

# PEEL 2021/22 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Thames Valley Police

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# Overall summary

## Our judgments

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

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

We also inspected how effective a service Thames Valley 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

Since our last inspection in 2019 Thames Valley has been through a demanding 18 months. Like all forces, it has been affected by the pandemic. It has dealt with a serious terrorist incident, multiple public protests and increased levels of homicide.

Despite these pressures, I am satisfied with some aspects of Thames Valley Police's performance in keeping people safe and reducing crime. Yet, there are areas where the force needs to improve.

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

Thames Valley Police has made some improvements since our previous inspection in 2019. We now rate its crime recording as good and as a consequence it now records more crime. It has got better in some other areas we identified as requiring improvement. These include aspects of its response to victims of [domestic abuse](#) and the speed with which it answers calls in the [control room](#).

We are encouraged to see the efforts it is making to make sure that it is treating people both inside and outside the force fairly. The work it is doing in communities to attract people from ethnic minority backgrounds to join the force is noteworthy.

There is a greater focus on the wellbeing of the workforce, with a more proactive approach to supporting staff.

But, despite these positive elements, we found that the force is struggling to meet some of the demand in a timely way. It now records more crime than before. Combined with recent changes to the way cases are prepared, this means officers are busier than they were. In addition, some aspects of policing have become more complex, particularly in respect of gathering evidence from digital devices. At the same time, the force is bringing through new, inexperienced staff, who require greater time in respect to training and supervision.

The force has introduced some notable innovations, looked for more efficient ways of working and moved additional staff into some areas. Nonetheless, this inspection found that a lack of resource is affecting the timeliness of its response to the public, the investigation of crimes and the assessment of risk to [vulnerable people](#) or by potentially dangerous offenders. The work pressure on some staff is also undermining the steps that the force has taken to improve the wellbeing of its workforce.

Thames Valley Police isn't blind to this and it was reassuring to see that it had already identified some of the issues we found during our fieldwork. It is to its credit that it had not only completed this work, but shared it with the inspectorate. This gives me confidence that the force is aware of the problem, but it must now move forward to fully understand and address the matters identified. We will review its progress as part of our continuing assessment of the force.



**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.

Thames Valley Police uses analysis well to identify and tackle crime, [anti-social behaviour](#) and to protect the vulnerable. It works well with other organisations and generally tackles crime and anti-social behaviour in its communities through a structured approach, although this needs to be more consistently recorded. Effective recording of crime is a vital component of this process and I am pleased to see the improvement it has made in crime recording and data integrity.

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

- effective identification and management of repeat offenders;
- clear operational priorities with effective oversight and performance management;
- good use of measures outside court proceedings, such as cautions, to obtain justice for victims and divert offenders; and
- a strategic focus on protecting vulnerable people.

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

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

- It needs need to build sufficient capacity in its response and investigations to maximise opportunities to collect evidence, properly support victims and bring offenders to justice.
- The force doesn't always identify repeat or vulnerable victims at the first point of contact.
- It isn't consistently supervising crime investigations to a good standard, resulting in some offenders not being brought to justice.
- It doesn't have a comprehensive understanding of how allocating local policing teams to other work is inhibiting its preventative work.

Until the force improves the most important factors from this assessment it won't be able to effectively reduce crime.

# Providing a service to the victims of crime

## Victim service assessment

This section describes our assessment of the service victims receive from Thames Valley Police, from the point of reporting a crime through to the end result. As part of this assessment, we reviewed 130 case files as well as 20 cautions, [community resolutions](#) and cases where but the victim does not support or has withdrawn support for police action. While this assessment is ungraded, it influences graded judgments in the other areas we have inspected.

### **The force has improved the time it takes to answer emergency and non-emergency calls but vulnerable victims aren't always identified**

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

Emergency and non-emergency call waiting times have got better, but the force is still not quite meeting national standards. When calls are answered, the victim's vulnerability isn't assessed using a structured process. Repeat victims aren't always identified, which means this isn't taken into account when the force considers its response. Victims aren't always given crime prevention advice or advice on the preservation of evidence.

### **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.

In too many cases attendance was outside recognised force timescales and the victim's expectations weren't met. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage. Despite the difficulties, appropriate staff were allocated to respond to incidents.

## **The force is good at recording reported crime**

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

The force has effective crime recording processes to make sure crimes reported to the force are recorded correctly. We set out more details about the force's crime recording in the '[Crime data integrity](#)' section below.

## **The force allocates crimes to appropriate staff, but victims aren't always informed if their crime isn't 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's policy. In nearly all the cases we reviewed, the crime was allocated to the most appropriate department for further investigation, yet victims weren't always informed that 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 aren't always effective and timely**

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.

In some of the cases we reviewed, investigations weren't carried out in a timely manner and relevant lines of inquiry weren't completed. In some there was a lack of effective supervision of investigations and investigation plans. This resulted in some ineffective investigations. Victims weren't always kept updated about the progress of the investigation. This means some victims are being let down and offenders aren't being brought to justice.

When domestic abuse victims withdrew their support for a prosecution, the force didn't always consider prosecuting offenders without the victim's support or using measures designed to protect victims, such as a [domestic violence protection notice](#) or [domestic violence protection order](#). These measures are an important method of protecting the victim from further abuse.

Under the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) (the Victims Code) there is a requirement to conduct a needs assessment at an early stage to decide whether victims require additional support. The result of the assessment and the request for additional support should be recorded. The force isn't always completing this assessment, which means not all victims will get the appropriate level of service.

## **The force properly finalises reports of crimes but sometimes fails to consult the victims for their views or record them**

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.

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 to be taken into consideration.

In nearly all of the cautions and community resolutions we reviewed, the offender met the national criteria for their use, but the victim's views weren't always sought or considered. 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 most cases we reviewed. This represents a risk that victims' wishes may not be fully represented and considered before the crime is finalised.

### **Crime data integrity**

Thames Valley Police is good at recording crime.

We estimate that Thames Valley Police is recording 94.9 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.1 percent) of all reported crime (excluding fraud). This is a statistically significant improvement compared to the findings of our 2019 inspection. We estimate that compared to the findings of our 2019 inspection, this improvement meant that the force recorded an additional 11,500 crimes for the year covered by our inspection. We estimate that this means the force still didn't record over 8,300 crimes for the year covered by our inspection.

Its performance is worse for offences of violence against the person. We estimate that 92.5 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.9 percent) of violent offences are being recorded. The force performance for recording sexual offences is better, with 95.2 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.5 percent) of sexual offences reported to the force being recorded.

## Area for improvement

### Main findings

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

#### **Crime recording is well supervised and scrutinised by chief officers**

The force has focused on improving crime recording. It carries out regular in-depth audits, the results of which are reviewed by **chief officers**. Any errors found during audits are corrected and then circulated to relevant staff so that they learn from the correction. There is a crime recording action plan, which is reviewed and updated with progress against actions.

#### **The force has improved its recording of violent crime**

The force has made statistically significant improvements in how it records violent crime. We estimate that compared to the findings of our 2019 inspection, this improvement means that the force recorded an additional 8,200 violent crimes for the year covered by our inspection.

#### **The force records crimes against vulnerable people well**

The force records crimes against vulnerable victims well. It is important crimes against vulnerable victims are recorded to safeguard the victims from further offences and identify perpetrators.

#### **The force is good at recording most sexual offences but isn't always recording rape offences correctly**

The force correctly records most sexual offences, yet reports of rape weren't always recorded properly. Rape is one of the most serious crimes a victim can experience. Therefore, it is especially important that crimes are recorded accurately so that victims receive the service and support they expect and deserve.

#### **The force needs to improve the recording of equality data**

The force's data for victims of crime shows that age and gender are well recorded, ethnicity is less well recorded and other **protected characteristics** are not well recorded. The force should be collecting this information to understand the extent to which each protected group is affected by crime, how this differs from those without the protected characteristics, and whether a different response is needed for these victims.

