

PEEL 2021/22

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of West Mercia Police

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Overall summary

Our judgments

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

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

We also inspected how effective a service West Mercia 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, does not necessarily mean that there has been a reduction in performance, unless we say so in the report.

HM Inspector's observations

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of West Mercia Police in keeping people safe and reducing crime, but 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 past year.

Despite the force's efforts to improve its investigations, too many of its serious investigations are inadequately supervised and not sufficiently effective. This is resulting in a poor service to some victims of crime.

Several departments reported understaffing. This can affect workplace wellbeing and lead to a poor service to victims. The force recognises that its operating model needs to be more prevention focused. It has begun to develop a new model for the future, with the introduction of early intervention and prevention officers, and increased investment in problem-solving. Its workforce development activities are, however, yet to gain traction.

The force's information technology systems are unreliable, and this leads to poor service and inefficient working practices. Unreliable systems also affect the quality and accuracy of the force's data and management reports. This means that the force has a poor understanding of its demand in some notable areas, such as its response times. I am pleased to see that the force has introduced an investment programme to address these weaknesses.

West Mercia Police has, however, invested in all its operational policing areas, and improvements are evident in aspects such as community policing and the management of offenders and suspects. But there are still improvements needed, particularly in crime investigation and public protection capacity and capability.

The force plans to improve its technical and data capabilities, refresh its operating model and develop its workforce. This will provide a firm foundation for continued operational improvements. I look forward to seeing progress in these areas over the coming year.



Wendy Williams
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.

West Mercia Police prioritises crime prevention in its tasking meetings and other performance-management arrangements. It identifies vulnerability and repeat domestic abuse within a greater proportion of its crimes than other similar forces. Good contact with its communities, supported by analysis, helps the force understand vulnerable people and those most at risk of repeat harm.

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

- Attending officers are good at assessing and understanding risk and vulnerability.
- Problem solving and multi-agency working are effective at preventing crime.
- The force has invested in early intervention and prevention officers in all areas.
- Domestic abuse risk officers and independent domestic violence advisors help reduce repeat victimisation.
- Management of offenders and suspects, including the most serious offenders, is effective.

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:

- The criminal investigation department and public protection teams are under-resourced, and the force has gaps in its investigation capabilities. It isn't answering its non-emergency calls promptly enough and its repeat and vulnerable callers aren't always identified and sufficiently assessed during the initial call. And callers aren't always given crime prevention and scene preservation advice.
- Its operating model isn't meeting demand and the force hasn't assessed its workforce skills to understand current and future needs.
- Victim support is withdrawn in too many cases and decisions not to pursue evidence-led prosecutions are poorly recorded.

Until the force improves its crime investigation capacity, capability and effectiveness, it may not 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 West Mercia 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 a suspect was identified but the victim didn't support or withdrew support for police action. While this assessment is ungraded, it influences graded judgments in the other areas we have inspected.

The force answers emergency calls quickly, but needs to improve the time it takes to answer non-emergency calls and how it identifies repeat or vulnerable victims

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

Emergency calls are answered well. However, the force needs to improve the time it takes to answer non-emergency calls, and reduce call abandonment rates to meet national standards. When calls are answered, the victim's vulnerability isn't always assessed using a structured process. Repeat victims aren't always identified, which means this isn't taken into account when considering the response the victim should receive. Not all victims are being given crime prevention advice or advice on the preservation of evidence. This can lead to evidence being lost and lessens the opportunity to prevent further crimes being committed.

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 the vulnerability of the victim, including information obtained after the call. On most occasions, the force responds to calls appropriately. However, sometimes attendance is slow, victims aren't updated about delays and their expectations aren't met. This can cause victims to lose confidence in and disengage from the criminal justice process. Some non-emergency calls are managed with an appointment system. This is effective when used and, on most occasions, an appropriate member of staff is allocated to respond to the call. However, the force should make more use of scheduled appointments to manage both staff time and victim expectation.

The force allocates crimes to appropriate staff, and victims are promptly 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 are in accordance with the force's policy and in all cases the crime is allocated to the most appropriate department for further investigation. Victims are always promptly informed if their reported crime isn't going to be investigated further. This is important to provide victims with an appropriate level of service and to manage expectations.

The force isn't always carrying out thorough and timely investigations, with victims not always being updated on the progress of their 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.

Sometimes investigations aren't carried out in a timely manner and often relevant lines of enquiry aren't completed. There is frequently a lack of effective supervision of investigations. This results in some investigations not being thorough or timely. Victims are therefore potentially being let down and offenders aren't being brought to justice. Victims aren't always kept updated about the progress of the investigation, which can result in victims losing confidence in the investigation. When domestic abuse victims withdraw their support for a prosecution, the force doesn't always consider the use of notices or orders designed to protect victims, such as a Domestic Violence Protection Notice or Order. Obtaining such notices or orders is an important method of safeguarding the victim from further abuse.

Under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victims' Code), there is a requirement to conduct a needs assessment at an early stage to

decide whether victims require additional support. The outcome of the assessment and the request for additional support should be recorded. The force isn't always completing the victim needs assessment, which means not all victims will receive the appropriate level of service.

The force finalises reports of crimes appropriately but sometimes fails to consult the victims for their views or record these views when they are consulted

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 some cases, a caution or community resolution is an appropriate outcome to a police investigation. In these situations, the views of the victim should be taken into consideration and accurately recorded, and the offender should meet specified national criteria.

In most of the cases reviewed, the offender met the national criteria required. In all cases where community resolutions were used, the victim's views had been recorded. However, the victim's views were often not sought or considered in the use of cautions. 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 victims' wishes may not be fully represented and considered before the investigation is closed.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Adequate

West Mercia Police is adequate at treating people fairly and with respect.

The force hasn't complied with our [2017 national legitimacy recommendation](#)

While we found some published analysis on disproportionality of the use of stop and search powers on people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, the force hasn't yet published a plan to address this as required by our 2017 recommendation. If forces don't follow our 2017 recommendation, it can undermine their efforts to make sure that searches are undertaken fairly.

