

PEEL 2021/22

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Cheshire Constabulary

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Overall summary

Our judgments

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

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

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

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

Data in this report

For more information, please [view this report on our website](#) and select the 'About the data' section.

Important changes to PEEL

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

I am pleased with some aspects of the performance of Cheshire Constabulary in keeping people safe and reducing crime. I am satisfied with most other aspects of the constabulary's performance, but there are areas where it needs to improve.

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

The constabulary needs to improve the speed with which it answers calls from the public

Not all emergency calls are answered within the nationally recognised target. A high number of calls are also abandoned by the public when contacting the constabulary using [101](#). This needs to improve so that people receive the help they need promptly.

Management of some registered sex offenders as well as intelligence in cases of online indecent images of children, needs to improve

Some registered sex offenders (RSOs) classed as low risk have less contact with police than other high-risk offenders. We found poor practice in reviewing these cases to understand changes in the risk that offenders pose. Where there are backlogs in cases about indecent images of children, it is vital that [intelligence](#) surrounding those cases is refreshed. This wasn't happening. The constabulary has listened to our concerns and is now seeking to improve its practice. It is early days, and I will continue to monitor this work.

Cheshire Constabulary uses problem solving well to address neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour

Beat managers use problem solving well to address crime and [anti-social behaviour](#), and protect [vulnerable people](#). The constabulary also works actively with other relevant organisations, and this helps it intervene in local concerns early and prevent crime. The force values neighbourhood policing, and it is investing in its workforce by offering them an accredited neighbourhood management qualification. This is positive and will support the continuous improvement of neighbourhood policing.

The constabulary is an inclusive workplace and works hard to reflect its communities

Cheshire Constabulary has achieved national recognition for its inclusive workplace. It offers a range of support where it is needed. It is also seeking to attract a more diverse workforce. Numbers of officers from ethnic minority backgrounds are increasing, which is good news as the workforce will better reflect the communities in Cheshire in the future.

There has been significant change in senior leaders over the past year. I have confidence that over the next 12 months the constabulary will continue to improve and consolidate its performance. I will watch progress with interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Parr', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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.

The constabulary has a focus on problem solving and early intervention and works well with other organisations to reduce crime and demand. We found evidence of effective partnerships and prevention activity.

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

- prioritising beat policing with recognised beat managers and police community support officers (PCSOs) to engage well with communities;
- use of perceptual deterrence techniques to reduce and deflect offending behaviour;
- the nationally recognised harm reduction unit, which works with repeat [stalking](#) and [harassment](#) offenders to change behaviour, support victims, and assist officers with investigations and court orders; and
- [integrated offender management](#), working with partners and offender cohorts to reduce reoffending.

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

But the following areas may negatively affect its ability to reduce crime:

- the call abandonment rate and call answering rates, which may result in people disengaging or not reporting information to the police that would help prevent and detect crime;
- the significant reduction in the timeliness of crime recording, which could lead to victims of crime not receiving the service they need;
- not complying with the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime \(VCOP\)](#), which could lead to victims withdrawing support for investigations and reduce confidence in the police; and
- not always conducting robust and effective reviews, or providing appropriate supervisor direction, for the effective management of all RSOs, which may mean further offences aren't detected and victims aren't protected well.

Providing a service to the victims of crime

Victim service assessment

This section describes our assessment of the service victims receive from Cheshire Constabulary, 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 did not support, or withdrew support for, police action. While this assessment is ungraded, it influences graded judgments in the other areas we have inspected.

The constabulary needs to improve the time it takes to answer calls

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 be given appropriate [safeguarding](#) advice.

The constabulary needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls as it isn't meeting national standards. It also needs to reduce its abandonment rates for non-emergency calls. When calls are answered, the victim's vulnerability isn't always assessed using a structured process. Repeat victims aren't always identified, which means this isn't taken into account when considering the response the victim should receive. Victims are given advice on crime prevention and on the preservation of evidence.

The constabulary, in most cases, responds to calls for service in a timely way

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.

On most occasions the constabulary responds to calls appropriately. However, sometimes police response times exceeded recognised target times. Victims were sometimes not informed of the delay and therefore their expectations weren't met. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage.

Crime recording is of an adequate standard to make sure victims receive an appropriate level of service

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

The constabulary needs to improve its crime-recording processes to make sure reported crimes are recorded correctly and without delay.

We set out more details about the constabulary's crime recording in the [crime data integrity](#) section below.

The constabulary allocates crimes to appropriate staff, and victims are promptly informed if their 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.

The arrangements for allocating recorded crimes for investigation were in accordance with the force policy, and in all cases the crime was allocated to the most appropriate department for further investigation. Victims were usually told promptly if their crime report wouldn't be investigated further. This is important to provide victims with an appropriate level of service and to manage expectations.

Investigations are not always carried out in an effective or timely way

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

Most investigations were carried out in a timely manner, and relevant, proportionate lines of enquiry were completed. There was frequently a lack of effective supervision of investigations and investigation plans. Victims were sometimes not updated throughout investigations. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when they are regularly updated. A thorough investigation increases the likelihood of perpetrators being identified and a positive outcome for the victim.

Victim personal statements weren't always taken, which can deprive victims of the opportunity to describe the effect that crime has had on their lives. When victims withdrew support for an investigation, the constabulary didn't always consider progressing the case without the victim's support, which can be an important method of safeguarding the victim and preventing further offences. The constabulary didn't consider the use of orders designed to protect victims, such as a [Domestic Violence Protection Order](#) or [Notice](#) (DVPO/N), in some cases. More recently, we have seen better processes that consider using these orders when people suspected of domestic violence are released from custody.

Under the VCOP there is a requirement to conduct a needs assessment at an early stage to decide whether victims require additional support. The outcome of the assessment and the request for additional support should be recorded. The constabulary doesn't always complete the victim needs assessment, which means not all victims get the appropriate level of service.

The constabulary finalises reports of crime appropriately by considering the type of offence, the victim's wishes and the offender's background

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

In appropriate cases, those offenders who are brought to justice can be dealt with by means of a caution or community resolution. To be correctly applied and recorded, it must be appropriate for the offender and the views of the victim must be taken into account. In most of the cases reviewed, the offender met the national criteria for the use of these outcomes and the victim's views were sought and considered.

Crime data integrity

Adequate

Cheshire Constabulary is adequate at recording crime.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary needs to improve recording for crimes which involve vulnerable victims

It doesn't record enough crimes which involve child protection or vulnerable adults. It is important that crimes against vulnerable victims are recorded to safeguard the victims from further offences and identify offenders. Some of the crimes missed were of a serious nature, such as assaults and harassment. When the crime wasn't recorded, there was often no investigation and sometimes no safeguarding of the victim. Failure to record these crimes can result in perpetrators not being identified or brought to justice.

The constabulary needs to improve the time it takes to record crimes

Only around one in five of recorded crimes we reviewed (64 of 354) were recorded within 24 hours, including reports of rape, and recording often takes more than three days. Recording crime without delay helps ensure that victims receive the support they need as well as establishing an effective investigation.