## **The force should improve its workforce's understanding of anti-social behaviour and how it records anti-social behaviour crimes and incidents**

The force isn't always correctly recording crimes that occur as a result of incidents of anti-social behaviour. **Harassments** were particularly poorly recorded. Anti-social behaviour can have a significant effect on victims, especially if the behaviour is prolonged. Failure to record crimes results in victims not receiving the support they need and offenders escaping judicial proceedings.

# Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Thames Valley Police is good at treating people fairly and with respect.

## Area for improvement

### Main findings

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

**The force hasn't yet published analysis to demonstrate that it has a comprehensive knowledge of all causes of disproportionality in its use of powers of stop and search**

In our 2017 report on the use of [stop and search powers](#) nationally we made recommendations about how forces should look for its disproportionate use on people from ethnic groups, or based on age and gender. We said that if identified, forces should establish why this occurred and publish the analysis with an action plan to address it.

**The force should improve how it records and understands the use of force by officers**

Compared to most other police forces in England and Wales, Thames Valley Police records a low number of incidents where it has used force. We estimate that during 2019/20 it failed to record 27,441 occasions when force was used.

Systems used to record when force has been used are seen as time-consuming, so staff don't always submit the required form. A new system is being implemented, which will improve recording, but at the moment any analysis about how force is used is based on an incomplete data set. This prevents the force from being able to fully identify and understand disproportionality.

Thames Valley Police isn't fully meeting this recommendation. There is oversight and scrutiny of the use of stop and search at both a force and local level. The more sophisticated stop and search database it has developed helps it recognise the disproportionate use of the powers. Despite this, the force hasn't yet published any analysis of the causes of disproportionality or action plan that satisfies our 2017 recommendation.

### **The force treats people fairly**

Treating people fairly and without bias is included in many training courses in the force. This is reinforced by senior leaders, who give clear guidance on topics such as the correct use of stop and search powers and the abuse of authority. Our review of [body-worn video](#) showed officers dealing with the public politely, respectfully and fairly.

There is an early intervention scheme for officers who receive three or more low-level complaints in a 12-month period. This gives line managers the opportunity to review the officer's interactions with the public and help them reflect on and improve their approach.

### **The force works with diverse communities to understand what matters to them**

Each local policing area has a neighbourhood policing plan outlining work with their communities to ensure that important issues are addressed.

The force uses a range of methods to communicate with communities face-to-face and digitally. The force, working with other organisations such as local authorities, has worked intensely with its communities making it more likely to understand their concerns. Neighbourhood teams regularly meet them at local meetings, surgeries and events. Police community support officers (PCSOs) work with groups who have less contact with the police.

An online and social media presence plays an important role in the force's work with communities. It has over 800,000 followers across four social media platforms. Social media messages are posted in other languages when targeted at those whose first language isn't English. Live-streamed Facebook events, including an interview with the chief constable, have reached a quarter of a million viewers, giving the public insight into different areas of policing.

This isn't a one-way information feed. Responses to posts are monitored and responded to by the force. There are also 111,000 people signed up to the [Thames Valley Alert](#) two-way information sharing website. Each policing area has a community engagement officer and socially media trained PCSOs. Their role includes advising neighbourhood teams on the best way to develop interactive campaigns with the public.

## **The workforce understands how to use stop and search powers fairly and respectfully**

We reviewed a sample of 205 stop and search records from 1 January to 31 December 2020. Based on this sample, we estimate that 88.3 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.2 percent) of all stop and searches by the force during this period had reasonable grounds. This is a marginal improvement since our review the previous year when we found that an estimated 84.0 percent (with a confidence interval of 4.2 percent) of stop and searches had reasonable grounds. We found 58 of the 67 stop and searches on people from ethnic minority backgrounds that we reviewed had reasonable grounds recorded. The use of body-worn video is mandated when police use stop and search powers and we found an improved level of compliance with this.

All officers receive initial training on stop and search and several mandatory courses feature training in [unconscious bias](#). Yet, no structured refresher training, including the [College of Policing's authorised professional practice](#) for stop and search, has taken place for several years.

## **The use of stop and search powers is scrutinised by external organisations and the arrangement is being extended to include the use of force**

The force has developed several methods of external scrutiny of stop and search, including reviews by [independent advisory groups](#). The force applies less stringent vetting requirements for membership of community scrutiny panels that also review stop and search activity. It has extended the remit of these groups to include reviews of the police's use of force. This means that more people with relevant lived experience can provide feedback to the force.

## **The workforce understands how to use force fairly and properly**

Personal safety, [tactical communication](#) and use-of-force training is provided during the officers' initial learning phase. Operational officers complete mandatory annual refresher training on the use of force.

# Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

## Adequate

Thames Valley Police is adequate at prevention and deterrence.

### Areas for improvement

#### **The force should make sure that its approach to solving community problems of crime and anti-social behaviour is consistent and recorded well**

The force uses a recognised model to develop its response to community problems, such as anti-social behaviour, based on the principles of objective, scanning, response and assessment (OSARA). It has also developed a simpler version, OSARA light, for staff to use for less complex problems.

We found that the force doesn't use these models consistently. Some neighbourhood officers don't always use these structured models while others don't record what they have done to solve a problem. This reduces the opportunity for evaluation and the sharing of good working methods.

#### **The force should make sure it fully understands the impact of the allocation of neighbourhood officers to other duties**

Neighbourhood police officers told us they are frequently taken away from their normal duties to support other teams, which they find frustrating. This was a particular issue where it prevented them from working on problems in their community, attending planned meetings or working with other organisations tackling crime and anti-social behaviour.

The force can monitor the frequency of this when it takes place in a planned way but not when it takes place as the result of an urgent need due to the lack of availability of officers in other teams. This means that the force doesn't have a full picture of the cost or overall impact of the removal of neighbourhood officers to support with other duties.

The effective monitoring of the deployment of neighbourhood officers away from their core duties will become even more important over the next 12 months as the force commences a structured programme of secondments of neighbourhood officers to address shortfalls on incident response teams.

## Innovative practice

### **The force works with other organisations to prevent crime and protect vulnerable people**

The force has collaborated with Roehampton University to recognise the signs and language associated with romance fraud, where people who believe that they are in a relationship are duped into sending money to criminals.

This work sets out the techniques used by fraudsters in clearly understandable and highly informative steps. It has been publicised across both social media and traditional media with an online guide produced in the form of an e-booklet. Its content is a blend of operational and academic work presented in format that is easy to digest and download and which signposts victims to support.

## 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**

We are pleased to see the force's commitment to preventing crime, anti-social behaviour and [protecting vulnerable people](#). It follows College of Policing guidelines for neighbourhood policing, which is overseen by a dedicated board. It is laying the foundations of an effective model.

In our fieldwork we saw neighbourhood teams working well with other organisations such as councils. They use data, including information shared by these organisations, to target areas of high demand and individuals.

The force has developed an innovative range of IT systems that identify the areas that are vulnerable to crime and individuals who are at increased risk, or who are a risk to others.

There is effective work to determine the needs of the force's different communities. Some officers have built links with BAME or LGBTQ+ communities, which puts the force in a better position to understand their needs. It is disappointing to find that these networks weren't always mapped and documented. If an individual officer moved, those relationships may be lost.

### **The force works effectively with a wide range of other organisations, with positive results and reductions in demand**

The force works well with other organisations and can demonstrate positive results and reduction in demand. At a neighbourhood level we observed work with partners, such as local authorities, to tackle and eliminate problems such as persistent anti-social behaviour and low-level criminality.

