

PEEL 2021/22

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Essex Police

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Overall summary

Our judgments

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

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

We also inspected how effective a service Essex 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

I recognise that Essex Police, in common with other forces, has experienced many difficulties over the past year due to the pandemic. I am pleased with some aspects of its performance in keeping people safe and reducing crime. I am satisfied with most other aspects of the force's performance, but there are areas where it needs to improve. I consider the findings below most significant from our assessment of the force over the last year.

The way the force answers and responds to calls from the public requires improvement

The force is often failing to answer calls within nationally applied standards. In particular, it needs to improve the time it takes to respond to non-emergency public calls for service and reduce the abandonment rate and wait times. It also needs to do more to ensure that routine calls for service are properly assessed and prioritised and any delays in response are kept to a minimum.

The force needs to improve its service to victims of crime

The force needs to make sure that it complies with the requirements of the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime \(VCOP\)](#). This includes offering [victims](#) the opportunity to give a personal statement and completing a victim needs assessment. The force also needs to improve how it records why victims withdraw their support for investigations and should make sure it documents whether evidence-led prosecutions have been considered in all such cases.

The force needs to improve its management of registered sex offenders

The force needs to do more to ensure it has the ability to undertake nationally recognised risk assessments in a timely manner. It also needs to ensure that the quality and timeliness of supervisory reviews help it to effectively manage the risk posed by registered sex offenders (RSOs).

The force is good at treating people fairly and with respect

Essex Police works well with communities. It has a good understanding of the effect that [stop and search powers](#) have on different communities. Officers have a good knowledge of what constitutes reasonable grounds for using these powers, and the force has put in place an effective system of external scrutiny of their use.

The force is good at preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

Essex Police works effectively with other allied organisations to proactively intervene to [protect vulnerable people](#) and to reduce crime and disorder using a range of prevention and enforcement measures.

The force promotes an ethical and inclusive culture and generally supports its workforce

The force has a strong sense of purpose with clear expectations that staff will always act with professionalism and integrity. The force has a good awareness of the needs and objectives of its workforce. It provides excellent wellbeing support and a supportive culture of learning. However, it needs to improve the support given to some teams dealing with [vulnerable](#) victims.

My report now sets out the fuller findings of this inspection. I will monitor the force's progress as it addresses the areas where it can improve while acknowledging the good work it has already undertaken in other areas.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Constabulary

Reducing crime assessment

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

Essex Police has an ethos of early intervention to prevent crime. It uses analysis to identify crime hotspots and responds effectively with other organisations to tackle entrenched criminality and [anti-social behaviour](#). It has developed a co-ordinated and forward-thinking approach to reducing crime. This includes creating an organisational structure that allows it to provide a range of support services to local policing, including providing comprehensive special constabulary, cadet and volunteer services.

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

- The force has a proactive approach to getting local communities involved in the prevention of crime, which is supported by its specialist police community safety and engagement officers (PCSEOs).
- The force is committed to improving community safety and works innovatively with community safety partnerships (CSPs) and other partner organisations to tackle crime and disorder linked to the night-time economy.

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

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

- It doesn't always identify repeat victims at the point of contact.
- It isn't always answering or responding to calls from the public in a timely and effective manner.
- It needs to do more to ensure that its lack of capacity and levels of inexperience in key areas, such as crime investigation, doesn't put undue pressure on staff and affect the quality of service provided to victims and the public in general.

Providing a service to the victims of crime

Victim service assessment

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

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

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

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

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

The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency and non-emergency calls and the identification of 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 needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls as it isn't meeting national standards. It also needs to improve its answering of non-emergency calls to prevent them from being abandoned by the caller. When calls are answered, the force doesn't consistently use its [risk assessment](#) process to ensure it identifies vulnerable victims. Equally, the force doesn't always identify repeat victims, which means their particular needs may not be taken into account when considering the response required. At the same time, victims aren't always given crime prevention advice, which could reduce the risk of them becoming a victim of crime again.

The force doesn't always respond 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.

However, we found that police attendance was often outside recognised force timescales. Victims were sometimes not informed of the delay, which may cause them to lose confidence and disengage.

The force usually carries out prompt and thorough investigations, with victims receiving regular updates on the progress of the investigation

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.

Investigations were usually carried out in a timely manner, and relevant and proportionate lines of enquiry were completed in most cases. Investigations were well supervised, and victims were kept updated throughout investigations. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when 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 a victim withdraws support for an investigation, the force didn't always consider progressing the case without the victim's support, which can be an important way of safeguarding the victim and preventing further offences from being committed. The force didn't always consider the use of orders designed to protect victims, such as a [domestic violence protection notice](#) or [order](#) (DVPN/O) in some cases.

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

The force isn't always using the appropriate outcome or obtaining an auditable record of the victim's wishes

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.

When a suspect is identified but there are evidential difficulties in progressing a prosecution, the victim should be informed of the decision to close the investigation. Not all victims were informed by the force of the decision to take no further action and close the investigation.

Where a suspect is identified but the victim doesn't support, or withdraws support for, police action, the force should have an auditable record to confirm the victim's decision so that it can close the investigation. Evidence of the victim's decision was absent in some cases reviewed. This represents a risk that the victim's wishes may not be fully represented and considered before the investigation is closed.

A crime that can only be prosecuted at magistrates' court must begin a prosecution within six months of the offence. An investigation can be closed if a suspect is identified but the time limit has expired. The force used this outcome incorrectly on several occasions.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Good

Essex 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 involves all of its diverse communities to understand and respond to what matters to them

The force has a strong focus on involving the community and has a clear and coherent communications strategy. It achieves positive two-way engagement with all the varied communities it serves, using a range of methods. The force has a significant presence on social media with increasing numbers of people accessing its content on different online platforms.

The force is aware that not everyone uses social media. It publishes a weekly district newsletter which is available online, but is also widely distributed in printed form, with support from local councils. It also involves the community with 'walk and talk' events with parish councillors when local officers meet often vulnerable and physically isolated members of communities to provide reassurance and support. 'Stroll on patrol' and similar schemes offer residents a way to meet ward officers, local councillors and other relevant agencies to walk around their area to identify and resolve community problems.