The constabulary needs to improve the recording of equality data

Data for victims of crime shows that age and gender are well recorded, ethnicity is less well recorded and other [protected characteristics](#) are not well recorded. The constabulary should be collecting this information to understand the extent to which each protected group is affected by crime, how this differs from those without the protected characteristics and whether a different response is needed for these victims.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the constabulary provides a service to the victims of crime.

The constabulary is adequate at recording crime

We estimate that Cheshire Constabulary is recording 93.1 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.5 percent) of all reported crime (excluding fraud). On the basis of our findings, we estimate that it still didn't record 6,300 crimes for the year covered by our inspection. It performs less well for offences of violence against the person, where we estimate 91.5 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.2 percent) of violent offences are being recorded. But the timeliness of crime recording has deteriorated since our last crime data integrity inspection, and it is important that this is addressed to improve crime recording standards.

The constabulary records rape offences accurately

Rape is one of the most serious crimes a victim can experience. So, it is especially important that crimes are recorded accurately to make sure victims receive the service and support they expect and deserve. But we found the constabulary needs to improve the timeliness of recording these offences. Only 25 of 41 rapes we reviewed had been recorded within 24 hours.

Anti-social behaviour-related crime is recorded well

The constabulary usually records crimes as a result of incidents of anti-social behaviour well. Anti-social behaviour can have a significant effect on victims, especially if the behaviour is prolonged. If crimes are recorded correctly, the victim is more likely to receive the support they need, and offenders can be identified and prosecuted.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Good

Cheshire Constabulary 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 constabulary engages well with its communities, which helps it understand and manage priorities

Cheshire Constabulary has an [independent advisory group](#) and community cohesion groups with volunteers in each of the nine local policing units. These groups are consulted regularly and there is a focus on increasing their diversity to make them more representative. Beat managers and police community support officers (PCSOs) are allocated throughout the 122 ward areas. They work with communities through targeted activities such as surgeries and the initiative 'street a week' to address local concerns and surveys. It also uses a survey, known as [Resident's voice](#), to gather community views and help it shape local priorities. The constabulary would benefit from making sure all areas are using this survey well so they understand all needs. This would ensure that people who have less access to online resources are included and able to raise matters that are important to them.

There is a clear process for deciding problem-solving priorities. Beat review meetings take place locally, and these feed into tasking and co-ordinating processes, helping to determine the resource required to address problems. There is local policing team representation at meetings, including local intelligence, and matters are escalated as needed. These measures work well.

The workforce understands the fair and respectful use of [stop and search powers](#)

The workforce receives stop and search training, and further immersive training is being developed. This is a positive development and will help officers to learn more effectively. Use of [body-worn video](#) is mandated for stop and search, and data is visible within a data dashboard to show compliance. Stop and search single points of contact (SPOCs), mostly sergeants, regularly dip sample body-worn video and stop and search records, completing an online survey with their findings. These show where improvements are needed. Officers we spoke to told us that they receive individual feedback from SPOCs, helping them to learn and to use powers more appropriately. We also reviewed a small sample of body-worn video recordings. We found that some officers could better understand use of force legislation – for example, when considering whether compliant handcuffing is a necessary use of force to conduct stop and search safely and appropriately, and we provided feedback to the constabulary about this.

The constabulary monitors use of stop and search and use of force powers well

There is a focus on using powers to target criminality, and the constabulary is increasing its use of stop and search. It has a defined legitimacy framework for monitoring stop and search. A quarterly [procedural justice](#) meeting, chaired by an assistant chief constable, is held to monitor stop and search and other data for use of force and hate crime by exception, and there are internal working groups focused on continuous improvement in the use of powers. These groups have representatives from throughout the constabulary as well as a dedicated internal monitoring lead officer who sits within the partnership unit. The internal meetings work well, with active discussion to support improvement – for example, developing technology to make it easier for officers to complete stop and search records on mobile phones and providing practical advice for officers when searching transgender people.

There is a comprehensive stop and search data pack which supports these meetings. We found that the constabulary may benefit from extending the data monitored to help it determine whether use of stop and search aligns with crime patterns, intelligence and priorities. This would ensure that the use of powers is directed towards crime reduction and prevention.

The constabulary trains its workforce to communicate with the public effectively

The constabulary is serious about understanding bias and disproportionate use of powers. The lead for stop and search has sent a video message to the workforce clearly stating the importance of asking the self-defined ethnicity question of people subject to stop and search as well as the need to record reasonable grounds effectively. An active listening package is being given to call handlers in the force contact centre to help them better understand callers' needs. The constabulary has incorporated active listening into its personal safety training, training for new recruits and investigator training. This is good news as it is important that officers listen and are fair in their dealings with the public.

The constabulary has improved use of force recording

In 2017 we found Cheshire Constabulary needed to improve its understanding and recording of use of force and ensure it complied with the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#) recording requirements. This has improved. A working group, chaired by a superintendent, monitors recording. There is a comprehensive data set for use of force and it is published for transparency. The data is also scrutinised at the procedural justice meeting, with exception reports highlighting areas of most interest or concern. The internal stop and search and use of force monitoring lead gives the constabulary confidence that forms are submitted appropriately. This works well and supplements departmental processes. The constabulary is improving its practices based on incidents when force is used – for example, difficulty experienced by officers when the body-worn camera moves while in use and the exploration of solutions to resolve this.

The workforce could better document the reasonable grounds for use of stop and search powers

We reviewed a sample of 205 stop and search records from 1 November 2020 to 31 October 2021 during our inspection. Based on this sample, we estimate that 83.9 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.9 percent) of all stop and searches by the constabulary during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. This is a statistically significant decrease since our previous inspection when we found an estimated 94.4 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.7 percent) of stop and searches had reasonable grounds documented. All 14 of the records we reviewed for stop and searches on individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds had reasonable grounds recorded. The stop and search record is the only reference a person retains after the encounter. We found some use of local police jargon in records, which can be confusing. An easy-to-understand explanation helps the public know whether they were searched legitimately. The constabulary should consider this in stop and search training.

More could be done to learn effectively from the independent scrutiny of stop and search and use of force

Use of police powers is scrutinised at the police accountability meeting, which includes independent and police representatives. The meeting is usually independently chaired and looks at stop and search and use of force data. The constabulary also holds community cohesion groups (CCGs) with members of the public in local policing units. These groups review body-worn video of stop and search and use of force encounters, and we observed several of them during our inspection. CCGs are inconsistent. Numbers attending vary, and each is chaired by a police officer, rather than independently. The police explain hate crime data well, and updates are provided on local policing. But members of the groups don't receive training and aren't given detailed guidance on what to look for in their assessment of body-worn video for stop and search and use of force. Without this direction, or explanation of the standards expected, the learning that independent scrutiny can offer is diminished. The constabulary is now taking action to improve these groups, but the new approach isn't yet in place. This is important so that the constabulary can respond to independent feedback and improve the use of such powers.

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

Good

Cheshire Constabulary is good at prevention and deterrence.