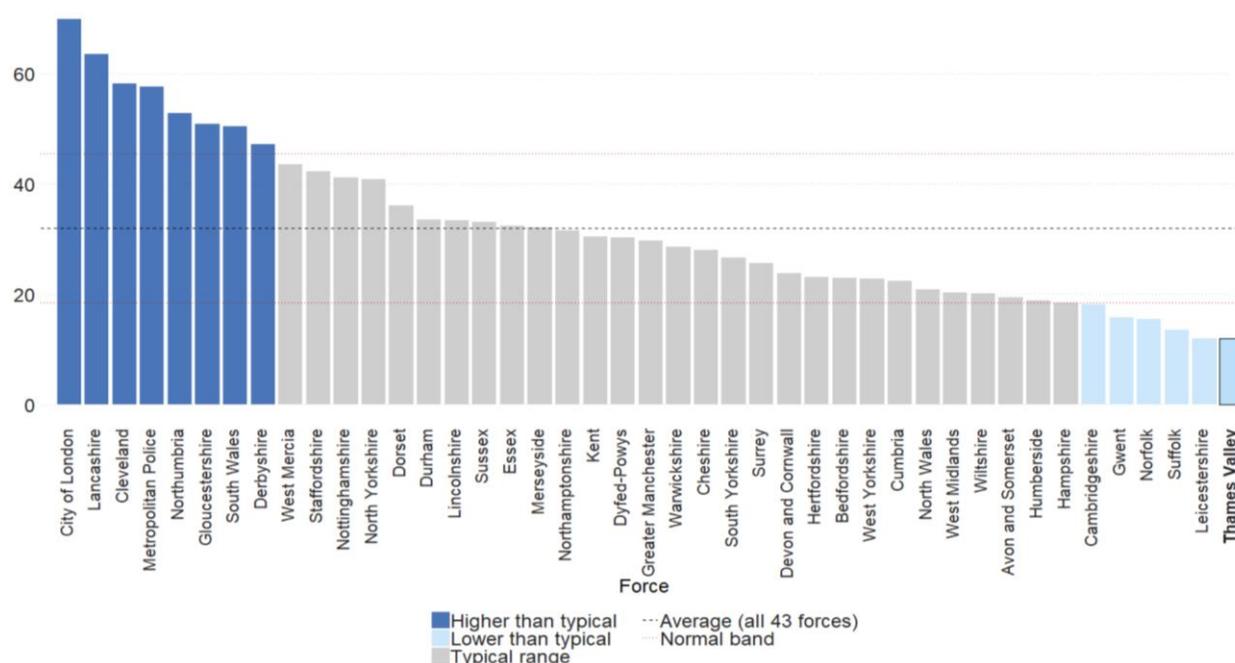
Despite the inconsistent approach identified as an area for improvement above, we saw evidence that some staff use the OSARA model well. There are oversight arrangements to evaluate the quality of plans to solve community problems and an IT network increasingly used to share information about good professional procedures. The force is putting neighbourhood [intelligence](#) analysts in place, which will help it more fully evaluate the effectiveness of this work.

There are a range of forums where the force works with organisations to tackle anti-social behaviour and protect vulnerable people. For example, in Operation Guardian a specialist from a domestic abuse charity is on duty at identified peak demand times to attend domestic abuse incidents with a police officer. This gives the victim early access to support and advice. In other cases, we learnt how the force works with charities supporting homeless people and drug users, to determine how they can reduce their vulnerability to harm.

### The force should reassure itself that it has a full understanding of levels of anti-social behaviour

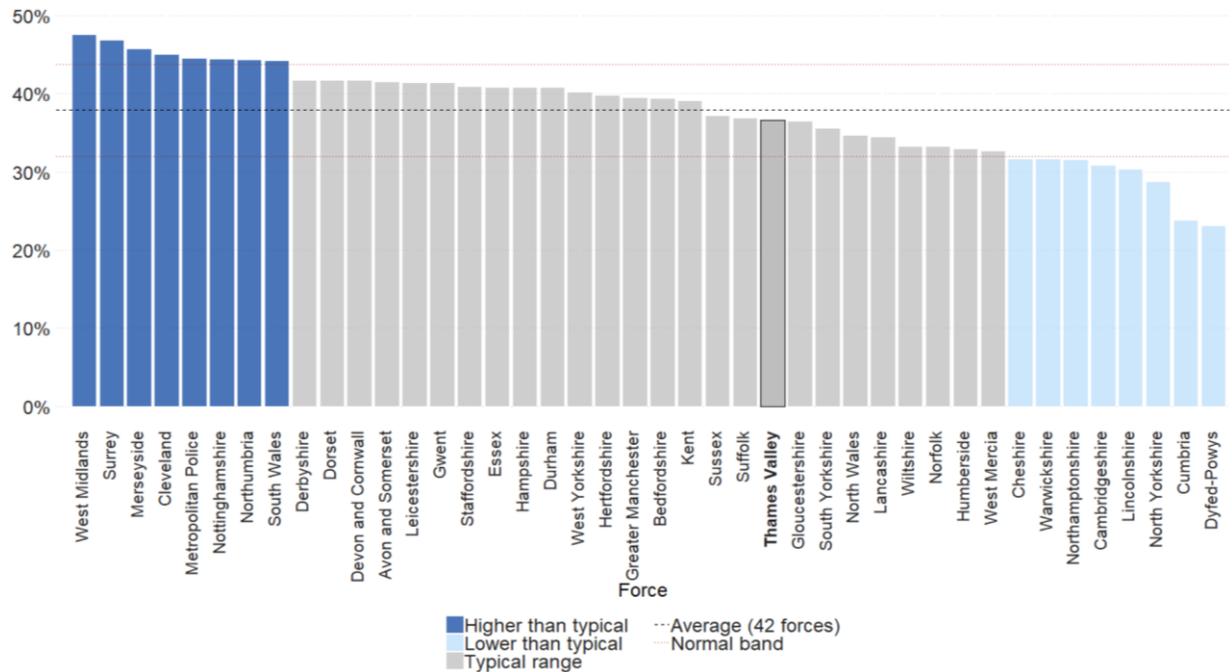
In the year ending 31 March 2021, Thames Valley Police recorded 11.9 anti-social behaviour incidents per 1,000 population. This is the lowest of all forces throughout England and Wales and much lower than the average throughout forces in England and Wales, which was 31.9 incidents per 1,000 population.

### Anti-social behaviour incidents recorded per 1,000 population for forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2021



In the year ending 31 March 2020, the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) estimated that 36.6 percent of the population of the Thames Valley Police force area experienced or witnessed anti-social behaviour. This is similar to the average throughout force areas in England and Wales, which was 37.9 percent.

## Estimated proportion of people that experienced or witnessed anti-social behaviour for force areas in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2020



**Note: the data included in this graph are estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales. Within this data, the City of London has been combined with the Metropolitan Police to provide an estimate for London as a whole.**

It isn't clear why Thames Valley Police records lower levels of anti-social behaviour. It may suggest that there are fewer incidents in the area where Thames Valley Police operates, that anti-social behaviour isn't being reported or that it is being inaccurately recorded by the force.

The force should reassure itself that the community is confident in reporting incidents of anti-social behaviour and that any reports made are correctly identified and recorded.

# Responding to the public

Requires improvement

Thames Valley Police requires improvement at responding to the public.

## Areas for improvement

### **The force should make sure that repeat callers and vulnerable people are routinely identified**

Thames Valley Police records a lower proportion of callers with mental health concerns than most other forces in England and Wales. Our observations of the forces call handling centre highlighted that checks for repeat callers or other vulnerable people connected to the incident weren't always completed at the first point of contact. On some occasions where a vulnerable person was identified, insufficient details were recorded on the incident log.

Failure to identify repeat or vulnerable callers means that the risk to the victim isn't always accurately assessed and, as a result, the victim may not always receive the correct response.

In the year ending 31 March 2021, the force recorded 4.1 mental health incidents per 1,000 population. This is lower than the rate in England and Wales, which was 9.1 mental health incidents per 1,000 population in the same period. Thames Valley Police was unable to tell us how many incidents it had received relating to repeat callers.