The force interacts positively with younger people who are often harder to reach. The force recently hosted an online roadshow which had inputs on 'how to keep safe' and 'making life choices'. It also works with sporting organisations to set up events, such as football or basketball tournaments, where the force can interact with young people in a positive way.

The force ensures that its communication activity is targeted and effective, with a strong approach to community involvement. Every six months, each district commander presents to the [chief officer](#) team and partner agencies the nature of their community involvement and future plans. The force has also invested in a team of local PCSEOs who aim to identify longer-term issues in the community. There is emphasis on levelling up in terms of identifying barriers and finding opportunities to engage with communities that face particular challenges.

The force engagement policy is underpinned by its close work with its [independent advisory groups \(IAGs\)](#). These are made up of members of the public who meet to advise and offer ideas to the force on a wide range of activities relating to local policing. Each district has its own IAG with diverse representation and an agenda that reflects the needs of local communities. The chair of each IAG will attend the overarching force-wide strategic IAG, which provides oversight of key issues such as stop and search, crime prevention and hate crime.

The force understands why and how to treat the public with fairness and respect

The force is committed to improving the quality of everyday interactions between police and the public, including at times when contact can be challenging, such as arrest or exercising powers under stop and search. Officers and [staff](#) receive initial training on how to de-escalate confrontational situations, which is refreshed annually through mandatory personal safety training. The force has recently added a reassurance element to its stop and search procedures to ensure officers end any encounter in a manner that aims to defuse potential conflict. Officers are encouraged to ask the person if they have any concerns or comments about the way they have been stopped. The process also provides an opportunity to offer support and advice to those who may be vulnerable, including young people at risk of criminal exploitation.

The force understands how to use stop and search powers fairly and respectfully

During our inspection we reviewed a sample of 196 stop and search records from 1 January to 31 December 2021. Based on this sample, we estimate that 85.7 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.9 percent) of all stop and searches by the force during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. This is broadly unchanged compared with the findings from our previous review of records from 2019 where we found 85.5 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.9 percent) of all stop and searches by the force during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. Of the records we reviewed for stop and searches on people from ethnic minorities, 22 of 28 had reasonable grounds recorded.

The force understands and aims to improve the way it uses stop and search and use of force powers

The force has supported the setting up of a stop and search scrutiny panel as part of the IAG process. Video footage of stop and search incidents selected at random has been presented to the group, stimulating constructive challenge and debate, with any learning fed back to the force. A noteworthy example relates to the group giving good feedback to improve the way officers request information on how the person stopped defines their own ethnicity. The force also publishes comprehensive information on stop and search on its website.

Internally, the force ensures effective strategic oversight via its stop, search and use of force board. The force's equality, diversity and inclusion board supports the process of using data to focus on potential disproportionality in the use of police powers. In addition, 10 percent of stop and search forms are jointly reviewed by the force's stop and search lead and community engagement co-ordinator. Individual local policing areas (LPAs) support the process via monthly review panels which examine ten stop and search forms selected at random.

Essex Police needs to do more to ensure it has good external scrutiny and challenge its use of force from an independent forum. Despite its importance, use of force isn't currently an area of focus for its IAGs. Information on use of force is also very limited on Essex Police's website.

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

Adequate

Essex Police is adequate at prevention and deterrence.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to do more to evaluate its approach to problem solving and tackling crime

The force has established sound protocols at a strategic level to make the most of analytical opportunities to solve crime and anti-social behaviour. But there is a lack of maturity in the force's problem-solving processes.

There are good initiatives throughout the force that focus on protecting vulnerable people and tackling high-harm perpetrators. However, because the force doesn't consistently use a problem-solving model, initiatives sometimes lack effective scanning, analysis, response and, especially, assessment. This means the force can't promote best practice.

The force needs to ensure that neighbourhood policing officers have access to structured training relevant to their role

A lack of training means there may be missed opportunities to prevent and detect crime and anti-social behaviour and to safeguard victims.

Senior leaders recognise the importance of neighbourhood policing. The force provides a range of training opportunities for neighbourhood policing and is taking steps to progress a clear development pathway for officers that incorporates a structured training programme.

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

The force has developed an effective crime prevention strategy, which brings together partner agencies to reduce crime, support victims and keep people safe from harm. The strategy focuses on four key areas: serious violence, organised crime, complex needs, and vulnerabilities. These are further divided into 14 policing strands established as being areas that carry the greatest threat to community safety.

The crime prevention strategy underpins the force plan and its focus on the 'four Vs' – helping victims, determining vulnerability, preventing violence and maximising the visibility of staff – to provide public reassurance. The force also has an effective tasking process which helps it to prioritise activity in line with its crime prevention strategy. Local priorities are linked to force priorities to ensure there is a consistent approach to policing activity while maintaining the ability to undertake activities that respond to the specific needs of local communities.

The force works in partnership to prevent crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability

The force's [neighbourhood policing teams](#), known as community policing teams (CPTs), benefit from a close relationship with other community safety partners. Joint working is reinforced by locating police and other agencies, such as housing and local authority anti-social behaviour teams, together in community safety hubs. The arrangements provide impetus for [intelligence](#) sharing and problem solving, enabling the force to identify and tackle criminal activity at the earliest opportunity.

The force has a multi-functional local policing support unit (LPSU) that provides a range of support services to local policing, such as rural engagement and business-crime teams. The LPSU also includes the special constabulary and the cadet and volunteer structure. LPSU activities are supported by the recently created LPSU strategic co-ordination group which meets monthly. The group brings police, police volunteers and partner organisations together to support local policing and problem solving with an emphasis on prevention and the 'four Vs' of the force plan.

The force has a proactive approach to improving community safety and works closely with CSPs and other agencies to tackle crime and disorder linked to the night-time economy. There is a focus on prevention, including support for those who may have made themselves vulnerable through alcohol consumption. Initiatives include use of 'SOS buses', which offer a place of safety, and taxi marshals to get people home safely. Problem solving also includes activity within licensed premises such as targeting drink spiking and enforcement against those premises fuelling street drinking or anti-social behaviour.