Areas for improvement

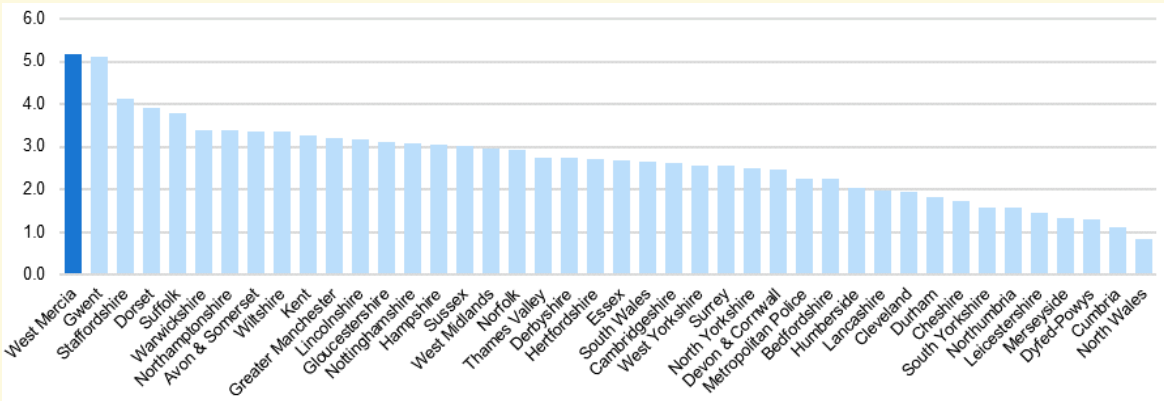
The force should reinvigorate its work with independent advisory groups (IAGs) in all parts of the force. It should work with IAGs to ensure consistent and comprehensive data sharing, the review of body-worn video (BWV), and meaningful scrutiny of the use of force, with actions taken in light of the IAGs' feedback

The force has IAGs on each of its five local policing areas (LPAs), but these are used inconsistently to scrutinise the use of force in West Mercia Police. For instance, only one IAG observes West Mercia Police's use of force training. Only one LPA use of force meeting has an IAG representative present. Not all IAGs review BWV. Though West Mercia Police shares use of force data with its IAGs, it isn't clear how this data is used nor what the force's intent is in sharing the data. Some IAG members said they hadn't received use of force data for some time and that inaccuracies in the data hadn't been corrected despite requests. We found no evidence that the force's strategic use of force group either sought or acted on feedback from its IAGs. In the strategic meeting minutes we reviewed, only one matter was identified for discussion with the IAGs, and this was resolved not through local groups but through scrutiny work within another force area. Inconsistent use of independent scrutiny undervalues the work of IAGs and risks undermining public trust in the police's use of force.

The force should be regularly monitoring a comprehensive set of data on its use of stop and search, in line with our 2017 national legitimacy recommendation, to enhance its understanding of fair and effective use of these powers. This data should be scrutinised by the force and used to ensure that the use of stop and search powers is proportionate and targeted appropriately

Our 2017 recommendation aims to understand and address the disproportionate way that stop and search tactics might be used on people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. However, the force doesn't overlay all elements of its stop and search data with other factors such as ethnicity to help it to better understand disproportionality. While the force is making efforts to address disproportionality, this remains substantial in West Mercia Police. In the year ending 31 March 2020, West Mercia Police stopped and searched Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals at a rate 5.2 times higher than white individuals. This is higher than the England and Wales rate of 4.0 times, and is the highest rate of disproportionality compared to other forces.

Stop and search disproportionality rates of Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals compared to white individuals, across forces in England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2020



Although the force publishes comparative stop and search data, including analysis by ethnicity and age, the data reviewed at the stop and search strategic board and IAG meetings doesn't yet cover all of the areas we would expect. For instance, the data doesn't distinguish between drugs found in someone's possession or those found in connection with illegal supply. And the force continues to report arrests as a search outcome rather than whether officers found the object they were looking for. Furthermore, any requests for additional data must be developed by an analyst, which means there is a wait until the next meeting for this to be considered. This can delay data-informed improvements. More thorough analysis would help the force and the community to understand whether police stop and search activity is fair, effective and used appropriately to address community priorities.

Main findings

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

The force is improving its contact with its communities

The force introduced its community charter early in 2021. As part of this, locally identified priorities have been agreed with the force's 465 parish councils. Safer neighbourhood teams (SNTs) are working on these priorities with local community groups and other organisations. This year the force introduced a community contact system, neighbourhood matters, providing a two-way communication platform with a growing base of registered users. However, there was over a year's delay between the closure of its former community messaging system and the introduction of neighbourhood matters. This coincided with the pandemic outbreak, a period when effective messaging with communities was a high priority. This limited the force's options for working with people remotely during that period. Subscription to neighbourhood matters is now growing, as SNTs make face-to-face contact with local residents and businesses. This will help the force keep local people involved and updated on its crime and anti-social behaviour prevention activities.

SNTs use an appropriate range of social media channels and face-to-face events to meet with their communities. Examples include sessions with specific community and faith groups to promote crime prevention and safety messages, such as fraud prevention. The extent to which this is centrally co-ordinated and focused on force priorities is, however, less evident. This may limit the extent to which communities work with the force and other organisations to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in their local areas.

The force encourages the community to get involved with policing activities

In Telford, the force has introduced what it calls trusted panels. These panels are made up of a group of community representatives who challenge the force's understanding of some of the most difficult policing problems it faces. The panels have recently helped inform the force's approach to two contentious matters affecting different sections of the local community.

The force has an effective citizens in policing team that co-ordinates its volunteer programmes such as the Special Constabulary, volunteer police cadets, police support volunteers and Neighbourhood Watch. It has appropriately reviewed its Special Constabulary working hours arrangements and recontracted its expectations with its volunteers. Though this has reduced its special constable capacity to one of the lowest in England and Wales, it has improved both participation rates and individual hours contributed. The force plans to grow the Special Constabulary during 2022 and 2023 in line with its wider workforce uplift objectives and the National Police Chiefs' Council [Citizens in Policing](#) guidance.

The force receives high levels of applications for its advertised volunteer roles. It could, however, display its volunteer opportunities more prominently on its website.

This would help improve community participation and increase public trust and understanding of policing.

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

A range of training is provided (such as officer safety training) that incorporates skills designed to promote fairness and respect. This includes training for members of the workforce to recognise their own biases and improve their communication skills with the public. We found that the workforce had a good understanding of these subjects.

We found consistent and appropriate use of BWV, such as at times when force was used, arrests were made or members of the public were stopped and searched. However, some non-uniformed officers don't routinely carry BWV so their searches and arrests aren't always recorded. The force should consider issuing BWV to all officers who routinely make arrests or use [stop and search powers](#). BWV is useful not only to gather evidence, but also to maintain public trust and confidence.

The workforce understands how to use stop and search and use of force powers fairly and respectfully, though recording and supervision could be improved

Officers are trained in use of force and stop and search as part of their scenario-based officer safety training. However, police staff such as police community support officers, who can also use force as part of their work, are more likely to report that their annual training has lapsed. Refresher training has been reduced to just one day, due to training backlogs caused by the pandemic. The force intends to adopt the College of Policing's use of force training programme and national curriculum in 2022.

Officers are confident in their use of stop and search powers and in their use of force. During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 136 stop and search records from 1 January to 31 December 2020. Based on this sample, we estimate that 94.1 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.9 percent) of all stop and searches by West Mercia Police during this period were reasonable. This is higher than our review that took place in the previous year, when we estimated that 92.7 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.1 percent) of stop and searches had reasonable grounds. Use of force and stop and search records are checked by supervisors and further audited by subject matter leads. The force also has low rates of injuries relating to the use of force, and reviews all such cases. Officers should be provided with regular feedback to support continuous learning. Where feedback is provided, officers value it and use it to help improve their skills.