### **The force should make sure that call handlers assess risk effectively so that people receive an appropriate response**

Contact management staff are trained to use a structured risk assessment known as THOR (Threat, Harm, Opportunity, Risk). This helps establish how urgent a call is and what type of response is needed. This process isn't completed well enough on too many occasions. Failure to consistently complete and record a thorough risk assessment can lead to an inappropriate prioritisation or response.

## **The force needs to make sure that call takers give appropriate advice on the preservation of evidence and crime prevention**

On several occasions crime prevention or scene preservation advice wasn't given when required. Giving crime prevention advice can protect victims from repeat abuse and scene preservation advice will greatly assist investigations.

## **Innovative practice**

### **Officers have received additional training to help them work better with victims in crisis**

Some 200 members of incident and crime response teams have received training from police negotiators on how to communicate with victims of crime. The training raises awareness that a victim of any crime could be in crisis and how that may feel. This is explored further through explaining the different stages of grief and how a victim may respond differently to the expectations of the attending officers. This provides the teams with skills to help them better work with victims and leave the victim feeling they have had a good service.

## **Main findings**

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

### **The force doesn't always have the capacity to provide an appropriate and timely response to incidents, including those involving vulnerable people**

Response officers investigate certain types of crime, complete case papers and respond to calls for service. They are clear on their responsibilities to safeguard vulnerable people. They have good knowledge of what initial enquiries need to be made at crime scenes to secure and preserve evidence.

There has been increased demand on response officers, for example they have more work to complete to prepare prosecution files. Officers also look after people detained under the Mental Health Act. Frequently there are difficulties finding a place of safety so they spend unacceptably long periods of time waiting with officers. This is an additional demand on the force which, at this time, it isn't able to fully quantify.

We found that the numbers of officers responding to incidents is insufficient to meet demand. As a result, the force doesn't consistently respond to calls for service within its own target times. There are often backlogs of incidents waiting for officers to attend.

Data from the force for the 12 months ending in July 2021 indicates that it is only meeting its 15-minute target to attend incidents requiring an immediate response on 54 percent of occasions. People requiring an urgent response – within one hour – only receive it on 38 percent of occasions. The need to respond to new calls for service

prevents response officers from giving a consistent, timely service to victims of the crimes they are already investigating.

### **Workloads in the control room and for response officers aren't always manageable**

Response and control room staff receive good levels of welfare support through structured debriefing after traumatic incidents, access to free and confidential mental health support from the Blue Light Network, and the availability of counselling through the employee assistance programme.

Line managers are responsive to welfare needs and the chief officer team has taken steps to improve officer safety. Enhanced support is given to any officers and staff who are assaulted. The success of prosecutions for these assaults are monitored at a chief officer level.

Despite this, all too often we heard from control room and response staff that workload pressure was unmanageable. Figures from the force indicate that many of the response teams are working excessive overtime, which indicates that the pressures are a problem.

Call handlers in the control room, who are getting used to a new contact management computer system, were concerned they might overlook something important due to the amount of calls they deal with.

### **The public can report crimes and incidents through a range of channels**

The force is an early adopter of the new national contact platform for police forces, [police.uk](https://www.police.uk), providing digital reporting services and information.

There has been a marked shift towards using this platform partly because the force encouraged callers to use online reporting during COVID-19 lockdowns. A change in messaging has contributed to 50 percent of non-emergency calls moving online at its peak.

It is also rolling out the Good Sam app, which allows the global positioning signal of a caller's phone to be pinpointed on the force system. With the caller's consent it gives access to the caller's mobile phone video app. The footage and GPS in turn can be shared with ambulance and fire and rescue services.

### **Officers attending calls don't always receive relevant information in a timely way**

The force has implemented a new, advanced IT system to manage its response to calls for service from the public. It can access other IT systems within the force holding relevant information about callers. This helps to assess the risk to the caller and provide information to attending officers.

Although this is positive, not all contact management staff fully understand how to use the system effectively. They told us that sometimes they found it difficult to quickly gather all relevant information. This could mean they have an incomplete picture of

what resources are available for deployment and fail to pass all relevant information to attending officers in a timely way.

The force has recently made changes to how information is displayed by the system. We will review their effectiveness as part of our continuing work with the force.

**The force's understanding of the demands for emergency response informs its decision-making on deploying resources to meet them**

Prior to our inspection, the force had already comprehensively reviewed its capacity to respond to calls from the public and shared this work with us. It discerned that often there weren't enough deployable incident response staff to meet demand in a timely way and developed a plan to increase the number available. This includes reducing the frequency with which response officers are used to support other parts of the force and seconding neighbourhood policing officers to the response role. Progress against this plan is overseen by a group of [senior officers](#).

We identified the same issues and will monitor the force's progress in implementing its plan to address them.

# Investigating crime

Adequate

Thames Valley Police is adequate at investigating crime.

## Areas for improvement

### **The force needs to make sure it complies with the requirements of the Victims Code**

Under the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#), there is a requirement to conduct a needs assessment at an early stage to decide whether victims fall into one of the three priority categories: victims of the most serious crimes; persistently targeted victims; and vulnerable or intimidated victims. If victims fall into these categories, special measures can be used to support them to give the best evidence in court and these should be explained.

The outcome of the assessment and the request for special measures should be recorded.

In the initial stage of our inspection of Thames Valley Police we found no structure to ensure that victim needs assessments were completed, which made it unclear whether this support had been fully considered. While we are pleased to see the force promptly improved its training and processes in this area, the new system is not yet understood by everyone nor effective enough.

We also found that victims' personal statements were often not considered. This means that they are not always given the opportunity for their voices to be heard.

Victims are inconsistently updated about the progress of their case. We acknowledge the force's efforts to address this since our 2019 inspection. Response officers have time allocated in their shift pattern to update victims, and oversight and monitoring arrangements are in place. Despite this progress, this still needs to improve.

### **The force should ensure it records the reasons why victims withdraw their support from investigations and considers evidence-led prosecutions**

When a victim decides to withdraw support for an investigation, known as [outcome 16](#), or wishes for it to be dealt with by an [out-of-court disposal](#) or a caution, an auditable record of the victim's wishes, such as a signed statement, needs to be obtained. This is important as it gives a record of the victim's wishes and the reasons why they don't wish to support a prosecution.

In many cases these wishes are not recorded. In some cases, such as domestic abuse incidents, it would have been appropriate for the police to continue an investigation through an evidence-led prosecution, but this wasn't considered by the investigating officer.

## **Innovative practice**

### **Victims of serious sexual assault are given information that encourages them to see criminal justice proceedings through to completion**

Victims of rape and serious sexual assault may wait for some time for the investigation to be completed. This can lead to the victim feeling that the police don't take the matter seriously and disengaging from the investigation.

To prevent this, Thames Valley Police provides a timeline explaining what to expect during the investigation and when significant events are likely to take place. This gives victims an understanding of the process and the time that it will take.

Evaluation shows that victims who have received this are less likely to withdraw from the criminal justice process.