The force understands demand facing neighbourhood policing teams and manages resources in line with that demand

The force aims to reduce crime against shops and businesses by improving crime prevention and strengthening partnership working in its urban centres. The creation and recent expansion of dedicated town centre policing teams helps the force target crime and anti-social behaviour better in town centres. It also improves confidence through visible policing that aims to maximise opportunities to engage with the public. There is also a strong focus on targeting hate crime, as the responsibility of investigating hate crime rests with the CPTs. Dedicated hate crime officers within each LPA provide additional support to repeat victims.

The force places great emphasis on hotspot policing, a strategy that focuses police and partner resources and activities in those places where crime is most concentrated. The force's approach is based on evidence, and it uses a range of data sources to identify areas that generate the highest levels of high-harm offending. It runs a dedicated operation that focuses activity on identified hotspots in the force's major towns. The force has acquired Home Office funding to support its activity.

The force recognises and rewards activity undertaken by its community safety teams

There is some reward and recognition for officers on CPT at force and local level, such as police community support officer of the year or best officer or team. This is replicated locally. While there doesn't seem to be any specific award categories for problem solving, the force has submitted several entries into this year's national Tilly Awards. These awards aim to celebrate and recognise police and partner projects that have achieved success in resolving community issues. The force also encourages innovation and idea sharing through its online idea sharing system.

Responding to the public

Requires
improvement

Essex Police requires improvement at responding to the public.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to improve the time it takes to respond to non-emergency public calls for service and reduce the abandonment rate and wait times

The force doesn't promptly resolve non-emergency calls. These calls, made on the [101](#) number, are triaged by a switchboard operator and forwarded to the most appropriate destination. Depending on the nature of their call, a caller may be transferred to the emergency 999 line, but more often it is to a secondary line for another department. There are frequent delays in answering this secondary line and these may contribute to the number of callers abandoning their call.

The force told us that the rate of abandonment of these non-emergency calls had decreased from 22 percent in the year ending 31 March 2020 to 15 percent in the year ending 31 January 2022. However, this is still above the national standard of 5 percent for forces with a switchboard. Failure to respond effectively to enquiries from the public on the 101 police non-emergency number may contribute to a loss of confidence in the service or inappropriately drive callers to use the emergency 999 line.

The force needs to make sure that repeat callers are routinely identified

Checks to see if the caller was a repeat victim weren't completed at the first point of contact in 40 of the 55 cases we reviewed. This means callers who are repeat victims may not receive the appropriate response and the force may not realise every opportunity to reduce repeat victimisation.

The force needs to make sure that call takers give appropriate advice on crime prevention

The call handler usually gave advice on preserving the crime scene, which makes it less likely that forensic opportunities will be lost (in 13 of the 15 cases we reviewed). However, we found that crime prevention advice was given to callers in only 19 of the 26 appropriate cases we reviewed. Lack of advice at the first point of contact with a victim limits opportunities to reduce repeat victimisation.

The force needs to do more to ensure that routine calls for service are properly assessed and prioritised and any delays in response are kept to an acceptable level

Every incident recorded by Essex Police is given one of six response gradings:

- emergency response (either grade 1 urban or grade 2 rural to reflect geographical differences);
- priority response (grade 3) if the call is assessed as having a degree of urgency but an emergency response isn't required;
- routine response (grade 4), where an incident doesn't require an emergency or priority response but where the enquiry can only be completed with the physical attendance of an officer;
- resolution without the need to send an officer (grade 5); or
- attendance by appointment (grade 6).

The force's response to grade 4 calls is a particular concern, with high levels of outstanding calls awaiting a deployment decision. Many of these calls relate to vulnerability, which is sometimes not being properly managed.

A proportion of incidents should also have been initially recorded as crimes but remained as outstanding incidents. This means that some victims, including some who are vulnerable, aren't receiving an acceptable level of service.

The force is aware of the problem and has taken immediate steps to improve its response. It has significantly increased the number of sergeants within the [force control room \(FCR\)](#) to support existing staff in getting initial attendance and risk assessment right and ensuring that grade 4 calls are prioritised and properly managed.

Main findings

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

The force needs to improve the time it takes to respond to emergency public calls for service

The force needs to reduce the time it takes to answer emergency public calls for service. The force performance in relation to 999 calls has dropped slightly from 89 percent of calls answered within ten seconds in the year ending 31 March 2021 to 85 percent in the year ending 31 March 2022. This is below the national standard of answering 90 percent of emergency calls within 10 seconds.

The force needs to do more to fully identify and understand risk at initial contact

The call handlers in the FCR prioritise calls effectively but need to use their [threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement](#) risk assessment model more consistently to ensure they identify vulnerable victims. We found that the initial prioritisation of a call was correct on most (54 of 58) occasions reviewed; however, the call handler didn't always use a structured triage process or correctly record the details from the risk assessment questions. The call handler didn't check to see if the caller was vulnerable in 6 of the 51 cases we reviewed. At the same time, there was effective supervision and call handlers were polite and professional in all cases we reviewed.

The force has an effective graded response policy to support its ability to provide an appropriate response to calls for service. But it needs to adhere to this and attend within the force's published timescales

The force has a graded response policy with clearly defined target times for arrival depending on the nature of the call. We found a consistent approach to the allocation of appropriate resources to relevant incidents, with very few incidents downgraded. However, the force frequently failed to meet its own response target times. Victims weren't always updated regarding any delay in attendance, which means their expectations weren't met and their confidence in the police response may be adversely affected. The response was supervised appropriately on most occasions.

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

Response officers, known as local policing teams (LPTs), look for signs of vulnerability when they attend incidents – for example, children exposed to [domestic abuse](#) or any signs of criminal exploitation, such as [cuckooing](#) where offenders take over the homes of vulnerable people. Officers responding to people in mental health crisis have access to advice and guidance from the mental health [street triage](#) (MHST) team. This is an effective and collaborative approach by Essex Police and the Essex Partnership University Trust (EPUT) which provides a mobile response to incidents using marked police vehicles crewed by a police officer and a mental health nurse. The MHST team assesses a caller's needs and provides appropriate specialist advice or attends the incident to provide immediate care and referral.