When force is used, each officer using force should submit a use of force form in line with [guidance from the National Police Chiefs' Council](#). However, only half of our survey respondents said that they submitted a use of force form in cases of compliant handcuffing, where a detained person co-operated fully when handcuffed by an officer. And a third said they didn't receive supervision or feedback on their use of force. Police inspectors are expected to review a selection of records and BWV, however compliance with this is inconsistent. Where a person doesn't suffer injury, officers rarely record this on use of force forms. And although the force has substantially improved the recording of ethnicity on use of force forms throughout

2021, the recording of disability data remains poor. Inconsistent recording, supervision and feedback can limit individual learning and the force's understanding of the use of force. The force should continue to promote accurate recording and supervisory feedback, and learning from the use of force.

Independent scrutiny helps the force improve its approach to stop and search

Geographical and thematic IAGs are well established in West Mercia Police. They are independently chaired, well attended and confident to challenge the force. A strategic IAG, also independently chaired, is well attended by chief officers and the force's senior leaders. The force welcomes independent scrutiny and acts on the feedback provided. IAGs review BWV footage and the grounds that officers record when members of the public are stopped and searched. IAGs are also represented at the stop and search strategic board. IAGs act as critical friends, helping improve understanding, communication and confidence across the diverse communities of West Mercia.

The force reviews a range of information to help it understand its use of force, but should consider publishing more of its use of force information

West Mercia Police has use of force ambassadors to promote good ways of working and understanding throughout operational teams. It has refreshed its Taser policies and all situations where Tasers are used are referred to the force's professional standards department. The health and safety team reviews all use of force, which helps establish trends relating to both public and officer injuries. The force also produces a comprehensive set of quarterly data for its strategic use of force group to consider. It publishes use of force data and a helpful infographic, though this isn't easy to locate on the force's website. The force doesn't, however, publish minutes of its use of force meetings. A lack of published information reduces transparency and can limit scrutiny groups' understanding of how force is used in West Mercia Police. It also reduces opportunities to improve practice in this important area.

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

Good

West Mercia Police is good at prevention and deterrence.

Innovative practice

The force's approach to early intervention and prevention is innovative

The force has introduced and trained 16 officers in early help, and intervention and prevention skills in line with its early intervention strategy. Early help officers work in the partnership hubs, and intervention and prevention officers work directly with identified individuals. They use data to identify repeat victims at the highest risk of being harmed, and repeat offenders at the highest risk of causing harm. This helps the force identify those who would most benefit from early intervention approaches. High-harm data is based on recency, frequency and severity of offending. Early help officers, and intervention and prevention officers are particularly focused on the children who are in environments where they are most at risk of suffering long-term adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). They work with local authority, education, health, housing and other organisations, and with colleagues in the problem-solving hubs. Their aim is to safeguard vulnerable people and reduce the likelihood of long-term negative effects resulting from exposure to high-harm environments. The force recognises that early intervention and prevention is an efficient and cost-effective way to reduce future criminality and long-term demand.

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 dedicated safer neighbourhood teams (SNTs) in all parts of West Mercia. It has introduced a community charter to guide its prevention and deterrence activities, and contact with its communities. We found clear chief officer leadership in this area. The force has effective tactical tasking and co-ordinating group (TTCG) arrangements, informed by relevant data and analysis. TTCGs make sure that the force's activity is focused on its crime priorities. Agreed SNTs are assigned police and partnership tasks through TTCGs. This means they work with organisations such as the NHS, fire and rescue services, and Trading Standards departments on specific problems such as modern-day slavery.

Each neighbourhood team understands the vulnerable locations, groups and people within its communities. The force prioritises prevention and has developed expertise to provide intervention to those most at risk of going missing. Examples we saw were the force's dedicated missing person bureau, prevention officers and resilient care home teams. And the force's victim advice line (VAL) team interview vulnerable adults when they return home after going missing agreed. VAL is well placed to refer vulnerable adults to support organisations to help deal with the underlying causes of people going missing.

A range of other information such as community contacts, risk-management plans and details of registered sex offenders is also available through the force's intranet-based community profiles.

The force has an analytical function in its problem-solving hubs, working with local authorities. It also has three partnership analysts funded by the police and crime commissioner who provide analytical support to the community safety partnerships. This ensures effective data and information sharing with other organisations to inform multi-agency activities. Comprehensive three-year community safety assessments help prioritise multi-agency activities. This co-ordination, analysis and tasking helps the force and other organisations to work together to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability in all parts of the force.

The force uses problem solving to good effect and works with other organisations to prevent crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability

We found that the force had good problem-solving capabilities. Dedicated co-ordinators within problem-solving hubs offer advice and support on the management of problem-solving plans. We were told that around 550 SNT officers and problem-solvers are trained in the [SARA](#) (scan, analyse, respond, assess) problem-solving approach and receive some continuous professional development (CPD) in their roles. However, there is as yet no fully comprehensive training programme for SNT officers. This is planned for 2022/23. Training and CPD helps to develop, value and retain community policing officers and staff.

We found that problem-solving plans were effective and appropriate to the risks they were seeking to address. The evaluation of problem-solving plans takes place at supervisor level and within problem-solving hubs. However, there is no consistent force-wide evaluation or learning from problem-solving plans. The number and type of

plans varies from one local policing area (LPA) to another. The number and type of risk-management plans also varies from LPA to LPA. We found good use and understanding of preventative powers and orders, although levels of use varied across LPAs. The force's problem-solving report makes clear the variation in activity from one LPA to another. These differences aren't readily explained by geographical factors alone. Variations in LPA performance can result in different levels of service in different parts of the force. The force's quarterly performance review process is intended to ensure that each of its LPAs performs at its best.

The force works with other organisations, such as local authorities, to address joint priorities. It does this through a variety of forums. These include its community safety meetings, and serious and organised crime joint action groups. Multi-agency targeted enforcement teams also provide many examples of joint operations in each LPA to reduce crime and vulnerability. These co-ordinated approaches in West Mercia help to sustainably reduce crime and its underlying causes.

The force has a good understanding of its neighbourhood policing demand and aims to reduce the temporary redeployment of officers to cover other roles

The force has increased the number of supervisors in community policing. And staff spoke positively about the support they received from their supervisors. Dashboards and activity records help the force to respond to neighbourhood policing demand. The force produces a detailed problem-solving hub performance report containing valuable information about the work of neighbourhood teams force wide.

Yet, despite this understanding, SNT officers and staff reported that they were routinely removed from their SNT roles to undertake response policing work. Only one in five survey respondents said that they had sufficient time to carry out their neighbourhood policing work.

Though the force recognises success in prevention by submitting [Tilley Awards](#) nominations, there is no other formal reward or recognition in place for SNTs and problem-solving staff. Fewer than a third of neighbourhood policing staff we surveyed felt that the force recognised and rewarded their work. The sense that neighbourhood policing is valued is being undermined by a lack of formal recognition and by the last-minute redeployment of neighbourhood policing officers to backfill other roles. The force has recently introduced measures to reduce such redeployments and help SNTs focus on their prevention and deterrence work.