## **Main findings**

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

### **The force has effective governance in place to improve the quality of investigations**

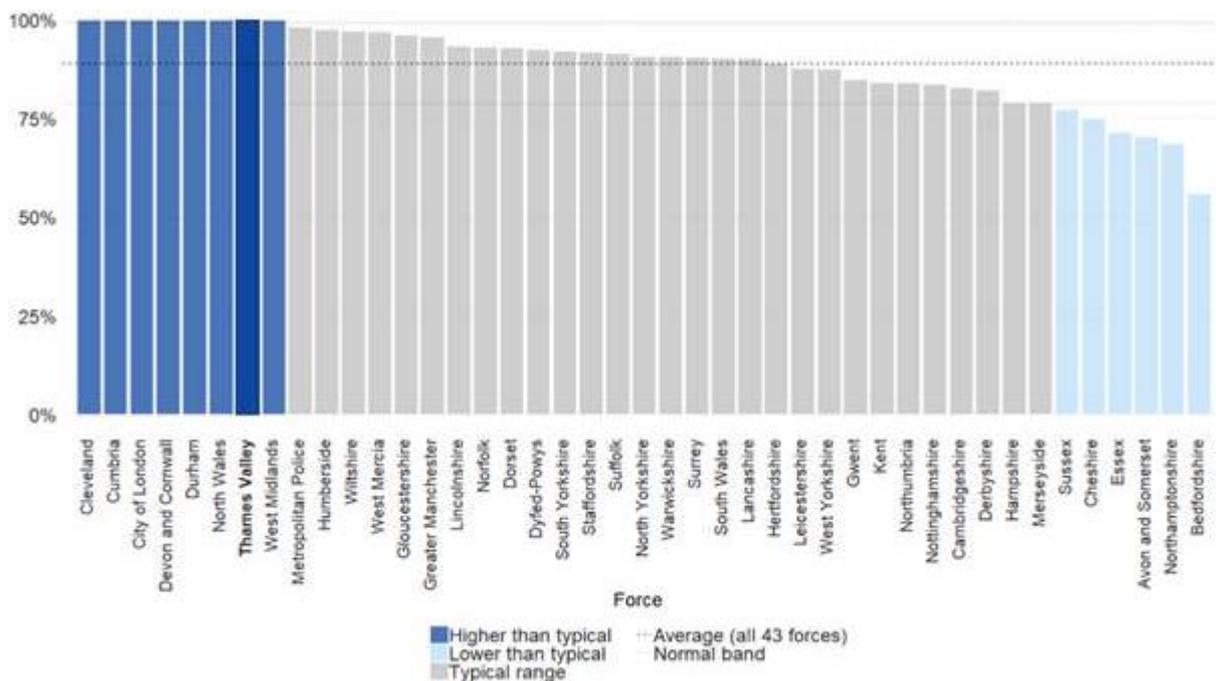
The force has put in place a comprehensive programme known as Endeavour to improve the quality of investigations. Embedding crime investigation skills is an important part of this work. Additional training and resources, such as aide memoirs and learning bulletins, are provided to front line officers and their supervisors.

The force has successfully encouraged officers to pursue a detective career but it should reassure itself that it understands the number of detectives it needs to meet demand

Encouraging officers to pursue a detective career is also part of the Endeavour programme. The force was an early adopter of the external [direct entry](#) route for detectives, a fast track from recruit to detective. It promotes the role of a detective through enhanced recognition, such as requiring experience of crime investigation for promotion. There is support for those who choose this career pathway. This includes a dedicated crime academy offering [continuing professional development](#).

As of 31 March 2021, Thames Valley Police had 100 percent of posts that require officers to be at level 2 of the [professionalising investigation programme](#) (PIP2) filled with accredited investigators or trainee investigators. This means the force has no shortfall of investigators. This is higher than the average throughout forces in England and Wales, which was 89 percent.

**Percentage of PIP2 accredited investigators and trainees (total staff) in post compared to those who should be in post throughout forces in England and Wales as at 31 March 2021**



**Note:** In total, 558 of the 792 PIP2 investigator roles (70 percent) were filled with accredited investigators while the remaining 263 posts were filled with trainee investigators. Including the number of trainee investigators has led to the force to have no shortfall in investigative capacity.

Despite this, many investigators carry high workloads that they describe as unmanageable.

The force now records more crime than previously. Procedural changes mean that it takes longer to prepare case files, comply with [disclosure](#) rules and gather evidence from electronic devices. This extra work has been absorbed within existing teams.

We found there is an over reliance on the use of overtime. We were told that staff in some units consistently work 30 hours' overtime each month. On occasions officers are working unpaid on laptops at home, which may mask the level of demand on them. This can affect the ability of officers to relax when away from work and take uninterrupted time for rest and recovery.

Despite these efforts, some staff still need to prioritise investigations based on risk, which means that other victims will wait longer for their investigations to be progressed. Delays mean that there is a greater probability that victims disengage from the justice process and offenders aren't brought to justice.

### **The supervision of investigations isn't always effective and appropriate**

The force has clear processes and expectations about the supervision of investigations. Despite this, some supervisors told us that the numbers of inexperienced staff made this more time-consuming. This extra demand added to other pressures of work may explain why supervisor reviews aren't always taking place.

Consequently, not all investigations are effectively supervised. This lack of oversight adversely affected the quality and timeliness of some of the investigations we reviewed.

### **Provision of forensic evidence for lower-risk cases isn't always timely**

The force has a service level agreement with its scientific support department in respect of the provision of forensic evidence such as fingerprints or mobile phone examination. The speed of examinations will be determined by the risk or urgency of the case. Service in respect of serious cases is good. The force has invested in additional equipment to examine mobile phones and where necessary has outsourced this work.

It recognises that in some non-urgent cases the speed of examinations isn't quick enough. There is now a forensic improvement plan with an allocated budget designed to improve performance in this area.

### **The force makes good use of out-of-court disposals to secure justice for victims**

When appropriate a force can use measures outside court proceedings to achieve justice for victims, such as a caution, apology or other forms of reparation. While work needs to be done to record the wishes of victims, Thames Valley Police makes frequent and proper use of these resolutions. This means that victims are satisfied, offenders diverted and pressure on the court system reduced.

# Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

Thames Valley Police is adequate at protecting vulnerable people.

## Area for improvement

**The force should make sure that it actively considers the use of measures to protect people from domestic abuse in all appropriate cases**

Our 2019 inspection said that the force should reassure itself that it was making proper use of tools such as domestic violence protection orders and the [domestic violence disclosure scheme](#), also known as Clare's Law.

In this inspection we found that [domestic abuse protection orders](#) were still not considered in all applicable cases. The force also makes less use of the domestic violence disclosure scheme than almost all other forces in England and Wales. This may mean that opportunities to prevent further harm to victims of domestic abuse are being missed.

## Main findings

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

### **The force's governance of the service delivered to vulnerable people is effective**

Each category of vulnerability, such as domestic abuse or modern slavery, has an individual action plan led by a senior officer. These follow categories set out in the National Vulnerability Action Plan as examples of good ways of working. Progress against these plans is monitored by the vulnerabilities strategic group chaired by a chief officer. The force could be more confident in the success of these plans if it reassures itself that it accurately identifies all types of vulnerability when victims first contact the force.

Where the board identifies a problem that requires further work to improve its service in a particular area it commissions a service improvement review. These reviews are used frequently by the force and consist of a detailed analysis drawing out conclusions and recommendations with an associated improvement plan.

## **The force doesn't always have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of vulnerable victims**

Staff and supervisors in units dedicated to dealing with vulnerable victims, such as the domestic abuse investigation teams, told us that workloads were often unmanageable. Overtime was used routinely to keep up with demand and there was evidence of staff working from home to complete tasks. Not all this extra work received overtime payments, meaning that this demand on officers' time may be hidden from the force.

Cases with the highest risk or approaching some sort of time limit such as a court date are prioritised. Yet, cases such as an allegation of a historic domestic rape or investigations awaiting a charging decision would be left until officers had time to attend to them. These delays increase the risk that victims may withdraw from the investigation and make it difficult to secure a magistrate's extension to [bail](#) conditions imposed by the police. This can then lead to conditions designed to protect domestic abuse victims lapsing.

## **The force has improved its initial response to victims of domestic abuse but there is still work to do**

In our 2019 inspection, we identified that the force used a system of appointments to see victims of domestic abuse where an immediate response wasn't required. It could be some days before a victim was seen. This delay all too often meant that the victim had disengaged from the investigation and making an arrest was more difficult.