The force is meeting the challenges of high and fluctuating demand and an inexperienced workforce within its local policing teams

LPT officers benefit from having a range of roles. They investigate certain types of crime, complete case papers and respond to calls. Officers generally have a good knowledge of crime scene principles to ensure evidence is preserved. The force acknowledges it has an inexperienced workforce working within its LPTs, including many acting sergeants, who have had limited training and experience in performing a supervisory role. The force has a system in place whereby those who wish to undertake a temporary sergeant role must undergo a selection process. It is also prioritising allocating newly qualified sergeants to response teams as part of the Police Uplift Programme.

The number of officers and the levels of inexperience on these teams make it challenging for the force to meet its demand. However, it has adopted an effective flexible shift pattern which has helped it to improve the availability of resources at peak times, reducing overtime cost and managing daily demand.

While training for LPT officers is effective, the force needs to do more to improve professional development and ongoing training for staff working in the FCR

The creation of a flexible shift pattern for LPTs also fulfils the objective of supporting training and continuous professional development, as the shift pattern has built-in training days. The position within the FCR is less effective. Staff training is limited to accessing training material online as there are no dedicated training days within the FCR shift pattern to provide ongoing professional development. The force is taking steps to refine its existing shift pattern to create training days.

The force understands the wellbeing needs of its FCR staff and officers responding to emergency calls

The force understands the wellbeing needs of its FCR staff and officers responding to emergency calls. Both FCR and LPT staff deployed to traumatic incidents receive good levels of welfare support via the [TRiM trauma risk management](#) process, online support and the availability of counselling.

The force has enhanced the support and protection provided to police officers who have been assaulted at work, under the nationally recognised protocol known as Operation Hampshire. Operation Hampshire sets out a seven-point plan, leading with the principle that assaults on staff should be investigated with the same level of care, compassion and commitment as an assault on any member of the public. The force has also added a debriefing section, as part of the process, to enable reflective learning.

Investigating crime

Adequate

Essex Police is adequate at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to improve how it records why victims withdraw their support for investigations and should also make sure it documents whether evidence-led prosecutions have been considered in all such cases

An auditable record of the victim's wishes, such as a signed statement, was rarely obtained in the cases we reviewed. This is important to provide evidence of those wishes and understand the reasons why victims don't support a prosecution. The force should also make sure it documents whether evidence-led prosecutions have been considered in all cases where the victim has withdrawn support. This will help it to fully understand whether opportunities to protect victims from future abuse and bring offenders to justice have been missed.

The force needs to make sure that the requirements of the VCOP are complied with. This includes offering the opportunity to give victim personal statements and completing a victim needs assessment

Essex Police isn't always completing and recording victim needs assessments or taking victim personal statements. These assessments ensure that any special measures required by the victim are established at an early stage so the victim receives the appropriate support throughout the investigation and subsequent prosecution. Equally, the victim personal statement gives victims the opportunity to explain how the crime has affected them physically, emotionally, psychologically or financially.

Main findings

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

The force understands how to carry out quality investigations on behalf of victims and their families

The investigations improvement board chaired at chief officer level has overseen force-wide improvements in the quality of investigations. The board uses data effectively to help it easily identify force-wide compliance challenges in the investigative process as well as specific local performance issues. A robust investigative framework supports the process, which requires a comprehensive case action plan for each investigation. An effective and significant internal audit process also supports compliance.

The force can demonstrate good focus and strategic oversight in improving the victim's journey within the criminal justice process via the victims and witnesses board chaired at chief officer level. The board has introduced a victim digital dashboard in line with the victim's 12 rights as enshrined in the VCOP. The dashboard pulls together a range of data to identify under-performance in any one area to help the force to ensure it achieves the standards that victims should receive from the criminal justice system. It is reinforcing this approach with a 'hearts and minds' campaign for staff, emphasising the often traumatic personal journey of victims through the criminal justice process.

The force has a strong focus on tackling offending that is defined as high harm, namely serious sexual offences, domestic abuse involving violence, child abuse and hate crime. The force has increased staffing in high-harm investigative teams in order to improve the quality of investigations, as well as reduced the volume of complex investigations being investigated by LPT officers.

The force understands the crime demand it faces and what resources it needs to meet it effectively

The force's resolution centre offers an effective investigative review of crimes at the point of reporting. This works well to prevent local officers from responding to crime allegations they don't need to attend or that have no investigative leads. The process is supported by a triage system, including a digital assessment tool designed by Essex Police. A series of standard questions underpinned by an algorithm is applied to each report to help decide whether to allocate the report of crime for further investigation.

There are some delays in the allocation of crimes to a case officer once the crime is allocated to investigative units, which means that investigations aren't always progressed in a timely manner. The force has tried to standardise the allocation process throughout the varied investigative units, but this has proved challenging. These delays can result in the loss of evidence and cause victims to disengage. At the same time, crimes were mostly allocated to an appropriate investigator. Most investigations had an effective investigation plan, and most were properly supervised.

As of 31 March 2021, 54 percent of qualified detective posts were filled with accredited detectives, with a further 239 officers undergoing detective training for accreditation within two years. This shortage of qualified detectives has led to capacity issues, especially in teams dealing with crimes linked to vulnerable victims such as those involved in child, domestic or sexual abuse cases. However, effective supervision at detective sergeant level has helped the force to maintain performance, although these supervisors often have high workloads. Consequently, they are often unable to regularly review older cases that investigators are holding. As a result, inexperienced officers sometimes tend to keep and try to progress crimes that should be closed. This can lead to unnecessarily high workloads and a reduction in the timeliness of investigations.