The workforce doesn't understand evidence-based practice

Although it features in the force's community charter, and some practice sharing takes place through problem-solving hubs, [evidence-based practice](#) isn't widely understood by SNT officers. This means that they may not be using the best available evidence to inform their day-to-day operational decision-making. The force should work to address this gap in workforce understanding.

Responding to the public

Requires
improvement

West Mercia Police requires improvement at responding to the public.

Areas for improvement

The force should work with health partners to introduce effective arrangements to promptly support people in mental health crisis

To access expertise in mental health-related incidents, West Mercia Police must phone other organisations for advice. No mental health organisation has a physical presence in the control room. Some parts of the force have mental health experts who patrol with staff at peak times, but this isn't the case everywhere. We noted this lack of capacity and capability when we inspected the force in 2019. It is disappointing that the force and its health partners have been unable to provide co-ordinated support to those in mental health crisis. A lack of advice and on-the-ground support means that officers spend too much of their time supporting people in mental health crisis when other organisations are better placed to do so.

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

Crime prevention and scene preservation advice was given to callers in fewer than half of the incidents reviewed during our victim service assessment (VSA). Giving crime prevention advice reduces repeat victimisation, and scene preservation advice assists with investigations, particularly when response officers can't promptly attend.

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

We identified that call handlers don't consistently record information on force incident management systems to indicate vulnerability. Checks for repeat callers aren't always completed and the force doesn't always record that a victim is vulnerable. Just over half of staff who responded to our workforce survey said that they were given enough information about risk and vulnerability to respond effectively. A failure to identify repeat or vulnerable callers means that the risk to the victim isn't always fully assessed.

The force should accurately record all missing person reports on its missing person system

In West Mercia, the number of investigations for missing children has been falling, from 2,822 in the year ending 31 March 2019 to 1,530 in the year ending 31 March 2021. While some of this may be attributable to the work of the force's missing person bureau, prevention officers and resilient care home teams, the force has confirmed that not all missing person reports are recorded on its missing person system. This includes reports of adults missing from hospital and children missing from home, school and care settings. And officers told us that managers were reluctant to record lower-risk cases on the missing person system. The force may therefore have only a partial picture of the risks facing missing people. Consistent recording of all missing people on the dedicated force system can help provide timely intelligence and support better decision-making. It can also help ensure the effective and efficient management and investigation of those who repeatedly go missing, and ensure that consistent risk assessments take place.

Main findings

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

Though incident levels are monitored, the force can't report confidently on its response times

The force monitors its volume of unresourced incidents. Its deployment principles guidance helps managers address demand pressures as they arise. This includes making relevant use of diary appointments. There is no inappropriate pressure on controllers to downgrade incidents, and any grading changes are suitably documented. The force's command and control system can't, however, report on response times. And this is a fundamental gap in the force's understanding of its performance. Also, the force isn't always updating victims to inform them of any response time delays. By not attending calls promptly, it increases the likelihood of evidence being lost and victims losing confidence in the police response.

The force isn't answering non-emergency calls swiftly enough and too many calls are abandoned

Although the force answers its emergency calls promptly, force data shows that it only answers around half of its non-emergency calls within its own 30-second target. This data also shows that almost 20 percent of non-emergency calls are terminated by the caller before being answered, double the 10 percent national standard. Technology and power failures regularly affect control room and call handling systems. These factors reduce the service the force is able to provide to callers. The force has a public contact improvement plan in place to improve non-emergency call handling.

The force uses a structured approach to address threat, harm and risk at the point of first call, and has a range of contact channels available

The force assesses caller needs using the [THRIVE](#) (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement) method. Call handlers use a variety of systems to inform their assessments. Our VSA identified that THRIVE was used appropriately. The force also undertakes its own quality monitoring of calls to understand how call handlers assess threat, harm and risk. This has identified that staff make limited use of the domestic abuse call script to help inform risk assessments. These factors may explain why the force records a smaller proportion of its incidents as domestic abuse than similar forces.

The force uses an appropriate range of digital contact methods. These include [Single Online Home](#) – a platform that allows police services to create a nationally consistent, locally branded online presence – and a social media management system that brings together several different social media platforms. It has recently introduced a digital desk to co-ordinate these contact channels, providing the public with additional ways to contact the force.

Officers manage incidents well, though professional development for officers and supervisors should be improved

Managers demonstrate a good understanding of day-to-day response demand on each local policing area (LPA). Their daily management meetings are routinely used to consider response workloads, moving resources to try to address pressure points as they arise.

Officers consistently said they were confident assessing risk at incidents they attended. Investigators told us that officers secured and preserved evidence well at crime scenes and that handover reports were good. Where weaknesses are apparent, they tend to be due to less experienced officers or supervisors. The national uplift in officer numbers, though welcomed, is leading to inexperience in response team roles while these new officers build their skills. This makes it essential that supervision is effective.

Despite this, there is currently no training for temporarily promoted sergeants at West Mercia Police. A supervisor e-book is being introduced. It will complement other intranet guidance on a range of supervision areas including investigations, victims, wanted people, missing people and complaints.

A continuous professional development (CPD) programme has been introduced for response officers, sergeants and staff in the operations and communications centre (OCC). It covers subjects such as the Victims' Code and evidence-led investigation. However, the benefit of this is yet to be felt by the workforce. And the force struggles to obtain accurate attendance information for its CPD events. Good-quality training and CPD are essential to improving workforce effectiveness.

Investigating crime

Requires improvement

West Mercia Police requires improvement at investigating crime.

Cause of concern

Investigations

The force needs to improve how it investigates crimes, supervises investigations and updates victims.

Recommendations

West Mercia Police should, within three months:

- make sure investigation plans are created where applicable, with supervisory oversight ensuring that all investigative opportunities are taken; and
- make sure victims are regularly updated in line with the Victims' Code and that victim needs assessments and victim personal statements are recorded when appropriate, so victims are provided with suitable support services throughout the investigation.

The supervision of more serious investigations hasn't yet sufficiently improved. The force has introduced measures to improve the supervision of investigations and the workforce commented positively on this. Despite this, 14 out of 66 serious cases we reviewed were still ineffectively supervised. Appropriate investigation plans weren't in place for 10 out of 35 serious cases where such plans would have been relevant, and delays (unrelated to forensics) were apparent in 18 out of 70 relevant cases we examined. We found correlations between these problems and ineffective supervision. And we also found examples of supervisors failing to use the force's investigations dashboard to manage investigative demand, despite the work the force has done to promote this. Ineffective supervision of investigations is leading to a poor service to victims.

The force doesn't consistently provide a quality service to victims of crime. The Victims' Code isn't consistently documented on the force's crime system. A quarter of victim updates are overdue and satisfaction surveys report that victims aren't always updated as required. Victim personal impact statements are taken in only a small proportion of relevant cases. Victim needs assessments weren't carried out in over one third of the serious cases we reviewed. These processes are the gateway to further support for victims of crime. Victim needs assessments ensure that any additional support required is promptly identified so the victim is supported throughout an investigation. It can also mean the difference between a victim co-operating or not co-operating with an investigation.