The force now attends nearly all domestic abuse reports in person and prioritises them. It makes a much higher proportion of arrests for domestic abuse than previously and brings more domestic abuse perpetrators to justice than in the past. The most recent data provided by the force shows that it made 9,250 arrests between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2021, compared to 4,097 in the previous six months. Despite this, it takes officers on average 12 hours to attend an incident that isn't classed as immediate. This is too long.

## **The force works effectively and proactively with other organisations to reduce vulnerability and repeat victimisation**

Working with other organisations is a notable strength for Thames Valley Police and is woven through its approach to protecting vulnerable people. It actively works within multi-agency strategic boards such as the safeguarding children's board. It contributes well to the work of meetings that support victims of domestic abuse, such as [multi-agency risk assessment conferences \(MARACs\)](#) and multi-agency tasking and co-ordination meetings (MATACs).

It makes good use of data from other organisations to identify and protect those at most risk of harm or of becoming repeat victims. This includes young people who are in danger of harm by frequently going missing or others involved with drugs supply or other forms of exploitation.

It adopts good professional procedures such as using the [Philomena protocol](#) to encourage other organisations to note relevant information that might be helpful in

locating a young person at risk from frequently going missing. It also uses the Herbert protocol, which is a similar approach for older people in care settings.

The force was an early adopter of Operation Signature, which supports elderly victims of fraud and prevents them becoming victims a second time.

The force has [multi-agency safeguarding hubs \(MASHs\)](#) that receive all referrals created about vulnerable people. The hub assesses the risk attached to each referral and starts work with other organisations to provide appropriate support. As a result of a backlog of assessments, the force put additional staff into the hub and reviewed how it could work more efficiently. As a result, the backlogs have been reduced. Although positive, some backlogs remain and the problem may persist without further investment or the implementation of more efficient ways of working.

### **The force supports detained children and young people and women**

Children and young people detained by Thames Valley Police or who attend a police station voluntarily as a suspect are seen by a worker from the [liaison and diversion](#) service. This is to seek opportunities to put diversionary activities in place and address any needs, such as mental ill-health, where the young person may benefit from support. The force also works with Reading Football Club to offer life coaching and other diversion activities for 18 to 25-year-olds.

Women are seen by the custody nurse, who assesses any underlying needs that may be leading to their offending. This discussion with someone outside policing has sometimes highlighted hidden harm, such as domestic abuse. This helps ensure the woman has access to specialist support.

# Managing offenders and suspects

Good

Thames Valley Police is good at managing offenders and suspects.

## Innovative practice

### **The force takes effective measures to reduce re-offending and change behaviour**

Violence reduction units (VRUs) are partnerships initially funded by central Government to promote a [public health approach](#) to knife crime. The work of the VRU in Thames Valley demonstrates innovative approaches.

VRU data has improved the targeting of offenders and locations connected to knife crime leading to a reduction in these crimes. Interventions at 'teachable moments' in accident and emergency departments and custody divert young people from committing further violent crimes.

The use of community resolutions has been expanded to some drug offences. Those found in possession of class A drugs, irrespective of a previous conviction, can take part in a diversion scheme that provides assessment, education and tailored intervention. The force told us that 95 percent of adults and 88 percent of young people participating complete the programme.

Data sharing has been significantly improved through the development of the Thames Valley Together Project. This gives over 1,000 people working across allied organisations access to data on a cloud-based shared system and uses analytics to better understand the issues that may be driving crime.

## Main findings

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

**The force doesn't always have the resources within its [MOSOVO \(management of sex and violent offenders\)](#) and POLIT (police online intelligence) teams to manage demand in a timely way**

Individuals suspected of viewing indecent images of children online are dealt with promptly where the risk is assessed as high or very high. But the force doesn't deal promptly with investigations that are assessed as low or medium risk.

There are also delays in intelligence gathering for referrals to police linked to indecent images of children. At the time of our inspection, there was a backlog of nearly 300 cases waiting for a full risk assessment. This leads to delays in arrest and investigation and affects the force's ability to prevent further offending.

The team responsible for the management of sex and violent offenders (MOSOVO team) also has a backlog of visits. These visits help establish whether or not a sex offender is reoffending or if the risk they pose has changed. This can be identified by examining phones and laptops but staff expressed concerns that equipment and technical assistance isn't always available. This may affect the force's ability to accurately assess the risk the offender poses and therefore its ability to prevent further offending.

The force recognises the risks in this area and has approved the allocation of 12 further staff to the MOSOVO team. The force should monitor the effect of this increase to ensure that it is sufficient to manage demand and risk.

**The force has effective arrangements to monitor and scrutinise pre-charge bail and the release of suspects under investigation**

Officers were clear about when it was appropriate to grant suspects pre-charge bail (PCB) or [release them under investigation \(RUI\)](#) and supervisors record the justification for these decisions. This increases the effective management of suspects and protects victims. Systems remind investigating officers and their supervisors when suspects on bail are due to return. Supervisors record why decisions about the use of or any changes to PCB or RUI are justified. The appropriate use of PCB and RUI is monitored quarterly by senior officers through the bail custody group.

**The force has provided officers with guidance for dealing with foreign nationals who have been detained**

Frontline officers understand what actions need to be taken in respect of a detained foreign national. A document offers guidance about how to establish the identity of the individual and prevent any risk they may pose. It includes information about acceptable forms of identity and how to carry out immigration and Interpol checks. Explanatory notes and any contact details that may be needed are provided.

**Public protection and neighbourhood policing teams work together to manage registered sex offenders**

Staff and supervisors in the [public protection unit \(PPU\)](#) are trained to use nationally recognised risk assessment techniques. This helps to correctly determine the risk posed by registered sex offenders.

The PPU and [neighbourhood policing teams](#) work together to ensure awareness of sex offenders in the community. Details of all registered sex offenders and where they live are held on the force computer system and new offenders are included in neighbourhood briefings. A guide has been produced for neighbourhood officers explaining what they should look for if they attend a sex offender's address and there are clear processes for them to record any intelligence they gather. This helps the force understand any increase in risk or likelihood of further offending.

### **The force identifies and manages repeat offenders well and takes effective measures to change their behaviour**

Repeat offenders are identified through the risk, frequency and gravity dashboard created by the force intelligence bureau. It combines sources of information and intelligence, including information provided by other organisations, to determine the most serious risks in each policing area. Local tasking and co-ordination processes direct appropriate actions to reduce offending.

There is an effective multi-agency [integrated offender management \(IOM\)](#) programme. Themed subgroups, such as housing or mental health, develop bespoke support systems for offenders.

IOM staff work alongside probation and analytical staff to reduce offending by removing some of the drivers of it, such as homelessness or drug use. They use nationally approved models to assess the initial and changing risk posed by offenders. The force breaks down results by offender and has calculated the cost of crime throughout all organisations to give an understanding of whole costs. Data provided by the force shows a 23 percent reduction in offending by participants during the first six months they are on the scheme. This data has been used to justify additional investment to increase the size of the IOM cohort to 500 as the force moves to expand the scheme to work with types of offenders not usually eligible. This will make it more responsive to local patterns of offending.

# 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 \(ROCU\)](#)s. 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 Thames Valley Police hasn't yet been completed. It is due to conclude in 2023. We will update our website with our findings (including the force's grade) and a link to the regional report once the inspection is complete.

# Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Adequate

Thames Valley Police is adequate at building and developing its workforce.

## Areas for improvement

### **The force needs to better understand all data relating to wellbeing and improve its evaluation of the services it provides to staff**

The force does not fully use data from [occupational health](#) and psychological screening referrals to understand wellbeing issues throughout the force. There is also only limited evaluation of the extent to which its wellbeing provision addresses its workforce's needs. This means it may not be fully identifying issues or using the best means to tackle them.