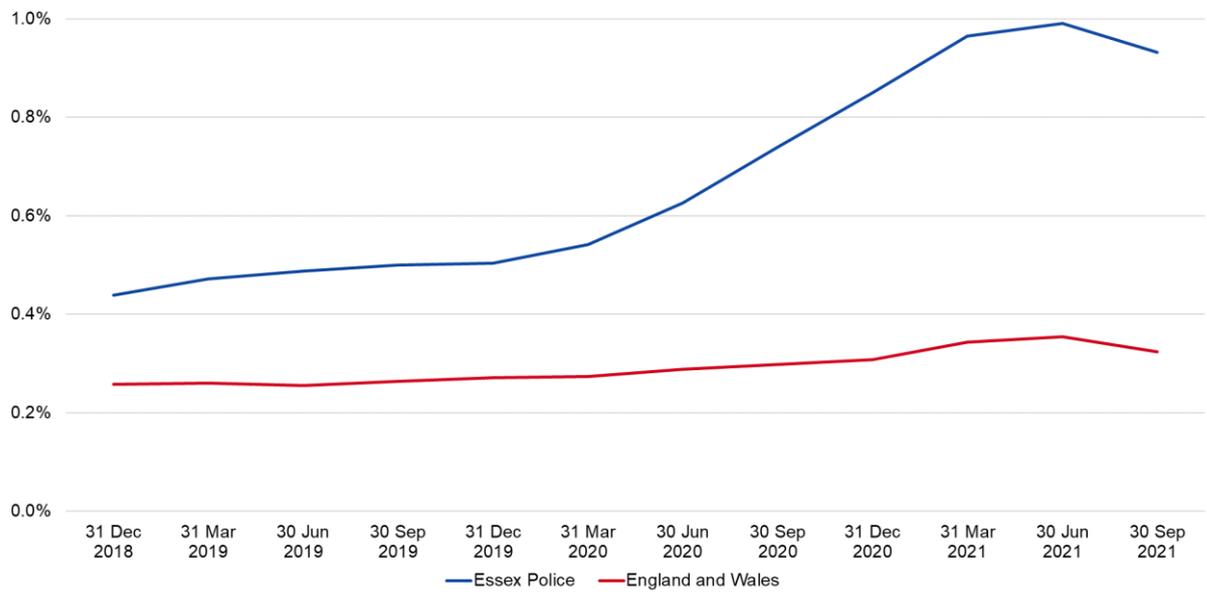
The force provides a quality service to victims of crime but may be missing some opportunities to bring some offenders to justice

In most cases we reviewed (28 of 31) an arrest was made in an appropriate time frame, and investigations were thorough with all relevant and appropriate investigative opportunities being taken on most (83 of 90) occasions reviewed. The force has good oversight of investigations with focus on effective investigation plans and targeted supervisory intervention. The agreed victim contract as part of the VCOP was adhered to on nearly all (68 of 69) occasions.

For the year ending 30 September 2021, in Essex, 0.9 percent of offences were assigned with the code 'outcome 17'. This is where an investigation hasn't continued when a suspect has been identified as the statutory time limit¹ has expired. This was higher than the rate across all forces in England and Wales of 0.3 percent. Four of the twenty cases we examined resulted in outcome 17 because of delays in the investigation. In addition, two of the twenty cases we examined involved offences that didn't have a statutory time limit and therefore outcome 17 wasn't an appropriate outcome.

¹ A statute of limitations is a law that sets a time limit for filing certain criminal charges against someone. After the time limit has passed, the government can't prosecute, try or punish a person regardless of the evidence against them. The case is said to be 'statute barred'.

Proportion of offences recorded with an outcome of 'prosecution time limit expired' (outcome 17) by Essex Police and by all forces, from the year ending 31 December 2018 to the year ending 30 September 2021



Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

Essex Police is adequate at protecting vulnerable people.

Area for improvement

The force needs to do more to maintain and improve the wellbeing of staff involved in protecting vulnerable people

Despite a range of wellbeing support and advice being available throughout the force, officers investigating cases involving vulnerable victims often don't feel cared for and supported. They indicate a lack of understanding of the sensitive and often traumatic circumstances of the cases they investigate and a corresponding lack of proactive wellbeing support. The force makes use of a voluntary questionnaire and the option of follow-up counselling, but this is insufficient and may fail to identify staff who need support or even redeployment. An EPUT pilot project is underway in the force's police online investigation teams (POLIT), with two dedicated counsellors on site to support staff. The project is proving successful with good demand for its services. The force is considering extending it to other teams dealing with vulnerable victims.

Main findings

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

The force understands the nature and scale of vulnerability

The force ensures good strategic oversight of public protection issues via its public protection strategic board. The force has adopted the national vulnerability action plan with its focus on early intervention and prevention, protecting, supporting, safeguarding and managing risk. In order to ensure both strategic oversight and operational improvements, it has appointed leads at senior level for a range of different types of vulnerability, including domestic abuse, [stalking](#) and [harassment](#), human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

The force manages its governance of vulnerability (strategy, policy and accountability) to make sure it has the capacity and capability to protect vulnerable people. The crime and public protection command continues to grow in terms of both staff numbers and the creation of specialist units designed to provide a more tailored service to vulnerable victims. The force now has separate dedicated teams of experienced detectives who manage complex and organised child [sexual exploitation](#) investigations and historic child sexual abuse cases.

The force has effective processes in place to obtain victim feedback on a regular basis, including through partner agencies. The victim feedback panel uses victim-commissioned services within rape crisis, domestic abuse and witness care to provide feedback to frontline teams. Listening to victims and identifying recurring themes helps the force to learn and shape future services.

The force safeguards and supports victims of domestic abuse, but needs to ensure a more consistent and comprehensive approach to responding to victims' needs

Force policy dictates that officers must complete a [domestic abuse, stalking and harassment \(DASH\)](#) risk assessment form for every domestic abuse incident. Forms are then subject to a secondary risk assessment to confirm or, if necessary, change the level of risk. The level of risk will determine which unit investigates the case. The quality of DASH forms is generally good, but there are often differences in opinion on the final risk grading, which can be subjective. An independent unit now reviews all high-risk DASH forms, and the force has also introduced risk assessment scrutiny panels which select sample DASH forms and scrutinise the reason for the risk grading. The force has also recently introduced a new risk assessment tool, approved by the [College of Policing](#), to enhance its focus on stalking, harassment and [controlling and coercive behaviour](#), which will also help to establish a more contextualised approach to risk assessments.