Areas for improvement

The force should improve how it records victims' decisions and their reasons for withdrawing support for investigations, and make sure it documents whether evidence-led prosecutions have been considered in all such cases

In 2019, we recommended that the force should take steps to better understand the data relating to its crime outcomes and put actions in place to make sure it is effectively pursuing justice on behalf of victims. Despite this, 9 out of 47 cases where an outcome had been recorded had an incorrect crime outcome code applied. Outcomes where a victim declines to support an investigation or withdraws their initial support are among the poorest in England and Wales. Supervisor reviews of outcomes rarely result in them being challenged or amended, and where the victim declines or withdraws support, an auditable record of the victim's wishes, such as a signed statement, is rarely obtained. Though we found improved workforce understanding of evidence-led prosecutions, particularly in cases where victim vulnerability was a factor, decisions not to pursue evidence-led prosecutions were poorly recorded.

The force should make sure that all victims are consulted prior to and following the use of a caution, and all such victim contact should be appropriately recorded

We found that victims aren't always consulted prior to a caution being administered and their views are seldom recorded. It is important to consult and consider the views of victims to help maintain their confidence in investigations. And it is important to obtain an auditable record to understand why victims may not wish to support prosecutions. The force has recently put in place a plan to improve its support to victims of crime.

Main findings

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

The force is investing in improvements to its investigation capacity and capability, though gaps remain

The force is introducing a consistent investigation model force-wide, although this is yet to be implemented in all parts of West Mercia Police. It has grown its investigator numbers and developed plans for investigator training. To support effective investigations, a range of new policies, procedures and guidance materials are available on the force's intranet for both investigators and their supervisors. Improvements in disclosure are evident, with staff commenting positively on their training and their understanding of disclosure rules. The force has recently introduced a new crime allocation policy and our victim service assessment (VSA) found that crimes were appropriately allocated. Improved guidance and processes will help contribute to improved investigations.

West Mercia Police has made substantial investment in its digital forensics capacity and capability. It has introduced a quick-reaction team, local digital media investigators, and local kiosks where basic mobile device examinations can take place. This helps make the digital evidence-gathering process more efficient. All these improvements are well regarded by investigators and further improvements are planned.

Digital forensics backlogs persist, however, particularly in cases that can't be examined through local kiosks but aren't deemed sufficiently serious for prompt examination by the quick-reaction team. This is affecting the service provided to victims of crime, and officers are experiencing low morale when waiting for lengthy periods of time for digital examination results.

Despite the force having structured processes for assessing and prioritising digital forensics work, we heard of officers using informal channels to accelerate examinations, which may result in some cases not being correctly prioritised. Digital forensic delays can affect victim confidence and support for investigations. The force is continuing its improvement work in this field.

We found shortages in investigators qualified in the College of Policing's professionalising investigations programme ([PIP2](#)) and in staff who have completed the Ministry of Justice's [Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings](#) interview skills course. On top of this, criminal investigation departments widely reported under-resourcing in all parts of the force. This under-resourcing is currently exacerbated as investigators have been pulled away from other cases to support several major investigations that the force is dealing with. This affects the service that investigators can provide to victims. Our VSA found that in one fifth of cases investigators failed to pursue some main lines of enquiry.

Victims and witnesses are encouraged to see criminal justice proceedings through to completion

The force's in-house victim advice line (VAL) and its victim and witness services provide good support to victims. Referral processes into VAL are well managed, with secondary checks taking place to ensure no victim is missed. Handover arrangements between VAL and victim and witness services also appear effective, and help maintain victim support for criminal justice processes. These arrangements provide good support to victims during criminal justice processes. Victim and witness support for prosecutions in West Mercia appears effective.

The force has worked to improve its governance and oversight of investigation processes and its understanding of crime demand

The force has governance, performance review and crime-management arrangements in place in all areas, though these arrangements haven't yet made investigations in West Mercia Police fully effective. An investigation-management unit quality assures recorded crimes to check that risk assessments are completed. The force has recently introduced a crime dashboard. This digital tool has helped the force better understand its investigative demand and better monitor investigation activities such as victim updates. But it is essential that all of those involved in the supervision and management of investigations make consistent and routine use of tools such as the dashboard as part of their day-to-day work.

Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

West Mercia Police is adequate at protecting vulnerable people.

Area for improvement

The force should agree a multi-agency data collection plan to enrich the strategic understanding of vulnerability by the force and the organisations it works with

There is no multi-agency strategic data collection plan in place. And efforts to introduce a vulnerability partnership executive group have yet to gain traction with all participants. This will limit the understanding and approach to vulnerability by the force and its strategic partners, such as local authorities, and those in health and housing.

The force should make sure that orders such as Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders are considered in all appropriate cases

We found that the use of Domestic Abuse Protection Notices is lower pro-rata than in other similar forces. The use of these notices declined over the four quarters to March 2021. A similar pattern can be seen in the numbers of Domestic Violence Protection Orders applied for and granted. Our VSA identified missed opportunities in the cases we reviewed, with notices considered in only 1 out of 12 cases where our auditors felt they may have been appropriate. These notices and orders provide a valuable opportunity for the police to work with other organisations and help prevent repeat victimisation.

Main findings

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

The force has an adequate understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability

The force has appropriate governance in place in relation to vulnerability, and boards and performance meetings view an appropriate and relevant set of vulnerability data. There is a dashboard showing data at local policing area (LPA) level too.

The force undertakes a range of regular audits and self-assessments, checking that its workforce consistently follows force guidance on the management of vulnerability. Lead managers are assigned to implement actions arising from these activities, and these actions help promote improvements. Public protection functions and other teams co-operate well in providing advice on and improving workforce understanding of vulnerability. The force is developing its vulnerability strategy in line with the College of Policing's [National Vulnerability Action Plan](#). The self-assessment process provides the force with insight into areas that need development and improvement, as well as assessing its capability and capacity to make those changes.

Though data from other organisations is lacking, the force produces some good research and analytical products that help it understand vulnerability. And it has developed local vulnerability profiles for child sexual exploitation (CSE) and for domestic abuse (DA), helping police and other organisations to understand these areas so they can work together to address them. West Mercia Police identifies vulnerability within a greater proportion of its crimes than other similar forces, and the same is the case for repeat DA crimes. We saw good examples of information sharing across multi-agency functions, such as harm assessment units (HAUs) and integrated offender management (IOM).

Operational staff search force systems to understand vulnerability. However, staff aren't routinely able to generate their own analytical products for a particular area or problem. This limits the opportunity for officers such as those in problem-solving roles to understand vulnerability without requesting specific analysis. Gaps in vulnerability data limits a more comprehensive understanding of vulnerability.