Main findings

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

The constabulary has good leadership and governance in place for effective prevention and deterrence

Providing outstanding neighbourhood policing and [protecting the vulnerable](#) is a priority. The constabulary has a clearly defined plan to modernise neighbourhood policing which is in line with the [College of Policing](#) national guidance. It has named beat officers and PCSOs allocated to its 122 wards. This is a tangible investment in resources that are known and seen in communities. There is robust governance in place through force performance meetings and local policing teams to monitor progress against plans and priorities. The 'area commitments' for neighbourhood policing show how beat policing is to be undertaken, helping the workforce to understand what they need to do. Most beat managers we spoke to were aware of their local and force priorities. We found that area superintendents have effective relationships with community safety organisations. This helps them contribute locally to tackling important issues and to work well together to prevent and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

The constabulary applies evidence-based practice in its prevention approach

The evidence-informed policing board considers how research by police constable degree apprentice officers can best be focused on problem solving. The constabulary also uses perceptual deterrence theory, where the effect and severity of sentencing sanctions for criminal behaviour are emphasised to discourage criminality. An example includes the visual 'ageing' of an organised crime offender convicted and imprisoned for a long sentence. Pictures showing before and after the ageing process were used in local media campaigns, demonstrating what the offender would look like on release. The force also has a yellow and red card 'warning' scheme. These cards are issued by officers when they see unwanted criminal or anti-social behaviour, reinforcing the message that crime will not be tolerated. These measures haven't yet been evaluated, but the constabulary

believes they will reduce offending and are an interesting approach to considering how early intervention can reduce crime and protect vulnerable people.

Problem solving is used well by beat teams to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour

Problem solving works well within beat teams, and we saw many examples of how it is being used to address community concerns as well as general vulnerability. One such example is Operation Expel to safeguard vulnerable people and protect them when they are deliberately targeted by [county lines](#) drugs suppliers and their homes used for criminal activity – known as [cuckooing](#). There is a structured model in place and problem-solving plans are documented. There are problem-solving teams within local policing units that act as subject matter experts offering support for more complex matters, and they work with local teams well. The problem-solving portal on the intranet has a range of helpful information and guidance for staff. The constabulary has recently developed a five-part evaluation template for problem-solving plans, and this will give clarity on good practice in the future, which is positive. The constabulary shares problem-solving practice across wider teams through problem-solving conferences, with two held in 2021, showcasing what works well. Partner organisations also told us the constabulary works well with them where incidents or events need a collaborative approach.

Beat managers have effective tools to assist their problem-solving activity

The constabulary uses data dashboards and a beat management application to analyse and understand repeat callers and repeat incident locations. It is also planning to use a mapping tool to help officers visualise demand. Partner agencies told us they have invested to fund an analyst post to enhance the use of police and partnership data in community safety activities. This is a positive development. Beat officers have community profiles to identify main contacts in the community and understand the demographics of their wards. Beat officers use a variety of methods to gain feedback from third-sector organisations and communities. There is formal consultation with the public, with consideration of how to reach those less likely to trust or work with police – for example, the LGBTQ+ community in Congleton. Officers record the most vulnerable, top perpetrators, dangerous offenders and those who generate high demand for partnership services in their area. This supports early intervention and problem-solving activity well. We saw some good examples of how plans are used to reduce demand and protect the vulnerable. These include Operation Initiated, a force-wide operation targeting county lines drugs supply and the reduction of related serious violence.

The constabulary is taking steps to professionalise neighbourhood policing through an accredited qualification

The constabulary is now rolling out its Skills for Justice Level 3 neighbourhood management qualification with an ambitious programme to build skills in early intervention and problem solving. Some members of the workforce have also undertaken a higher Level 4 qualification to help them provide training to others. This recognises the importance of effective neighbourhood policing, professionalises the role of beat managers and supports the continuous improvement of problem-solving activity and early intervention.

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

The constabulary values effective problem solving, and it actively recognises staff for their good work. The constabulary nominates suitable candidates for the international problem-oriented policing Goldstein awards, national problem-solving Tilley awards and local awards. The constabulary offers several opportunities for volunteering, including cyber volunteers, the special constabulary, which had 213 officers as at 31 March 2021, the cadet scheme and the mini police scheme for younger children. Beat managers, PCSOs and volunteers we spoke to told us they feel valued and rewarded by the organisation.

Beat managers are often abstracted from neighbourhood policing

The constabulary has a target of less than 10 percent abstraction for beat managers. But we found that officers are often taken away to cover response duties to help meet demand. This means they aren't seen on their wards and are unable to work on problem solving. This happened in the summer months last year and more recently when some teams were disbanded to support response teams in January. These abstractions and their effect on neighbourhood policing and problem solving aren't monitored. It would benefit the constabulary to consider how it can better balance response demands with visible ward policing. We found that abstractions for PCSOs had less of an effect.

Responding to the public

Requires
improvement

Cheshire Constabulary requires improvement at responding to the public.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should improve the way it responds to calls for service and reduce the abandonment rate so that fewer callers disengage

On 31 May 2022, the Home Office published data on 999 call answering times. Call answering time is the time taken for a call to be transferred to a force and the time taken by that force to answer it. In England and Wales, forces should aim to answer 90 percent of these calls within 10 seconds.

Since the Home Office hadn't published this data at the time we made our judgment, we have used data provided by forces to assess how quickly they answer 999 calls. In the future, we will use the data supplied by the Home Office.

The constabulary isn't answering all 999 calls within target times. Constabulary data for the six months up to January 2022 shows an average of 76.6 percent of all 999 calls answered within 10 seconds. The constabulary monitors this as well as the average length of time a member of the public waits for calls to be answered. Although there has been recent improvement, many non-emergency calls are still abandoned. The abandonment rate ranged from a year high of 37.3 percent in August 2021 to 16.2 percent in January 2022. This is too high. By its own assessment, Cheshire Constabulary can do more to understand where in the call-routing process people abandon non-emergency calls and why they do so.

The constabulary should ensure that risk assessments are consistently applied to calls for service so that risk and vulnerability are visible from the outset and inform deployment decisions

During our previous inspection, we found that the constabulary needed to improve the application of risk assessment to calls for service so that risk and vulnerability are visible from the outset, to ensure it is used to re-assess when delays occur and that it informs the subsequent attendance and investigation. There has been some improvement and training to support application of risk assessments within the force contact centre, but there are still gaps in the application of [THRIVE](#), the risk assessment tool. Consequently, more can be done to ensure that the workforce applies risk assessments to incidents so that they can be responded to appropriately.

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

Our fieldwork found that repeat victim checks weren't carried out in all cases, and where the person was a repeat victim, this wasn't always recorded. Similarly, we found that checks weren't always conducted to see if another person was vulnerable; nor was the vulnerability of others within households always recognised and recorded. Some vulnerability is being missed, and victims may not receive the service they require to adequately safeguard them. In our last inspection, we issued an area for improvement for the constabulary to review its vulnerability-marking processes to make sure it is consistent and used to inform safeguarding considerations for victims. Our fieldwork shows this hasn't been fully addressed and more can be done to effectively safeguard vulnerable victims.