The force has introduced domestic abuse problem solving teams (DAPST) to improve engagement with repeat victims, offering additional support that may prevent them from disengaging from the criminal justice process. The teams will also engage with the offenders linked to these victims, who often have complex needs. They work closely with partner agencies to provide diversionary routes away from offending, such as support for mental health and drug rehabilitation. An offender management team works closely with the DAPST, locating and arresting wanted offenders. The team also enforces compliance of ancillary orders, such as DVPN/Os and [non-molestation orders](#).

The force should make sure that preventative orders that aim to protect victims of domestic abuse are considered in all appropriate cases. In particular, when a victim withdraws their support for an investigation, the force didn't always consider the use of ancillary orders to protect victims. Equally, the force acknowledges that it needs greater consideration of the use of [stalking protection orders](#) for both domestic abuse and other types of stalking behaviour. The force has recently set up a dedicated team that aims to obtain and enforce a range of behavioural orders linked to different types of offending.

The force works with other organisations to keep vulnerable people safe

[Multi-agency risk assessment conferences](#) manage the needs of victims of domestic abuse who are most at risk. During our inspection, these meetings were held using video conferencing technology. We were told that this meant that more people from other organisations attended and took part. We observed several of these virtual meetings and were impressed to see that a wide range of participants from other organisations were present. Information was shared effectively, and constructive discussions led to steps being taken to keep victims safe. While police attendance at these conferences was good, the force should ensure that those attending are consistently at the appropriate management level to help it to participate fully in joint decision making between partner agencies.

The force works with partner organisations to respond to the needs of vulnerable adults who may be at risk of neglect or harm, financial exploitation or cuckooing. It has a dedicated vulnerable adult triage team, which co-ordinates information sharing and action between police and other agencies to ensure that vulnerable adults are safeguarded and offenders are identified and brought to justice. The force was an early adopter of the Herbert Protocol. This is a national scheme which encourages those caring for people with dementia to complete a form to help authorities find their loved ones in the event they go missing.

The force has worked constructively with the two unitary local authorities of Thurrock and Southend within Essex to implement [Operation Encompass](#). This outlines nationally recognised professional standards in which police officers notify schools about domestic abuse incidents affecting children. Operation Encompass aims to provide school safeguarding leads with information relating to children who have been involved in, or witnessed, a domestic abuse incident. Essex County Council, which is one of the largest local authorities in England, isn't currently part of the Operation Encompass programme.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

Essex Police is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to ensure that it has the capacity and capability to undertake nationally recognised risk assessments in a timely manner. It should also ensure that the quality and timeliness of supervisory reviews are of a standard that helps it to effectively manage the risk posed by RSOs

The force has five dedicated [management of sexual or violent offender \(MOSOVO\)](#) teams that identify, manage and mitigate the potential risk posed by RSOs and other dangerous offenders in the community. Offender managers perform a key role within the MOSOVO teams. There have been recent uplifts in staff, and this has had a positive effect on the ratio of RSOs to offender managers.

For each RSO, offender managers complete [active risk management \(ARMs\)](#) assessments and risk management plans and conduct home visits. ARMs assessments are the key tool used by MOSOVO teams to understand, in detail, the nature of the risks posed by RSOs and to establish where there are opportunities to prevent reoffending. ARMs should be completed in a home setting annually or where there has been a significant change in circumstances. Risk management plans are drawn up using material from the ARMs assessments and aim to develop lines of enquiry to address risk and implement safeguarding procedures. Home visits allow officers to test accounts provided by RSOs, to conduct risk assessments and to examine digital devices owned by offenders.

It was identified at the start of the inspection period that the force wasn't properly managing the potential risks posed by RSOs owing to significantly high numbers of overdue home visits. The force has since implemented several measures to reduce this backlog to acceptable levels, and it is expected that further reduction will be achieved with a recent additional increase in staff.

At the time of the inspection, we also found a high number of overdue ARMs assessments for RSOs, some of whom were assessed as high risk and around a third as medium risk. It is reassuring to note that the force is taking active steps to reduce these numbers. But the force still needs to do more to ensure that supervisory reviews of both ARMs risk assessments and risk management plans are both timely and of sufficient quality to achieve clear oversight and direction.

The force should introduce a system of intelligence checks to improve its risk assessment process for cases involving online child abuse awaiting enforcement action

Essex Police continues to receive referrals from the National Crime Agency and other law enforcement agencies relating to people suspected of accessing, possessing, making, taking or distributing indecent images of children online. Officers from the force's POLIT prioritise action against identified individuals using a nationally approved digital risk prioritisation tool.

The force adheres to national guidelines in terms of reviewing outstanding cases within specified time limits according to the identified level of risk to ascertain why enforcement action has yet to be taken. During our inspection, we found that most outstanding cases are assessed as low risk. However, we also found that reviews don't include intelligence checks, which would help the force to reassure itself that an individual's circumstances haven't changed, especially in terms of access to children and that the risk remains low. In response to our concerns, the force has introduced a more robust process of supervision for these cases but still needs to adopt a structured approach to conducting intelligence checks.

Main findings

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

The force is effective at arresting and managing suspects and offenders to protect the public from harm

The force understands the benefits and outcomes of managing offenders effectively. It has concentrated its efforts on reducing drug-driven violence, domestic abuse, serious sexual violence, night-time economy disorder and the impact of criminal gangs. It has developed an effective, proactive approach to tackling outstanding offenders and will look to maximise opportunities to charge and remand dangerous and violent offenders in custody at the earliest opportunity. It has also set up an offender management team that targets outstanding domestic abuse offenders as well as enforces compliance with preventative orders such as DVPN/Os and non-molestation orders.