The force provides safeguarding support for vulnerable people

The force has worked to improve workforce understanding of safeguarding, stalking and harassment, and harmful cultural practices. It has produced a range of guidance materials to support the workforce, including a comprehensive adult safeguarding toolkit. We found a strong and consistent focus on safeguarding in all parts of the force and among all officers and staff we spoke to. And the force has seen improvements in the recording of ethnicity data on crimes, to better understand whether this may be a factor in some crime types.

The force uses a [domestic abuse, stalking and harassment \(DASH\)](#) risk assessment model. Officers are familiar with this approach, and routinely look for evidence that might indicate vulnerability. For instance, DASH assessments record if there is a lack of food in the house or if living conditions are poor. This helps the lived experience and voice of the victim to be understood. The force monitors DASH completion rates, following up any missing details with attending officers. Completion rates are high as a result, and this scrutiny also helps improve the quality of DASH assessments.

[Operation Encompass](#) – a safeguarding partnership between police and education institutions that aims to offer immediate support to children experiencing domestic abuse – is in place in all parts of the force. This project results in police, schools and local authorities promptly sharing information about young people who may be affected by crimes and incidents in the home, such as domestic abuse. Staff told us that multi-agency information sharing is good, although some spoke of difficulties in obtaining timely information from other organisations outside office hours. This can make it difficult for officers to make decisions about investigations involving vulnerable victims, offenders or others. Each LPA works with other organisations to try to address these operational problems where they arise.

West Mercia Police has a co-ordinator to provide advice on civil orders. We found that the workforce had a good understanding of how these orders better safeguard vulnerable people. In the year ending 31 March 2021, the force received 3.9 [‘right to ask’](#) applications per 10,000 population, under the [domestic violence disclosure scheme](#), which allows someone to ask the police about a partner’s history of domestic violence or violent acts. The force also made 1.4 ‘right to know’ disclosures, which allow police to proactively disclose information in prescribed circumstances, under the same legislation. This was higher than the applications and disclosures rate throughout forces in England and Wales, which was 3.0 and 1.2 per 10,000 population respectively. The force has also identified from its own audits that it may be missing opportunities to make prompt arrests in domestic abuse cases. More consistent use of powers and orders would help the force better safeguard vulnerable people.

The force works with other organisations to keep vulnerable people safe

The force contributes to the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding hubs through HAUs in each LPA. Not all units are effective, however, and the force’s tasking meeting reports workload backlogs in some areas. Sickness levels are also higher in some HAUs than others. Backlogs and delays in assessing and managing risk can limit effective multi-agency safeguarding work. The force has brought HAUs under central line management and appointed a lead officer to bring performance up to consistent levels in all parts of the force.

The force produces what it calls a high-harm list. It details those victims and suspects who are most at risk of being involved in serious crimes and incidents. An example is domestic abuse, which is likely to have a long-term adverse effect on those involved, including other family members and children. The list is widely circulated for action by a range of departments, including problem-solving hubs and HAUs. The force also makes good use of support roles such as domestic abuse risk officers and independent domestic violence advisors to support those at high risk of harm and reduce the risk of repeat victimisation. These measures help the force and other organisations, including charities, to support victims and reduce the likelihood of repeat offences.

[Multi-agency risk assessment conference \(MARAC\)](#) arrangements are effective in West Mercia Police. There are co-ordinators in place in all areas, and we found evidence of good involvement and referrals from all organisations involved. Actions from regular MARAC meetings are clearly documented and followed up, and all high-risk cases are considered within the process. To manage demand, the force has introduced a tailored approach in Worcestershire and doubled the frequency

of meetings. This is to make sure that risks are as effectively assessed and managed in that part of the force as in all other LPAs. This addresses an area for improvement we identified in our 2019 inspection.

The force carries out a range of surveys to understand victims' views. The VAL and victim and witness service also seek views from victims. The force has a victims and witnesses group that oversees improvement work in this area. Victim confidence and satisfaction levels could, however, be further improved through the actions described in the '[Investigating crime](#)' section of this report.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

West Mercia Police is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Area for improvement

The force should make sure that it has the capacity and capability to proactively identify breaches of orders and further offences, and that all breaches and offences are fully recorded on force systems

The force has invested in equipment for staff to examine electronic devices during home visits to registered sex offenders. However, staff say that the software is time consuming to use and doesn't always work with mobile phones. This may reduce the ability to identify breaches of orders or further offences. On top of this, inconsistency and non-recording of breaches were also reported. These are said to be due to technical problems. This may lead to registered sex offenders being managed inappropriately and offenders not being brought to justice.

Main findings

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

The force manages outstanding suspects effectively

In 2019, we recommended that the force should improve its management of outstanding suspects. At that time, the force didn't understand how many suspects it had outstanding, nor the risk they posed. The force now has a far better understanding of outstanding suspects. Force data shows that over 85 percent of its outstanding suspects are graded high, medium or low risk. This information is reported on the force's crime dashboard and allows effective supervision of these cases. Operational teams routinely prioritise the arrest of outstanding suspects and those suspects who are circulated as wanted on the police national computer. Arrest report packages, risk management plans and the force's investigation review process all help to more consistently manage suspects who are under investigation. Managers check the progress of arrests during their daily management meetings. This means that the force takes prompt action to arrest those suspects who pose the greatest risk.

The force has improved its management of people on bail and those released under investigation (RUI), although its management of [voluntary attendance](#) could be improved

In our last inspection of the force in 2019, we reported that the management of bail and RUI were areas for improvement. The force has made good progress in these areas. The force's crime dashboard has improved its management of bail and RUI, and it has reviewed all of its bail and RUI records. Those reported on the dashboard are now accurate and up to date. Bail and RUI are effectively managed and scrutinised by custody officers and line managers. Our workforce survey reflected these positive findings. The workforce demonstrated a good understanding of bail and its use to help safeguard vulnerable victims. The checking and enforcement of bail is also improving, helping to reduce the risk of reoffending. The force has maintained its focus on bail and RUI through its own self-assessment work too. This helps the force better safeguard people through the effective use of bail and RUI.

Voluntary attendance by suspects (where people who haven't been arrested voluntarily attend police interviews) is supposed to be recorded on a system that is separate from the force's main custody records. The system then generates the documentation necessary to manage the suspect correctly. But staff don't always record voluntary attendances on the system. This may mean that procedures such as the collection of biometric samples from suspects may be missed, limiting the potential to detect links to other offences.

The force effectively manages the risk posed by the most dangerous offenders, although supervision could be improved

The force's high-harm offender co-ordinator maintains an overview of the management of the highest risk offenders. They also act as the central point of contact for systems used to manage registered sex offenders. Safer neighbourhood teams (SNTs) are aware of the registered sex offenders living in the areas they patrol and gather intelligence to help assess the risk they may pose.

The teams that manage registered sex offenders are effective, and work in line with national guidance. But there is a shortage of supervisory capacity within registered sex offender management teams. This causes significant delays in reviewing the records of visits to registered sex offenders in the community and their risk assessments. The force has trained supervisors in related departments to cover this shortage in the short term, but those supervisors have pre-existing commitments and supervisor resources therefore remain insufficient.