Main findings

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

The constabulary could do more to improve support to contact centre staff

Force contact centre attendance data is monitored in leadership team meetings and quarterly performance meetings. Each meeting considers performance data, resources, capability and attendance. There is a contact centre wellbeing action plan in place which used problem solving to consider how best to address the high level of absence that the department experienced during the summer of 2021. This is positive. But some staff told us that they find the workload pressured and that one-to-one meetings with supervisors are rarely held. This means that supervisors don't always understand the demands on staff and aren't well placed to manage individuals' professional development. This can have an effect on workforce wellbeing, limit the nurturing of talent and add to attrition rates within contact management.

More could be done to improve the response to non-emergency calls

We found that attendance at incidents isn't timely for non-emergency calls. Victims weren't always updated when there were delays or if the response to their incident had been downgraded. Changes to risk assessment can affect the urgency of a response to incidents. We found changes made were appropriate and in accordance with risk and vulnerability assessments. Justification was recorded and approved by a supervisor where needed. Recent data shows that the timeliness of response to priority non-emergency calls is improving, and the constabulary is exploring how this can be further improved and sustained in future.

Officers attend emergency calls promptly and within target response times

The constabulary has a graded response policy, and we found an appropriate approach in the allocation of incidents to the right team. The constabulary told us that based on average time from dispatch to arrival at scene, it met its response target to emergency calls from November 2020 to January 2022. Attendance is monitored closely at daily management meetings at local and force level, transferring resources to meet emergency demand. This means callers most in need of emergency support get prompt service.

The constabulary has improved its ability to respond to incidents where firearms may be present

It is important for both public and officer safety that, before responding, police systems can find out whether a reported incident involves a firearm or is at the address of a firearm certificate holder. It is equally important for this valuable information to be passed to officers attending so that appropriate risk assessment can take place. This has been an area for improvement for Cheshire Constabulary since 2015. Call handlers can now see the information they need when they check addresses. The constabulary is now working with the command and control system provider to fully automate this process. This means timely information is now being provided to attending officers to allow them to make effective decisions based on all relevant information to better protect their safety and that of others.

The constabulary understands the pressures facing response officers and supervisors and is taking action to address them

Response officers and their supervisors reported being under pressure, with vacancies in some areas. There are increasing numbers of student officers, which, although positive, brings the complexity of managing their absence for learning needs. This isn't unique to Cheshire Constabulary. The leadership understands the demands its response teams face and is taking action to improve the situation. A proof of concept model for area investigation teams is in place and this is intended to be applied force-wide, with three dedicated teams throughout the constabulary. These teams will deal with scheduled appointments and lower-level investigations that are currently dealt with by the response teams, freeing them up to attend incidents. This is a positive development. The constabulary has used call volume data to establish what level of resource is required to meet demand effectively. But it is too early to say whether the change will have the intended results. Response officers we spoke to welcome it, and we will watch this development with interest. The constabulary is also examining how automating and simplifying tasks within [NICHE](#), its crime recording system, could help free up time for sergeants. Releasing them from some administrative tasks would better support timely, effective investigations and justice for victims of crimes.

We also had positive feedback from response staff about their sergeants and how they discharge their wellbeing duties well, taking time where they can to decompress incidents and support their teams.

Investigating crime

Adequate

Cheshire Constabulary is adequate at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary needs to ensure that the requirements of the VCOP are complied with. This includes carrying out victim needs assessments and taking victim personal statements

We found the VCOP was rarely considered at the start of investigations and was often incorrect, with vulnerable victims being marked as needing a normal level of support. There were few victim contracts, which means vulnerable victims aren't being given options to decide how and when they want to be contacted. The constabulary uses vulnerable person assessments, but these are often just a repeat of what the incident was about, with little consideration of victim needs.

The victim needs assessment is an established way to understand what support a person needs during the criminal justice process. There were gaps in 21 of 54 relevant cases we looked at. Where the victim was identified as needing more support through enhanced services, this wasn't taken further in some cases. This could lead to victims not supporting prosecutions and losing faith in the criminal justice process. There were 44 cases where providing a victim personal statement was appropriate. In 29 cases, the victim refused or declined to co-operate. In the remaining 15 cases where a victim personal statement could have been considered, only 4 were actually taken. More can be done to ensure that victims receive the standard of care they need to support the pursuit of justice.

We know the constabulary has recently introduced an e-contact card to support better victim contact and VCOP compliance and to give necessary information to victims of crime. This is a positive development and enables victims to better engage with the officer investigating their case in the future.

The constabulary should establish processes to ensure that the auditable record of the decision of the victim and their reasons for withdrawal of support, or their wishes for an [out-of-court disposal](#) or caution, are fully documented

We reviewed 20 cautions, community resolutions and cases where a suspect was identified but the victim didn't support, or withdrew support for, police action ([outcome 16](#)). Where a community resolution was given, 5 of 16 cases we reviewed didn't have an auditable record endorsed by the victim – such as a statement or pocket notebook entry. In relation to outcome 16 cases, we found that in 17 of 20 files examined there was also no auditable record to confirm they wished to withdraw support. The constabulary needs to ensure that the decision of the victim and their reasons for withdrawal of support are fully documented in an auditable record. This will help the constabulary find out why victims withdraw support for police action, with a view to ensuring the service the police provide to the victim isn't contributing to this.

Main findings

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

The constabulary is not meeting demand for timely crime recording

We referred to the need for the constabulary to improve the timeliness of crime recording in the victim service assessment section of this report. The occurrence management unit records all crime in Cheshire. But it isn't recording crime in a timely way. Delays have reduced more recently, but overtime is being used to help meet demand. This isn't sustainable. We know there are intentions to increase resources, and there is a plan in place to better manage demand. This is good news, but the benefits are yet to be seen.

Crimes are allocated to officers via the crime hubs, mostly within 24 to 48 hours of reaching the hubs. There is clear direction to improve allocation by the detective superintendent with responsibility for this area, which is positive. But we found that units aren't always routinely staffed at weekends, which means that there are backlogs of crimes waiting to be allocated on Mondays. It is important that the constabulary can record and allocate crime swiftly, as any delay between victim contact and crime allocation to an officer increases the chance that safeguarding opportunities will be missed and victims will disengage.

There are gaps in accredited detective numbers, but the constabulary is making progress

The constabulary has a detective resilience action plan that reflects the national plan, and progress against it is tracked. As at 31 March 2021, 64 percent of detective roles were filled with accredited detectives. Vacancies in public protection roles are prioritised, and we found that numbers here are closer to the establishment levels. However, the constabulary told us that in local investigation teams there are more gaps.

The constabulary uses a range of ways to increase the number of detectives. It pays for study books for officers and supports them with a funded crammer course. The constabulary told us that the pass rate for the national investigators examination had risen from 58 percent to 75 percent as a result. It advertises for external transferees, offers direct entry for detective constables and has a detective academy within the [serious and organised crime](#) unit, with this model also being trialled in cyber-crime. We received some negative feedback from existing detectives that the academy approach can reduce opportunities for development and career pathways. The constabulary may wish to consider how the need to increase accredited resources is balanced with supporting the wider detective workforce.

