly to chief officers through the force executive board.

An annual strategic demand assessment also supports the force's understanding of demand. This assesses the force's ability to meet current and future demand, producing a heat map diagram which demonstrates the level of risk in different operational demand areas. The force uses this assessment to produce its [force management statement](#). This statement is integrated into planning processes, which means the force's leaders have a good understanding of demand trends.

In addition, relevant departmental leads are asked every month to give a detailed assessment of demand trends for a range of crime types. This monthly assessment means the force is in a better-informed position to respond to sudden changes in demand, and take appropriate action where possible to manage those changes.

In our victim service assessment, we found that due to weaknesses in the force contact centre's (FCC) approach, the force may not have had an accurate assessment of how much of its demand relates to vulnerability. The force acknowledges this and is exploring ways to provide FCC staff with the training they need to establish whether a caller is vulnerable at the first point of contact.

The force makes sure it has the capacity to meet and manage current demands efficiently

In 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 the force was given special grant funding by the Home Office to address the disproportionate risks it faces due to serious violence and gang crime. It has been awarded such grant funding again in this financial year.

The force needs this funding to make sure it can address this demand and the significant risks it poses. But these grants are intended for unexpected and exceptional events. Given the repeated need for government support, the demand created by gang violence in Bedfordshire is unlikely to meet these criteria indefinitely.

The force should consider how it would meet this demand if the government funding is not granted in future.

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

The force is rigorous at managing its finances. It has developed sophisticated approaches to priority-based budgeting, which make sure its most important objectives always guide how it allocates money and resources.

The force has a balanced [medium-term financial plan](#) which is based on realistic assumptions about future costs. The force has plans in place to increase its [reserves](#) by March 2024. This will allow the force to bridge budget gaps which it expects in 2023/2024 and 2024/2025.

The force can demonstrate it is continuing to achieve efficiency savings and improve productivity

The force is committed to making savings and finding more efficient ways to work wherever possible. For example, its [priority-based budgeting](#) approach and the force quality improvement programme have focused on areas such as the FCC where the biggest efficiency improvements are possible.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the force adapted quickly and invested in technology to allow people who can work remotely to do so. Staff working from home are well supported by technology and office equipment. This approach will reduce the need for staff travel and lead to significant savings on office space costs.

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