### **The force should ensure its that officers and staff have manageable workloads**

The most significant wellbeing effect on staff across the force was unmanageable workloads. Overtime is used to address daily demand and too often staff are not taking the full allocated meal break when on duty.

As a result, officers are sometimes unable to provide victims with the service they deserve, which further affects their wellbeing. High workloads are also preventing some staff from accessing initiatives designed to support them.

## Innovative practice

### There is good work to recruit and retain more officers from minority ethnic backgrounds

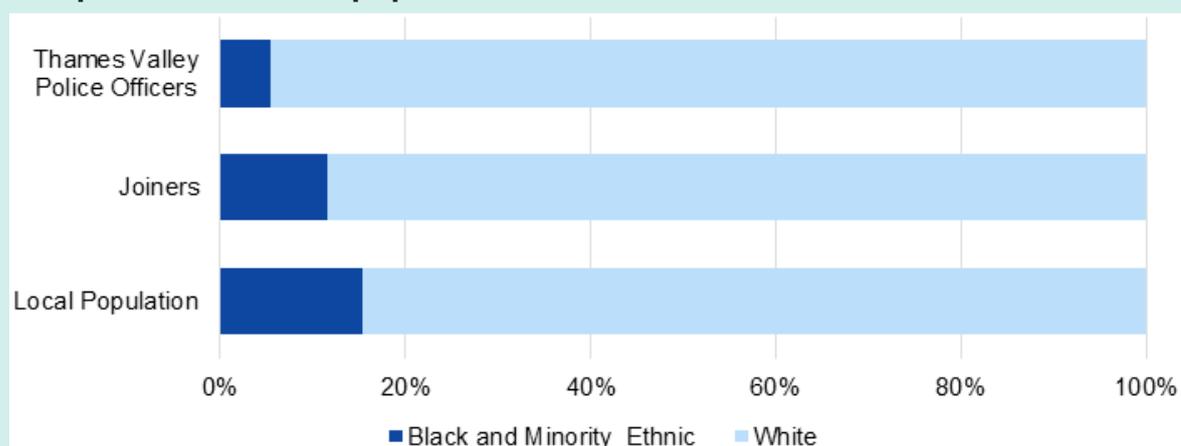
The force has a positive action engagement team (PAET) who encourage and support prospective officers from minority ethnic backgrounds to join Thames Valley Police.

Applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds who meet the eligibility criteria for police constable are offered support through the recruitment process. The PAET uses a private Facebook account to provide information and a Q&A session with a human resources representative on how to complete the application process. Those successful at this stage are provided with guidance and advice in interactive sessions that help them relate their experiences to the areas tested in the selection centre. Applicants offered an interview are again provided with advice and support for this part of the process.

The PAET maintains contact with the applicants to ensure any barriers or concerns are addressed. If successful, the student officer is assigned a mentor from their policing area to offer advice and support during their probationary period.

In the year ending 31 March 2021, 11.6 percent of police officer joiners to Thames Valley Police self-identified as Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME). This is lower than the BAME proportion in the local population (15.4 percent) but higher than the total proportion of BAME officers in the force at 31 March 2021 (5.5 percent). This suggests that the force is moving in a positive direction but is still not fully representative of its local community.

### Proportion of full-time equivalent Thames Valley Police officers and officer joiners that self-identify as Black, Asian or minority ethnic at 31 March 2021 compared to the local population



**Note: calculations exclude ethnicities that haven't been stated, which represented 0.8 percent of police officers and 0.3 percent of police officer joiners**

## Main findings

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

### **The force has an ethical and inclusive culture**

Staff are proud to work for Thames Valley Police and a feeling of belonging exists in the organisation.

Ethical behaviour is part of the training and development courses and is promoted strongly by senior leaders. There are ethics champions throughout the force and an [ethics committee](#) chaired by an independent academic ethics adviser. The committee has published ethical dilemmas, such as disparity in stop and search use and officers participating in protests, through a dedicated intranet page. The force could do more to promote this good work among frontline staff and encourage them to submit ethical dilemmas.

### **Wellbeing initiatives are available to staff but some struggle to find time to participate**

The force is following the national framework to promote staff wellbeing and there is support for those experiencing trauma, mental health issues or other welfare challenges.

The Emergency Services Trauma Intervention Programme (ESTIP) is widely used to support incident response officers effectively, although we found that this was applied less systematically for specialist investigators. Supervisors are trained in decompression techniques to support colleagues affected by traumatic experiences.

Advice is available for staff with financial difficulties, wellbeing dogs visit stations and quiet wellbeing rooms are provided for staff. The employee assistance programme provides access to support and counselling services. Gyms are provided throughout the force area and health surveillance nurses monitor trends in wellbeing.

There are 180 Blue Light Champions raising awareness of mental health issues and challenging the stigma that surrounds them and over 30 peer supporters that the force has trained to support colleagues. The force leadership has encouraged 'buddy networks' for staff to support each other, including a network for staff with cancer, a men's forum and a maternity group.

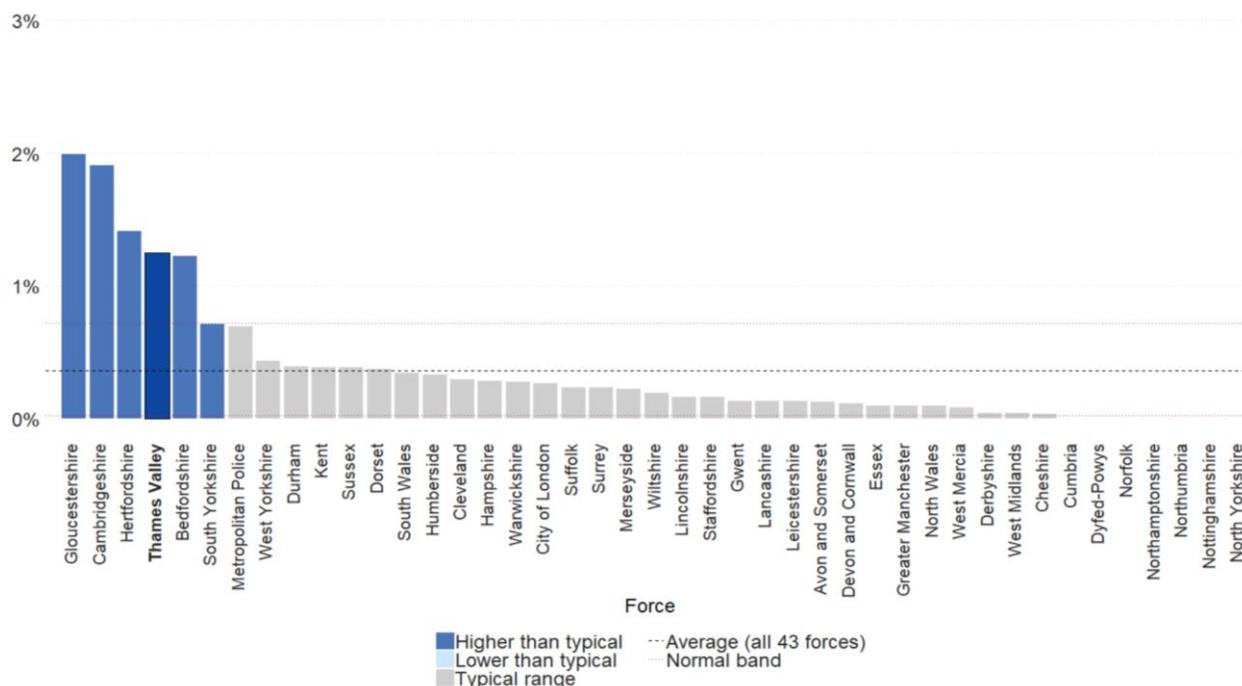
Overall, the force offers good wellbeing provision and the workforce knows it is available, but on many occasions they told us that they were too busy to use it. This undermines the efforts the force is taking to improve wellbeing.