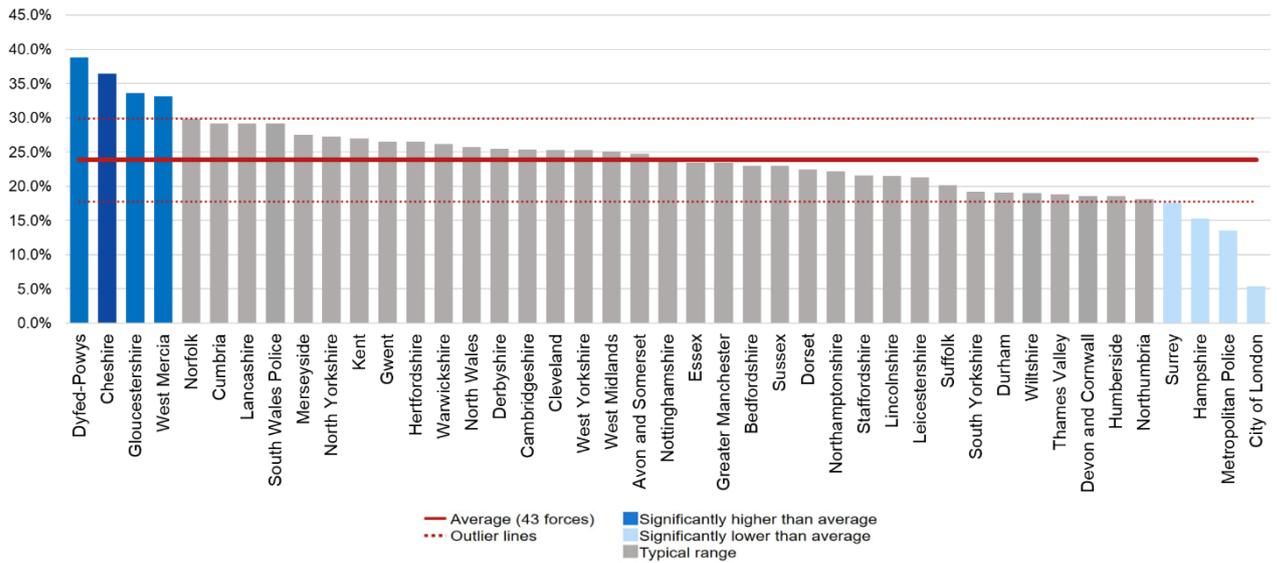
Appropriate and effective supervision of investigations does not always take place

Most investigations (60 of 70) we reviewed during the victim service assessment were carried out in a timely manner and relevant, proportionate lines of enquiry were completed. But there was a lack of effective supervision in 13 of 50 relevant cases reviewed and no investigation plan in 13 of 45 reviewed. We also found victims were sometimes not kept up to date about the investigations. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when they are kept informed. A thorough investigation increases the likelihood of perpetrators being identified and a positive outcome for the victim.

The constabulary could do more to take forward investigations appropriately where the victim doesn't support a prosecution

For all offences recorded by Cheshire Constabulary in the year ending 30 June 2021, 36 percent had an outcome of 'evidential difficulties: suspect identified; victim does not support further action' (outcome 16). This is statistically significantly higher than the average of forces in England and Wales, which was 24 percent.

Figure 1: Proportion of offences recorded in the year ending 30 June 2021 with an outcome of ‘evidential difficulties: suspect identified; victim does not support further action’ (outcome 16) across all forces



Staff we spoke to were aware of evidence-led prosecutions and the importance of taking them forward where victims are reluctant, to secure justice and protect vulnerable people. But we also know the constabulary considers more can be done to take these forward. It is encouraging staff to use body-worn video and improve the quality of statements to obtain successful outcomes for victims. It would benefit victims to consider how the constabulary can better understand whether officers are taking all opportunities to seek justice. For evidence-led prosecutions taken forward, the criminal justice unit monitors the quality of the file submitted and the outcome of these cases.

There is sound governance in place to improve investigations

The monthly force performance day attended by senior leaders considers key themes to improve investigations, as do other area or departmental performance meetings. Performance is further monitored through the quarterly performance review process, which seeks continuous improvement in investigations and victim service. The detective chief superintendent holds a weekly crime and suspect management performance meeting, with superintendent and chief inspector representatives from other departments. This meeting is effective. There is an improvement for open crimes with month-on-month reductions because of this focus. Similarly, there have been sustained reductions in the number of recorded offences where there is a named suspect. This enables victims to be better assured of timely justice.

The constabulary now has in place data dashboards which show detailed information for crucial areas for crime performance. This is a step forward and helps the workforce to see crime demand and performance for themselves. The dashboards are used to inform performance meetings and give officers and supervisors an effective tool for case management. Training has been provided to frontline supervisors to ensure they understand and use the tool effectively.

Delays in digital investigation have decreased since our last inspection

At our last inspection, we gave Cheshire Constabulary an area for improvement for its ability to retrieve digital evidence from mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices quickly enough to ensure that investigations aren't delayed. This has now improved. The constabulary has invested heavily in digital investigations, increasing staffing levels to address demand. [Digital forensics](#) is now better connected with investigations as part of the serious and organised crime portfolio – along with the online child abuse investigation team (OCAIT) and cyber-crime as a digital media investigations unit. Backlogs in the examination of computers and mobile devices have reduced. Submissions and triage processes have been improved, and digital investigation staff are available to attend scenes to consider what items are most likely to yield evidence. Most people we spoke to commented on the improvement in the turnaround times for retrieval of this evidence. This is good news and brings the potential for swifter justice for victims.

Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

Cheshire Constabulary is adequate at protecting vulnerable people.

Area for improvement

The constabulary should implement a co-ordinated and comprehensive safeguarding structure to protect vulnerable people appropriately

This is a time of significant change for the constabulary's safeguarding operating model. During our inspection we found confusion in the workforce about the current and proposed structure as well as a lack of understanding by staff of their safeguarding responsibilities. The constabulary needs to clearly define its safeguarding arrangements. It needs to communicate them well to make sure that officers and staff understand their roles and responsibilities and how and where to escalate safeguarding concerns. The constabulary's vulnerability strategy refers to a vulnerability board which oversees it. However, this board is no longer in operation. While this situation may be temporary and linked to the development of a new safeguarding model, it is important that the constabulary is able to continue to track progress. The constabulary should make sure it demonstrates how this will happen in any new model it develops.

Innovative practice

The constabulary has a nationally recognised and innovative harm reduction unit to safeguard victims of stalking and harassment and influence offender behaviour

The unit is managed by a detective sergeant and includes victims' advocates, a consultant forensic psychologist, forensic practitioner and occupational therapist as well as a probation officer and business officer. The purpose is to provide a joint approach to reducing risk of harm, with an emphasis on supporting victims of stalking and harassment. The unit also focuses on intervention with offenders involved in stalking and harassment as well as some serial [domestic abuse](#) perpetrators. It also offers advice to officers in relation to investigations and the application for [stalking protection orders](#). Cases are generally referred to the unit via the constabulary but can also be directed as a result of court order or through other statutory partners.

The unit has been independently evaluated by the Jill Dando Institute, which has found that there are clear cost benefits to the approach.