The force can demonstrate good oversight of its [bail](#) and [released under investigation \(RUI\)](#) processes via the offender management board chaired by a chief officer. The board makes use of a data dashboard, which ensures that bail is used appropriately to safeguard vulnerable victims and that supervisors conduct regular reviews to ensure that cases are progressing effectively. A dedicated bail management team supports the process by conducting daily audits of those on bail or RUI, ensuring that reviews are completed and by supporting bail extension applications at magistrates' court.

The force ensures staff are appropriately trained and equipped within its MOSOVO teams

The force has developed a supportive personal development profile (PDP) for new starters in the MOSOVO teams that incorporates everything an offender manager would be expected to know. The PDP should take around six months to complete, after which an offender manager will be allocated their own workload of offenders to manage. The PDP includes a requirement for offender managers to attend [multi-agency public protection arrangements](#) meetings.

The force makes effective use of a wide range of digital equipment to support the motioning of potentially dangerous offenders both on scene and remotely. The force has access to a 'digi dog', which is a search-trained police dog that can search for hidden digital devices. Equally, it uses an application called eSafe to monitor internet use by RSOs, which is often installed as part of conditions within a [sexual harm prevention order](#). The force also has access to on-scene triage tools that are installed onto the devices owned by RSOs during home visits to detect breaches of order or potential further offences.

The force has an effective programme to manage people most likely to re-offend

The force has an effective [integrated offender management \(IOM\)](#) process in place, in line with current government strategy of creating safer communities by reducing neighbourhood crime. There are six IOM teams throughout the force, which are each responsible for managing an identified group of local prolific offenders prioritised using a risk assessment framework. They actively seek pathways out of offending for these offenders. The IOM teams focus on early intervention, as well as enforcement, and will actively gather and seek intelligence on offenders. They will attend meetings with probation to offer support to prevent reoffending and will conduct unannounced home visits. The force uses mandatory and voluntary tagging as part of its IOM process, which helps it to remotely track offenders.

The force understands the benefits and outcomes of managing offenders effectively. It has a dedicated serious violence unit (SVU), which tackles [county lines](#) and gang activity, drugs supply and knife-enabled crime, working closely with other law enforcement and third-party agencies. The prepare, prevent and protect team is part of the SVU. It aims to safeguard individuals – either victims or perpetrators – from serious harm, working in partnership with various agencies to offer support such as educational and job opportunities that aim to divert individuals away from criminal activity.

The Essex violence and vulnerability unit is a small specialist team comprised of the police, youth offending service and office of the police, fire and crime commissioner. It co-ordinates interventions aimed at reducing the risk to young or vulnerable people from being exploited by gangs. Since it was created, the unit has worked with many organisations and young people to better understand their experience of serious violence and to support a range of diversionary projects. It is noteworthy that the partnership was recently awarded over £5m from the Home Office to continue its fight against drug-driven violence, county lines and knife crime.

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](#) 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 Essex 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

Essex Police 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 force promotes an ethical and inclusive culture at all levels

The force has a strong sense of identity. The published force plan is deliberately written in a clear and uncomplicated way to ensure that all staff can relate to it and that the public is fully aware of the force's objective. The focus is on helping people, keeping people safe and catching criminals. The force has developed a professionalism strategy as part of the force plan, which describes how, as individuals and collectively, the force can provide the best service to the public. Regular internal engagement events for both senior managers and all staff have been well received and reinforce a culture of inclusiveness, ethical behaviour and learning where staff flourish and have a sense of purpose.

The concept of 'dignity for all' is enshrined in the force's equality, diversity and inclusion strategy and focuses on working to support the interests of all within the community. The chief constable chairs a quarterly equality, diversity and inclusion board with representation from a range of partner agencies. The process is replicated at a local level with 12 district equality, diversity and inclusion boards. Diversity and inclusivity training has also been provided effectively to all staff via an external company. The force promotes the [Code of Ethics](#) at every opportunity and its workforce receives advice and extensive training on ethical decision making.

The force understands the needs of its workforce and uses this understanding to develop effective plans to improve wellbeing

Essex Police empowers staff to feel confident in giving their views on how the force is performing. It undertakes a regular staff survey in collaboration with Durham University to measure its performance. The force has also implemented a quarterly staff engagement survey based on one key question to improve participation rates and to help it gauge staff sentiment. The force uses Yammer, a social networking platform designed for staff to share knowledge, work together and build connections. We were also told that the chief constable's blog on the force's intranet site regularly receives over 2,500 hits.

The force is keen to get structured feedback from the activities it undertakes. It has a range of proactive and reactive ways to support staff, and many of these have been shaped by staff reporting back on their experiences. The learning the lessons board is where the force reviews how it works and behaves and is key to ensuring it continually improves. The force also uses 'Eureka!', an intuitive online application which helps it to gather, share and evaluate ideas from throughout the force.

The force maintains and improves the wellbeing of its workforce and understands the effect of the action it is taking

Overall, the force prioritises its workforce's mental and physical wellbeing. The force is committed to providing all employees with supportive interventions to maintain their health, wellbeing and safety. There is effective wellbeing support available on the force intranet, including 'Feel Well Live Well', which offers a range of programmes to help employees boost their health and resilience. The force also runs virtual wellbeing sessions, which have proved successful. The force told us there have been 225 sessions on 122 topics including suicide prevention, resilience, mind, body and soul, and agile working, often using external speakers. The sessions have proved very popular, with attendance actively supported by line managers and over 7,000 attendees to date.

In recognition of the increased financial challenges staff may be facing, Essex Police has been forward thinking in establishing an online financial wellbeing hub. The hub is located within the force's wellbeing website and provides a broad range of advice about managing finances and dealing with debt. It includes a programme of financial wellbeing sessions where a range of external guest speakers have provided insightful information to support and advise staff. Mindful of the fact staff may feel uncomfortable dialling into a live session to discuss their finances, the sessions are also recorded so they can be viewed independently. Since the site was created, there have been over 1,000 online visits, which amounts to over 13 percent of all traffic to the force's wellbeing website.