The high-harm offender co-ordinator helps investigating officers decide whether to use additional powers and orders to limit criminality, such as [child abduction warning notices](#), sexual risk orders and [sexual harm prevention orders](#). These orders improve the control and management of registered sex offenders.

Online CSE is everyone's responsibility, though technological weaknesses limit effectiveness

SNTs provide crime prevention and safeguarding advice to young people who are known to have uploaded indecent images of themselves online. Digital forensic investigators participate in operations where search warrants are used to investigate the sharing of indecent images. This helps the force to readily understand the gravity of the offence and to effectively identify devices that hold the greatest evidential value.

But technological weaknesses reduce the effectiveness of online child sexual exploitation teams. For instance, indecent images must be transferred on encrypted disks rather than across force networks, leading to delays in investigations. And the force's use of the national child abuse image database is limited, including the uploading of images. Because of this, new and previously uncategorised images discovered by West Mercia Police will not be searchable by other forces. The force should make sure that its digital transformation programme promptly addresses these weaknesses in the online child sexual exploitation teams' technology.

The force has an effective IOM programme

IOM processes are well co-ordinated and have good multi-agency involvement throughout. The force's approach to its offenders reflects the latest national guidance and local priorities. There are a wide range of schemes to help reduce the likelihood of further offending. These include programmes for the perpetrators of domestic abuse.

But the force and other organisations it works with don't routinely evaluate the cost and benefit of managing offenders through the IOM scheme. As a result, the force isn't able to fully assess the effectiveness of its approach to reducing reoffending. It doesn't know whether its investment in offender management is sufficient, beneficial or targeted at the right group of offenders. The force should work with its partner organisations to address this.

Disrupting serious organised crime

We now inspect [serious and organised crime \(SOC\)](#) on a regional basis, rather than inspecting each force individually in this area. This is so we can be more effective and efficient in how we inspect the whole SOC system, as set out in HM Government's SOC strategy.

SOC is tackled by each force working with [regional organised crime units \(ROCU\)](#). These units lead the regional response to SOC by providing access to specialist resources and assets to disrupt organised crime groups (OCGs) that pose the highest harm.

Through our new inspections we seek to understand how well forces and ROCUs work together. 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 West Mercia 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

Adequate

West Mercia Police is adequate at building and developing its workforce.

Areas for improvement

The force should ensure that its learning and development provision fully meets its workforce development needs

Some staff, such as those in public protection, lack the skills and experience needed for their roles. Staff spoke of difficulties in being released from work to attend training courses and of lengthy delays in accessing relevant training. Workforce feedback and our staff survey were generally negative about the quality of continuous professional development provision. The force's HR system is also unsuitable as a tool to support effective workforce learning and development. These weaknesses in learning and development provision limit the force's ability to improve the capabilities of its workforce.

Our 2019 report said that the force should improve how it manages individual performance and identifies talent, ensuring reviews are consistently and fairly applied across the workforce and valued by all, and that poor performance is managed consistently. This remains an area for improvement

The force's talent and resourcing function isn't yet fully staffed nor operating to full effectiveness. Despite being introduced in 2019, the force's talent management programme has made little progress. And workforce uptake and regard for annual appraisal processes, which should be used to support development, are poor in West Mercia Police. Data that we collected shows that an annual performance review was completed by 22 percent of West Mercia Police's overall workforce in 2020/21. This was identified as an area for improvement in 2019 and sufficient progress hasn't yet been made.

Our 2019 report said that the force should ensure that it provides suitable training, support and capacity for its supervisors so that they are fully equipped and confident to manage the performance and development of their staff, including effectively managing poor performance and identifying talent. This remains an area for improvement

Managers reported receiving little in the way of performance management training. Fewer than half of the surveyed workforce said that one-to-one discussions took place with their line managers. This was identified as an area for improvement in 2019. But sufficient progress hasn't yet been made and the force's 2019 passport to lead project wasn't implemented. These problems mean that staff aren't receiving the continuous development they need to be fully effective in their roles. The force is aware of these weaknesses and is working to address them.

The force has, however, introduced a new leadership development programme, with sergeant workshops running since summer 2021.

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 continues to promote an ethical and inclusive culture at all levels

We found that the workforce had a sense of belonging, supported by projects such as its speak up programme, which encourages the workforce to question and challenge working practices, and other force activities to support workforce diversity, equality and inclusion. Positive action has improved workforce diversity since our last inspection. The force's fairness and standards plan covers professional standards, fairness at work, the work of the ethics committee and a review of force promotion processes. Ethics feature in its policing plan and other strategic documents, including its people strategy. The force has re-introduced its ethics committee, which is independently chaired. The committee is well attended by representatives at all levels force-wide. It debates ethical dilemmas and is taking action to try to improve the workforce's limited understanding of its role and work. Chief officers show strong leadership of and commitment to the force's people strategy and related plans. And staff groups and unions report being listened to by senior leaders.

The force encourages a learning culture, with an increasing focus on feedback and development rather than blame. The workforce speaks positively about this. Officers told us that they were comfortable sharing information about themselves with the force and admitting problems when they arose. The Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020 have been fully implemented. Three quarters of public dissatisfaction reports are now immediately resolved in line with the new regulations, improving services to the public. Good work is recognised by managers locally, though formal recognition is still reserved for high-profile operational matters. Occasional examples of a blame culture are still cited, sometimes a considerable time after the event. And some staff reported

that chief officers only visited local stations in times of crisis. The force should therefore continue its efforts to promote an inclusive learning culture.

The force understands the wellbeing needs of its workforce and takes action to improve workforce welfare and wellbeing

Workforce wellbeing is understood through a range of data presented at force governance boards and through surveys, including a Police Federation of England and Wales survey. This showed increased workload, increased stress and reduced happiness. During 2021, the force assessed itself against the Health and Safety Executive's stress management standards, informed by health and wellbeing assessments completed at departmental and LPA level. It has recently developed a wellbeing plan to be approved by chief officers, though it hasn't yet decided who will implement its recommendations.

The workforce reported that their immediate supervisors and line managers showed a clear interest in their welfare and wellbeing, though this sentiment wasn't echoed in the operations and communications centre (OCC). Individual officer workloads are reasonable and appropriate in response, CID and public protection teams. But a range of factors make it difficult for staff throughout the force to complete their work. For instance, under-resourcing is a problem in response, CID, public protection and the OCC. Plus, student officers undertaking training away from their response teams, along with technical problems force-wide, make it difficult for the workforce to manage their workloads effectively and efficiently. This affects the quality of initial calls, support to victims, quality of service, and the quality and timeliness of investigations. The force's priority-based planning programme is helping West Mercia Police better understand current and future demand in all departments. This will assist the force in planning its resourcing and service levels for the future.