Main findings

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

The constabulary uses distraction devices in custody to better support the wellbeing of children and neuro-divergent people who are detained

Cheshire Constabulary is trialling the use of distraction techniques in one of its custody suites. Risk assessments are completed with people whose welfare may be negatively affected while detained. Art materials, including painted wall chalkboards, stress balls and crossword books, are offered to help reduce stress and provide distraction from the surroundings. The constabulary reports a positive response to this measure and is now seeking further funding to extend it to all custody suites. This is an interesting development as being detained in custody can be difficult for young and vulnerable people.

The use of protective powers to support vulnerable victims is increasing

Recently the constabulary has received praise for the number of stalking protection orders it has successfully attained relative to the population size of the area. In the year ending September 2021, it applied for 22 interim stalking protection orders with 21 granted – an increase on the previous year when five were applied for and four were granted. It also applied for six full orders all of which were granted – compared to one the previous year. We have seen recent improvement in how vulnerable victims are safeguarded. Where cases may result in no further action, superintendents are now contacted to consider appropriate use of protective notices and orders, such as DVPO/Ns. These orders place restrictions on contact from the suspect to the victim and provide a window of time for safeguarding support to be put in place to reduce future risk of harm. DVPOs and action needed for breaches are discussed in daily management meetings so that arrests can be made quickly where needed. The constabulary also makes use of the [domestic violence disclosure scheme](#) – Clare’s Law. This scheme allows the violent offending history of a partner or ex-partner to be disclosed to a potential victim so they can make informed choices about seeking support and remaining in a relationship. But the constabulary accepts that more can be done to ensure that in all appropriate cases disclosures are applied for and made.

There are effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in place

The constabulary has well-established [multi-agency risk assessment conference \(MARAC\)](#) arrangements in place and these follow [SafeLives](#) guidance. Where decisions are taken not to refer cases to MARAC, there is a documented multi-agency rationale. We observed a MARAC meeting during our fieldwork and found it to be well attended by a range of services. There was active contribution to the discussion of high-risk cases and a focus on safety planning and risk management for victims, perpetrators and children exposed to domestic abuse. The eastern area has introduced a twice-weekly e-MARAC to discuss cases and safeguard victims in real time, and a full MARAC is held where needed. This is positive, and we understand that this is now being considered in other areas.

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are also well established and teams are co-located in the same buildings, each with defined referral pathways for children but differing partner presence. Partner organisations told us there are good working relationships. There are also processes in place for referring concerns about vulnerable adults to adult social care.

There is good health and wellbeing support in place for some high-risk roles, and this is to be extended

Working in high-risk roles poses a risk to health and wellbeing, and it is important there are arrangements in place to offer support. Cheshire Constabulary is using a psychological tool for a cohort of 38 people in high-risk teams. The results determine the bespoke approach to be taken for each individual's wellbeing. We know that this is to be extended to high-risk roles throughout the organisation in 2022, which is a positive development. In addition to high-risk roles in safeguarding teams, it also offers support to officers working in the serious collisions investigation unit. This is good news. And there is a part-time psychologist working within Operation Hummingbird, the Countess of Chester baby death investigation, to support the workforce as well as the use of supported trauma debrief sessions. Such arrangements show that the wellbeing of officers and staff is well understood and supported.

Attending officers do not always recognise hidden vulnerability

We received feedback from specialist teams that the quality of [domestic abuse risk assessment forms \(DASH\)](#) and vulnerable person referrals submitted by response officers is improving. We reviewed some examples and found that they were mostly of a good standard. But not all officers recognise the importance of understanding and recording the [voice of the child](#) at domestic incidents and how such incidents may affect the child. This is important. Not recognising this vulnerability may reduce the likelihood of the right support being put in place to protect children in these situations. The constabulary recognises that there is a gap between the number of domestic abuse incidents and the number of [Operation Encompass](#) referrals submitted to schools. The purpose of such referrals is to alert schools when a child is identified as having witnessed an incident of domestic abuse, enabling measures to be put in place to support them. It is important that hidden vulnerability is recognised and dealt with appropriately in these settings, and more can be done to ensure this is fully understood and acted on by frontline officers.

Managing offenders and suspects

Requires
improvement

Cheshire Constabulary requires improvement at managing offenders and suspects.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should ensure the quality of supervisory Violent and Sex Offenders Register reviews is robust and that actions are recorded and completed to effectively manage the risk posed by RSOs

We conducted an audit of 12 [Violent and Sex Offenders Register](#) records against national practice and local policy. This included all risk levels and those low-risk offenders who are [managed in a reactive way](#). Seven records were inadequate, four required improvement and one was adequate. Staff and supervisory reviews of reactively managed cases were poor. And there was no consideration of other checks such as social media and police systems to identify risk. Some reactively managed records contained information that should have been acted on or potential crimes. But nothing was done to investigate or consider whether risk levels had changed in four of the cases. Reviews need to be robust and determine what actions need to take place to manage the risks of offenders effectively and safeguard the public.

The constabulary should urgently review its intelligence processes for cases awaiting allocation

We examined cases awaiting action in OCAIT and found a backlog of 123 cases awaiting action at the time of our inspection. There was no process for updating information relevant to those cases once an initial assessment was made. This is important, as without it there is no way for the constabulary to understand if risk has changed and if swifter action is needed. The refresh should also include contact with social services to capture other information for risk assessment. We found some notable examples – where a suspect had a child before they were arrested and another who had become a teacher. We gave the constabulary early feedback because of our concerns. It has now started a review process once cases reach six months old. This is a start, but a blanket approach to reviews doesn't manage interim risk effectively, and more needs to be done.

The constabulary should continue to review its use of [released under investigation \(RUI\)](#) to assure itself that opportunities to safeguard children and prevent further offending are not missed

We found that OCAIT disproportionately used RUI over pre-charge [bail](#) with conditions during our inspection. One hundred and thirty-nine suspects were subject of RUI, and only two were on pre-charge bail with conditions. Not considering bail with conditions means safeguarding options are missed. We gave early feedback given our concerns. The constabulary now gives direction to the workforce on the consideration of pre-charge bail rather than RUI. And we found this advice is extended more widely than to the [management of sexual or violent offenders \(MOSOVO\)](#) and OCAIT teams alone. This is good news and should ensure that more vulnerable children are safeguarded while cases are being investigated. The constabulary told us that updated data shows that since January 2022, 28 new OCAIT cases are being managed. And there is a better balance of bail to RUI cases, considering safeguarding needs. This shows some progress, but it is still early days, and more can be done to embed consistent and sustained safeguarding action.

Main findings

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

The constabulary has backlogs of active risk management systems assessments but is reducing this over time

Supervisors and staff we spoke to have a clear understanding of the [active risk management systems \(ARMS\)](#) process and the national guidance for the completion of ARMS. They describe operating in accordance with national practice to manage an RSO's risk to the public. But we found there was a backlog of ARMS assessments at the time of our inspection. There were 86 outstanding – 41 low risk, 44 medium risk and 1 high risk. The constabulary has been reducing the backlog over a period of time. This is mostly through the use of overtime, which isn't sustainable either financially or for workforce wellbeing. The constabulary told us that at 28 March 2022, the backlog had reduced to 53 overdue ARMS assessments – 20 low risk, 31 medium risk and 1 high risk, with 1 not yet assessed. This is positive, but the constabulary should ensure the future uplift in resources will manage demand appropriately.