The force offers a comprehensive range of counselling support for staff. The Employee Assistance Programme is a 24/7 telephone assistance package available to staff and their immediate families. It provides access to practical information and emotional support for personal and work-related issues including bereavement, relationship problems, stress and trauma. The force has introduced and is fully supportive of the TRiM process, a peer support network for people who have experienced trauma. It has a dedicated TRiM co-ordinator in its health and wellbeing department. This has proved particularly beneficial in mobilising large-scale TRiM support for staff who have been exposed to traumatic major incidents, such as the response to the death of 39 migrants found in a lorry container in 2019.

The force is building its workforce for the future

The force has an effective positive action and outreach plan that aims to create a workforce that better reflects the county's communities. The force's innovative 'we value difference' campaign uses the voices of its staff to promote the force to individuals who may not have previously thought that policing was a profession suited to them. It has proven successful in increasing the number of applicants from minority and under-represented groups. The force has also attended a range of diverse community events to showcase policing as a profession.

The force recognises the challenge of detective recruitment and retention. It maintains strategic oversight via its detective development programme board and has set up a dedicated detective development team to support the recruitment and development of new detectives. It has invested significantly and successfully in the Investigate First programme, a specialist entry route to policing to become a detective. The force has also created a virtual crime academy, which contains effective, informative and practical online learning content to support [continuing professional development](#).

The force has adopted a flexible approach to agile working, which assesses each role on its suitability. It aims to maximise opportunities for a hybrid approach that allows staff to have the dual benefits of home and office-based working without compromising operational effectiveness. The availability of online learning for professional development supports this process. The force's 'Develop You' framework provides access to development opportunities through training, attachments, projects and mentoring.

The force has introduced innovative leadership training at sergeant and inspector level. There is strong emphasis placed on staff wellbeing and the practicalities of being an engaged and interested leader. The force has trialled the use of a case file exercise in its recent sergeants' promotion process in the belief that the ability to properly supervise case files is an integral part of a sergeant's role. The force also recognises the challenges of performing supervisory roles on a temporary basis. Before a constable can perform the role of acting sergeant, they must first be identified as suitable for the role. A specific acting sergeant course is provided for those who undertake acting duties.

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.

Essex 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

Essex Police is good at operating efficiently.

Area for improvement

The force needs to ensure that it understands current capability and capacity in more detail to improve resource deployment and effective management of demand

The force has a structured and risk-based approach to resourcing which aims to ensure it can meet current and future demand. We found that bids for additional funding or support were detailed and decisions on allocation of resources were based on the prioritisation of risk and harm, in line with the control plans.

However, the force lacks detail on the current capacity and capability of its resource in key areas. This affects its ability to provide an effective and efficient service. We found departments throughout a range of LPAs struggling to maintain operational effectiveness for several reasons:

- There is inconsistency of individual team strengths across different LPAs for teams undertaking the same work.
- Within some teams, different shifts report significant variations in staff numbers often leading to an over-reliance on overtime.
- There are significant levels of abstractions of officers at various ranks from LPAs to support other areas of the force, such as custody and the FCR.
- There are staff shortages and, in some cases, shift patterns that aren't effectively aligned to demand to support the workforce.
- There is limited awareness as to how to maximise the use of skilled but finite resources – for example, the deployment of qualified detectives between local policing and specialist investigation teams.

Inconsistent resourcing and a lack of understanding about capacity and skills in key areas of the force puts pressure on staff and affects the quality of service provided to victims and the public in general.

Main findings

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

The force has an effective strategic planning and performance management framework

The force demonstrates a good level of governance and process. The Police and Crime Plan and force priorities align with several boards and performance meetings which are in place to support delivery. The force has a robust and evidence-based performance framework. It uses a range of measures and key performance indicators to establish and analyse current performance levels, patterns and trends and other relevant information to support decision making.

The force's financial plans, including its investment programme, are affordable and will support it to continue to meet future demands

The force has a clear plan to provide a balanced budget over the period of the [medium term financial plan](#). It has a good track record of creating savings, and this is supported by a regular efficiency, savings and growth board chaired by the deputy chief constable (DCC). There are clear plans and timescales with appropriate review processes and responsibilities. But future savings need to be supported by a more detailed savings and efficiency plan that considers how efficiencies can be driven through working practice and investment in new technology.

Essex Police is planning to spend £132m on capital investment by the end of 2026/27 with £76m of this investment directed at estates. The current estates strategy has led to improvements which have been well received by the workforce. This is due to expire in 2023 and is in the process of being refreshed. It is essential that the new strategy is aligned to the efficiency plan and can meet the anticipated demand and resource challenges that the force has identified.

Essex Police actively seeks opportunities to improve services by working effectively with other forces

The force has a well-established and effective collaborative process with Kent Police, exemplified in the process for the prioritisation and optimisation of IT projects. Sources of demand for new technology are identified and managed via a comprehensive governance process overseen by the digital transformation oversight board chaired by the Essex DCC and Kent deputy chief officer. The process enables the prioritisation of projects while also directing the sequencing and phasing of activity to ensure balance across demand and resources. Both forces have agreed an ambitious but realistic programme for digital development up to 2023/24.

The force is good in its collaborative approach to data use

The force has brought together influential private organisations to develop innovative digital approaches to solving key problems linked to policing. Key successes include developing an online programme offered to primary schools to prevent children from becoming victims of exploitation and bullying. Internally, 'Analytics for Everyone' is an interactive data dashboard which provides information to officers to identify crime patterns and assist with problem solving. The Essex Centre for Data Analytics is a partnership venture between Essex County Council, Essex Police and the University of Essex that uses combined analytical skills to help early identification of those at risk of harm.

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

The force is keen to improve digital delivery of services. The force, together with Kent Police, has invested in a digital asset management system which enables enhanced storage, organisation and download of digital material. Both forces were the first nationally to roll out Microsoft 365 technology in line with the National Enabling Programme requirements. Staff have been given access to Microsoft Teams chat and collaboration tools such as SharePoint. In addition, the force now has 13 digitally-equipped suites for voluntary interviewing, which reduces pressure on interview rooms in custody facilities.

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