### **The force is good at managing performance**

Leaders encourage a learning approach to improve performance. Reflective methods are used to manage low-level performance. This demonstrates that the force addresses poor performance in an ethical and proportionate way.

The force makes good use of the unsatisfactory performance procedures. In the year ending 31 March 2021, 1.25 percent of Thames Valley Police's officers were subject to these procedures. This is much higher than the average throughout forces in England and Wales, which was 0.36 percent.

### Percentage of police officers who have been through unsatisfactory performance procedures for forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2021



### Support to staff in high risk roles isn't seen as wholly effective

Officers and staff in roles identified by the force as carrying a higher risk of trauma undergo regular psychological screening through an online questionnaire. This is to determine and address wellbeing issues at an early stage. If concerns are identified, it is followed by an occupational health appointment. At the time of our inspection, referred staff were waiting on average 25 days for this to take place.

Staff taking part in the screening aren't confident that it always identifies those experiencing difficulties. The online form makes it easier for participants to avoid disclosing information that they feel could lead to an unwanted change of role or adversely affect promotion prospects. As there is less consistent use of decompression techniques among specialist staff, early signs of welfare issues may be missed.

### The force is building its workforce for the future

The force has an excellent recruitment website called TVP Careers, offering a good insight into policing for prospective applicants through extensive details on officer and staff roles. Information on recruitment and training processes are supplemented with videos about the experience of officers and staff in Thames Valley Police.

## **The force knows the diversity of its workforce**

The force knows the make-up of the workforce through its diversity monitoring questionnaire, which the force told us had been completed by over 80 percent of staff. This high return demonstrates that staff with [protected characteristics](#) feel comfortable disclosing them and it helps the force to support people better and to determine areas of the organisation where under-representation exists.

## **The force understands factors that influence retention**

The force has analysed data from leavers' interviews to discover the main reasons why officers and staff leave the force. It found that non-pay benefits such as flexible working act as incentives to stay with the force. Analysis of changes it made as a result showed more positive feelings towards the force. This means that people are less likely to leave the organisation.

## **Development programmes provide officers and staff with the opportunity to progress their careers**

The two-year Developing Potential Programme takes 30 police officers and staff each year to explore their self-awareness and self-development. A course tailored to Black, Asian and minority ethnic officers and staff has so far been completed by 60 people, which has improved diversity in leadership roles. Likewise, the Women's Development Programme supports female sergeants in moving into more senior positions.

## **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.

Thames Valley 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

Requires improvement

Thames Valley Police requires improvement at operating efficiently.

## Areas for improvement

### **The force needs to develop a comprehensive understanding of demand**

The force demonstrates that it has a good awareness of current demand for service and it flexes resources to meet the challenges it is experiencing. However, it needs to better understand how its approach affects the overall quality of service to the public and the impact on its staff.

We were told that staff have unmanageable workloads in most areas. New requirements, that include greater complexity in investigating crime and with file preparation, combined with the fact that the force now records crime more accurately, are adding pressure. Officers are taking work home to manage excess work demand.

Officers are often pulled away from their normal duties to supervise people in crisis. The pressures other services face in providing suitable accommodation for people detained under the Mental Health Act are increasing demand for Thames Valley Police. This is adding to the demand the force has to manage.

The force should reassure itself that it is able to understand and quantify how these pressures are affecting its ability to manage demand across the entire organisation.

### **The force needs to make sure it has the capability and capacity it needs to meet and manage current demands efficiently**

The force needs the right people in the right place to support the changes it has planned and to make sure that calls for service and investigations are not subject to undue delay.

Initiatives to help manage incoming demand, for example the incident and crime response teams, are not resourced effectively and do not have enough capacity or capability. The work pressure on supervisors is preventing them from overseeing and leading their teams as they feel they should.

The investigation of crimes and the assessment of risk to vulnerable people or by potentially dangerous offenders are adversely affected by a lack of sufficient staff with the right skills.

### **The force should ensure that new IT systems are implemented effectively**

In September 2020, Thames Valley Police introduced a new contact management system that records calls for service from the public, can access relevant information about the call from other force systems, and records actions taken.

This introduction of this system has caused frustration for some staff who have been unable to use it in the way that it was envisaged. For example, during the inspection we were told by control room staff that they were not confident they could always provide important situation updates relevant to the safety of officers attending calls. This was reinforced by incident response officers who had experienced this.

Some control room staff told us that they did not trust the new system to identify all the relevant information and consequently were also carrying manual searches on other systems. Other staff reported that screen displays lacked clarity, making it difficult for them to identify the location or availability of officers. As a result, they were recording some information on paper.

As part of the implementation of this system, the force has carried out a review and identified many of these issues already. In some cases, it puts problems down to staff not understanding how to use the system correctly despite receiving guidance. In other cases, where the review has raised the need for minor adjustments, such as a different screen layout, that has been progressed.

Despite these efforts, not all contact management staff understand standard operating procedures and how to make best use of the system 13 months after the system went live. This is leading to inefficiencies and, critically, these staff losing faith in the system. The force must make sure these issues are fully addressed and that new IT systems deliver what was envisaged and provide the benefits identified.

Generally, the force should reassure itself that the implementation of new systems is closely monitored to make sure that all staff are supported, and that feedback is both sought and seen to have been acted upon. This will help improve changes in the future. It will also enable the force to ensure the systems provide what was promised and that the impact of change does not affect staff confidence or the service provided to the public.

## Innovative practice

### **The force improves productivity by developing its use of robotic process automation**

In several policing areas, the force is using robotic process automation (RPA) for mundane administrative tasks, helping staff to focus on high-level, value-adding tasks. RPA works by using software to mimic human actions and follow policing processes. The force has developed its use of RPA to process firearms applications, process road traffic collision reports submitted online, check data within the records management system and generate automated letters to victims.

The force is looking for further opportunities to develop automated processes to focus staff time elsewhere.

## Main findings

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

### **The force understands future demand and has plans to make sure it can meet it**

The force has initially responded well to the national, central Government-funded programme to increase police numbers. The force focused its first year of funding on increasing the numbers in its incident and crime response teams and in fact recruited an additional 61 officers over the target of 183 by 31 March 2021. It is planning to use its second year of funding to support other areas throughout the force. This plan includes replacing some police staff with police officers in some roles, such as in the control room and as investigators. The force should reassure itself that these plans will improve results and provide value for money.

### **The force makes the best use of the finance it has available, and has a robust and effective plan to meet its savings challenge**

It is evident that the chief officer group takes control of finance, which is managed within a good governance structure. The force's financial plans are clearly aligned to the [force management statement](#), the force's strategic plan and the [police and crime commissioner's](#) police and crime plan.

The force anticipates that it needs to make savings of £18m over the course of its mid-term financial plan. It has an established savings board and there are rigorous processes in place with regular reviews to make sure that the force is on track to achieve them. For example, the force initially forecasted a requirement of £16m in savings over the life of the [medium term financial plan](#), but through regular reviews and assessments this figure changed to £18m. It was able to respond effectively to this challenge and realign its plans to accommodate the difference. While it still has a gap of £3.25m in its final year of planning 2024/25, there is good governance and focus on driving efficiencies to achieve savings.

The problem facing the force is that it needs to ensure savings are aligned with promoting effective and efficient policing. But the force recognises that further changes in funding will present it with difficult decisions and this could affect how it manages its workforce mix in future years.

### **The force actively seeks opportunities to improve services through collaboration**

The force has a good track record for entering into collaboration agreements. These include local, regional and national arrangements covering IT, counter terrorism, forensics and automatic number plate recognition. Of note is the joint IT strategy with Hampshire Constabulary, which reduces duplication while meeting joint priorities and objectives. Clearly linking to the national Policing Vision 2025, it sets out a timetable of improvements for both forces.

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