The constabulary does not conduct RSO visits in appropriate timescales but is improving its practice

At the time of our inspection, there was a backlog of 52 RSO visits. Of those, 21 were low risk and 31 medium risk. There were no high or very high-risk cases. We found nearly all RSOs who should have visits had them diarised for every 12 months, regardless of risk. A few records did show that visits were completed in between the 12-month period but not all. We gave the constabulary early feedback on this. And there was no clear rationale for the visit scheduling within risk management plans. The constabulary recognises its practice was incorrect and now follows NPCC guidance on home visits. The constabulary told us that at 24 March 2022, this backlog had reduced to 24 – with 12 medium risk, 10 low risk and 2 not yet assessed. This is good news.

The constabulary uses ancillary orders to protect the public but the proactive enforcement of these orders could be better

The constabulary uses sexual risk orders and these are managed by the MOSOVO teams. The approach to a sexual risk order includes an ARMS assessment, which isn't mandated within national practice but is good practice. OCAIT apply for a [sexual harm prevention order \(SHPO\)](#) for all their court cases and consider civil applications where an SHPO isn't issued. But during our audit, almost all records we looked at didn't show any proactive checking of devices on visits. Conducting these checks is important as it can help safeguard vulnerable children, lead to the early identification of further offences and help enforce conditions within court orders.

OCAIT is not able to meet current demand, but there is a planned uplift in resources to address this

We found a significant backlog of cases awaiting action during our inspection activity – with 123 referrals in the backlog. The oldest case awaiting allocation dated from the end of August 2019. Supervisors told us they have insufficient resources to meet the demand. The constabulary is using overtime to bring this backlog down, but this isn't sustainable. On inspection, we found the queue for action at 28 March 2022 was 125 cases. Some of these were planned for action in April. The constabulary is making progress in addressing cases by risk, but numbers remain high. Twelve of these cases relate to existing RSOs and new intelligence about their activity. Some are being dealt with by MOSOVO officers in the course of their visits. Furthermore, there is a planned uplift of resources from April 2022 to ensure that teams can meet demand effectively.

The constabulary now prioritises the arrest of named suspects and offenders to bring swifter justice to victims

The change in the senior leadership team for Cheshire Constabulary has brought a drive to improve the service provided to victims. A weekly crime and suspect management meeting is held to manage outstanding offenders. The quarterly performance meetings also have a focus on outstanding offenders and wanted people, connecting the strategic management of offenders and suspects with local activity, using risk assessment to prioritise action. The constabulary told us there had been an improvement in the arrest of suspects over the rolling 12-month period to December 2021. We also saw that high harm offenders, such as domestic abuse suspects and those who have breached protective orders, are discussed at the daily 'pacesetter' management meetings and followed up, with the focus on early arrest. This is positive and sends the message that the constabulary prioritises vulnerable victims and that those who cause harm will not be tolerated in Cheshire.

The constabulary understands its integrated offender management cohorts well and has effective partnership arrangements in place

The constabulary understands its integrated offender management (IOM) cohorts (those managed under the IOM approach), and the ratio of offenders being managed is mostly within expected ranges. The IOM approach reflects force priorities as well as national direction, with the risks posed by repeat domestic abuse perpetrators recognised. And further work will be undertaken to better reflect the nationally updated strategy. The force has also realigned IOM within its operating model so that it is under the line management of a safeguarding superintendent. The IOM team works well with partner agencies in monitoring cohort reoffending and in developing further control measures to reduce offending. Senior police managers meet monthly with Cheshire's heads of probation, and a multi-agency conference takes place. This supports multi-agency decision-making about cohort members. We did have some feedback that some offender managers haven't been trained for their role and are learning on the job. In the absence of a national training programme, it would benefit the constabulary to consider how training can be done to support workforce development.

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

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Good

Cheshire Constabulary is good at building and developing its workforce.

Main findings

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

The senior leadership team promotes an ethical performance and behaviour culture

The senior leadership team in Cheshire Constabulary is united in the direction it sets. The 'raising the bar' approach sets the performance standards for the provision of service to the public. The chief constable has conducted briefings with all sergeants and inspectors, reinforcing these standards. Police staff line managers are also briefed to ensure all supervisors understand the leadership expectations for their role. The [professional standards department \(PSD\)](#) has given awareness training to the workforce about standards and behaviour, and this is evident in its [organisational justice](#) model, which incorporates a reflective practice approach to behaviour and misconduct. We had positive feedback about the relationship between PSD and the wider constabulary, with an emphasis on learning rather than blame. Staff we spoke to understand the importance of behaving ethically in their work.

The constabulary understands and prioritises workforce wellbeing

Wellbeing is a priority in the constabulary's people strategy, and there are defined pathways for support through occupational health provision. There is a wellbeing steering group chaired by the deputy chief constable (DCC), and people services has a dedicated resource which works with the externally-provided [occupational health service \(OHU\)](#). The constabulary has completed a health and wellbeing self-assessment and this informs its plans. It has invested in wellbeing champions and allies, with an established network throughout the organisation and a steering group to promote good practice and offer colleagues advice and support. We saw some positive examples of how leaders engaged with their teams while working remotely during COVID-19. These included holding video calls, social meetings and a video briefing that was created via Operation Pandas (the constabulary response to the pandemic) to show how office space now looks, with screens and sanitiser, to prepare them for returning to the workplace. Measures like these reassure the workforce that their health and wellbeing are being addressed, helping them to feel safe and reducing anxiety.

There is a wide range of wellbeing provision to support the workforce

Most staff we spoke to were positive about the range of health provision and wellbeing support available to them. We know that where there have been delays in OHU appointments; action has been taken, with a new member of staff assisting the healthcare provider with medicals for recruits. We also know that the constabulary has employed the services of the mental health charity MIND to offer additional support to workforce members who need bespoke counselling services. We were told that there are workload pressures and vacancies, particularly in operational roles such as response, so this support is important. We did have some feedback that being unable to self-refer may prevent some people from seeking help. We understand this is due to the conditions set by the provider, and it would benefit the workforce if the ability to self-refer was part of the new enhanced offer being developed. The implementation of personal passports, for reasonable adjustments in the workplace, gives further support to individuals where there are bespoke needs to be catered for in their working arrangements. This is good news as it prevents unnecessary repetition of details about personal health concerns.

The workforce has access to a plethora of wellbeing information and self-help guidance, and stations have dedicated wellbeing rooms for staff to decompress. Wellbeing champions and allies have bespoke plans for their areas, and there are newsletters and poster campaigns highlighting health and wellbeing information. The constabulary has also invested in mental health first aid training – with more than 90 officers trained. It uses several feedback channels to measure the effectiveness of wellbeing provision, including surveys and more formal evaluation processes and data. This is positive in helping it to understand what works and what else may need to be considered.

The constabulary is seeking to increase the organisation’s diversity to better reflect its communities

The DCC is the diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) lead and chairs a monthly meeting to promote and improve DEI matters. The constabulary has taken steps to improve its understanding of workforce diversity through its campaign ‘Help us to mind our own business’, designed to increase confidence in the workforce to declare protected characteristics. The DEI team seeks to improve the internal environment, promotes appropriate positive action, and its support of improving workforce confidence in declaring protected characteristics overlaps with the recruitment focus. There has been a new approach to officer and staff recruitment with the campaign ‘Where you can be you’, aimed to attract candidates from diverse groups. The force has worked well with internal staff networks and the external diversity board to try to attract candidates who are more representative of the community.

At 31 March 2021, 2 percent of the constabulary’s officers were from an ethnic minority background, slightly lower than the proportion from an ethnic minority background in the local population (3.1 percent). But the proportion of police officers from ethnic minority backgrounds has increased in recent years, and this is reflected in the proportion of joiners from ethnic minority backgrounds, which is now closer to the local population at 3 percent.

Figure 2: Proportion of Cheshire Constabulary officers and police officer joiners from ethnic minority backgrounds at 31 March 2021 compared to local population



The constabulary is an inclusive employer and this is nationally recognised

The use of a neuro-diversity subject matter expert to advise on recruitment has also brought changes to help candidates perform on a level playing field. This is good practice, and the constabulary has been acknowledged for its inclusivity through recognised awards. It is a top 50 inclusive employer and a disability confident leader. It is the first police force to achieve the British Dyslexia Association's Smart Award and has received a silver award under the Ministry of Defence employer recognition scheme for support in employment of ex-armed forces personnel. The constabulary has a wide range of staff networks in place to represent the interests of the workforce. Each has direct contact with [chief officers](#) through quarterly consultative meetings that are used to give advice about concerns. These arrangements mean that the workforce can be confident that the constabulary takes inclusiveness seriously.

Cheshire Constabulary recognises that it could better understand why people leave and is taking action to address this

The constabulary monitors attrition rates at its people board. It told us that exit interview uptake is low and forms aren't always fully completed. Work will be done to enhance the constabulary's knowledge of why people leave, including the potential for a person independent of the direct line managers to hold the exit interview – for example, a DEI team lead for staff with a protected characteristic. This is good news as it will give leavers greater confidence to speak openly about their reasons for leaving and give the constabulary greater clarity on any patterns and trends over time.

The training plan and approach have improved since our last inspection

During the 2018/19 inspection, we found that there were some gaps in the training function and plans and that these should be reviewed to maximise investment opportunities and provide the training needed for the workforce. The situation has improved, and we have seen a change in the way operational training and continuous professional development are offered to the operational workforce. This is good news.

Performance and wellbeing appraisals aren't held in all parts of the force

We found some differences in the application of the performance, wellbeing and talent conversation (PTC) – the constabulary's performance and wellbeing appraisal for staff. The constabulary monitors the number of open PTCs with development objectives, but some members of the workforce still don't have a PTC in place – particularly in operational units. Without regular one-to-one meetings, not all staff can discuss and have recorded their performance and development needs, and those who either need support or are talented individuals may not be identified. We also know that there are very few people engaged in the 'poor performance' process. The constabulary may wish to consider how it can embed the benefits of regular and active PTCs with the operational workforce so that it can better manage performance and development.

The constabulary has taken steps to develop a talent management framework but it is not widely used

The constabulary developed a talent management framework following its last PEEL inspection, and this shows progress. It now has a dedicated adviser for talent management. It has also recently published a 'maximising talent' guide to support people seeking development and to guide line managers. But the framework depends on holding PTCs and one-to-one conversations with workforce members. We found few members of the operational workforce were aware of the talent management framework. It isn't yet routinely used, and the constabulary should take further steps to explain the framework to the workforce so that talent can be consistently identified.

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.

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

Strategic planning, organisational management and value for money

Adequate

Cheshire Constabulary is adequate at operating efficiently.

Area for improvement

The constabulary still needs to improve its understanding of future demand, so that it can plan effectively

Its failure to fully understand likely future demand was an area for improvement in our last inspection of Cheshire Constabulary in 2018/19, and this remains a weakness. The constabulary did do some analysis of demand following the last inspection and developed a project to identify where changes might be needed to ensure it could continue to meet demand. However, this review wasn't fully implemented, and we found a lack of recent analysis of current demand or predictive modelling of changes in future demand. In the absence of hard data, senior leaders have to rely too heavily on their own professional judgment to predict emerging threats and likely changes in demand in their areas of operation. This means that the constabulary cannot have any certainty that its plans for either its finances or its future workforce will be fit for purpose.

Main findings

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

The constabulary has an effective strategic planning framework, making sure it tackles what is important locally and nationally

Notwithstanding the area for improvement outlined above, the constabulary does have sound corporate planning and governance processes which integrate the [police and crime commissioner's \(PCC\)](#) priorities into the police's priorities. It also incorporates a robust assessment of its capability to protect its communities from crime and anti-social behaviour. This is supported by some effective practice in neighbourhood policing, where there is a clear commitment to working with local partner organisations and communities, to ensure a joined-up approach that reflects what matters to local people.

The constabulary has recently introduced a new performance management framework which sets out a hierarchical series of meetings through which performance at every level is monitored and reviewed. This starts with the PCC holding the chief constable to account and is cascaded down to individual performance conversations between staff and their supervisors.

Finances are well managed and financial planning aligns well with corporate planning

We were impressed by the way financial management and controls are integrated into overall management. There is a strong focus on continuing to improve efficiency and producing cost savings. Financial planning is aligned well with workforce planning and there is a strong governance structure in place to monitor and review the use of resources throughout the constabulary. It operates a mature and well-established approach using [priority-based budgeting](#). The annual process of planning the budget by collectively scrutinising planned spending against its effect on priorities is widely understood and accepted as standard practice. It gives senior leaders a systematic and robust way of ensuring that resources follow priorities. It enables the effect of any reductions in service to the public to be fully evaluated, serves to clearly establish areas where savings can be made with the least impact and prioritises those areas where any extra investment available can be used to best effect. In 2022/23, the constabulary was able to determine over £4m of savings through this approach, which it has been able to reinvest in areas of higher priority.

The constabulary collaborates to improve services, with a renewed focus on continually evaluating the benefits

The constabulary has a good track record of supporting a range of collaborations. It works particularly well with other North West police forces to provide more resilient specialist services for Cheshire and improve value for money. It also shares some support functions with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. It has recently identified a need to maintain a closer oversight of its collaborations to make sure the expected benefits continue to be achieved. It is in the process of setting up a more systematic and rigorous approach to monitoring the outcomes and reviewing the benefits of all its joint working arrangements.

The constabulary is in the process of closing down a failed collaboration which involved the outsourcing of its transactional HR and finance functions (including payroll) through the Multi-Force Shared Services (MFSS). Although this was a joint venture involving other police forces, Cheshire Constabulary was the lead force. MFSS has been problematic throughout most of its existence, and the closure is now reaching a critical phase as the constabulary needs to manage the transition of some important support services back in-house and onto new systems. This has resulted in extra costs for all parties involved, and the withdrawal presents risks to all. The constabulary is actively managing the risks and overseeing the transition well.

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