The force has introduced a seven-point plan to promptly support those injured or harmed in the course of their work. This has been well received by staff. The force has a good range of preventative and supportive measures in place, including chaplaincy and staff support networks. However, fewer than half of the surveyed workforce felt equipped and supported to maintain their own wellbeing. The force has trained 67 staff in mental health first aid and has plans to train more. And staff with specific health, wellbeing and welfare needs can complete a 'passport' with this information to help new line managers and departments promptly understand those needs. These approaches help better support workforce welfare and wellbeing.

Occupational health provision appears effective and services are well understood. But access delays were reported by the workforce and some spoke negatively of being offered telephone support when they wanted face-to-face contact. The National Police Wellbeing Service is conducting a peer review of force occupational health provision and was due to report after our inspection, which concluded in September 2021. Roles deemed to be high risk such as child abuse investigators are subject to mandatory occupational health assessments, and the force has identified other roles that would benefit from similar levels of support. These include those working in the OCC and those supporting families bereaved as a result of road traffic incidents. But some staff in these roles reported receiving no such support. Poor support in these roles can affect staff welfare and wellbeing. The force should ensure all of those working in high-risk roles receive appropriate support.

The force is effective in building its workforce for the future

West Mercia Police's recruitment plans and processes are effective. It is working with regional and national positive action groups to share and implement good ways of working. Examples include workshops for applicants before they attend recruitment assessment centres, one-to-one coaching, mock interviews and targeted social media recruitment campaigns. These have all increased both the effectiveness of recruitment processes and the diversity of candidates. This is particularly evident in the roles most prioritised by the force, such as response policing and investigation.

The force has strong leadership and uses a range of data to inform its activities to improve workforce diversity, equality and inclusion. The force understands patterns of attrition as well as the failure points along the candidate recruitment journey and how they affect female applicants and those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. It has applied positive action principles to tackle these failure points, which has seen the proportion of female and Black, Asian and minority ethnic joiners increase. In the year ending 31 March 2021, 43 percent of police officer joiners were female, an increase from 32 percent in the year ending 31 March 2018. The proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic joiners increased from 4 percent to 7 percent over the same period. However, the force could do more to better understand workforce diversity across all locations, functions, ranks and roles.

The workforce spoke positively of the flexible working options that were available and the support that was in place to encourage development and retention. This support includes activities such as buddying, coaching and mentoring, as well as the force's step up, step across programme, which is designed to encourage lateral development and promotion. There are also workforce support networks such as Women of West Mercia. Yet the force could do more to understand the reasons why people leave; it conducts exit interviews with fewer than half of its leavers.

The force has made good progress in implementing the policing education qualifications framework (PEQF)

The force has implemented the PEQF and there is good governance and planning through the workforce diversity, inclusivity and planning board. The force offers uniformed officer and investigator entry and training routes, with current and future intakes scheduled and well planned for. The force has run its own mock Ofsted inspection to assess the effectiveness of its PEQF provision. Staff involved in running the PEQF process and activities have the skills and knowledge needed to support the programmes, although some report that the pace feels relentless. Constables who tutor new recruits are also under pressure, given the volume of student officers the force has taken on.

The force has a well-costed and well-governed training plan, which reflects a good understanding of the current and future learning and development needs of the workforce. Most of the workforce feel sufficiently skilled for their roles and say managers support their development.

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 forces should use specialist resources and assets to target and arrest those who 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.

West Mercia 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

West Mercia Police requires improvement at operating efficiently.

Areas for improvement

The force should improve the breadth and accuracy of its data and make sure there is improved consistency in working practices

Poor recording practices undermine data quality. There are also too many gaps in the force's data and this prevents a comprehensive understanding of demand. For instance, systems don't currently report response time data. The force is therefore unable to reassure itself that its response resources are operating efficiently. The force also has limited data modelling capacity and capabilities. Weaknesses in data, processes and practices mean that analysts spend too long data checking, cleansing and cross-referencing when producing management reports. More consistent and accurate data will help improve the understanding of all sources of demand and in turn improve efficiency.

Our 2019 report said that the force should expand its skills project work to include an assessment of all skills, not only operational, including potential future skills requirements. This assessment should inform workforce plans. This remains an area for improvement.

The force hasn't completed the workforce skills audit identified as an area for improvement in our 2019 inspection. The audit should inform effective workforce planning. Without this it lacks sufficient understanding of how its resources can be used more effectively and efficiently to meet current and future demand. To improve its workforce planning, the force is recruiting more people into its talent and resourcing team, and plans to assess skills across all departments and roles by April 2022.

Main findings

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

The force's digital, data, technology and mobile working solutions aren't fit for purpose and affect workforce productivity

The force's technical infrastructure is unreliable and its systems regularly fail to function as they should. Systems are also poorly integrated, which means that officers must enter the same information onto multiple systems. Freezes, crashes and slow running also mean that officers have to re-enter the same information repeatedly or spend lengthy periods inputting information that should be entered more swiftly.

The force is aware of its data and technical weaknesses, and is working to improve them. Any major system failures are addressed by setting up a chief officer-led command structure to ensure the force can continue to operate. This involves implementing suitable technological fixes, and learning from the incident as a means of continuous improvement. West Mercia Police is investing in its technology, systems and data capabilities in the longer term, and it has effective change-management arrangements in place, with independent assurance. Between 2021 and 2025 it plans to invest £6m of revenue and £41m of capital into its data and technology replacement programmes, in line with its digital services plans. However, the effects of its investments are unlikely to be felt until the force's new network solution is introduced in spring 2022.

Weak technical systems contribute to poor workforce practices because officers resort to taking shortcuts. This affects data quality, which then affects the force's understanding and management of all aspects of its demand.

West Mercia Police's current operating model isn't meeting demand

The force isn't consistently responding to incidents that require prompt attendance, and the volume of unresourced incidents routinely exceeds the upper threshold levels the force has set. Too many teams reported resource gaps and staff shortages. And under-resourcing in public protection teams means that some cases are being handled by already pressured CID teams. CID and public protection teams reported a lack of sufficiently skilled staff. These teams are the most affected by the requirement to provide staff to support major incidents. The new investigative structure isn't yet fully resourced nor fully established in all areas.

In recognition of this, the force is shifting its operating model towards more preventative approaches. This is evident in its investment in early intervention and prevention capabilities, and problem-solving activities. Until this transition is complete, the force will continue to struggle to meet its day-to-day demand.

The force is making improvements so that it can meet its current demand more efficiently

To meet its day-to-day operational demand, force managers use daily management meetings and tasking processes to assign force resources to good effect. During the financial year ending March 2021, the force undertook a comprehensive priority-based planning (PBP) exercise. This first assessed current services and costs at departmental level. It then considered future demand alongside potential improvements, investments and efficiencies. The exercise analysed the likely impact of these factors on the service provided by the force, ranging from minimal service levels through to those of a fully comprehensive service. Affordability was also considered. This allowed chief officers to decide how best to match demand, resourcing and service levels across all departments. PBP will provide the firm foundation needed for strategic decision making for the next three years and beyond.

The force has recently set up a business operations centre, from which staff in roles such as HR and finance operate. This has created efficiencies through more efficient tasking processes, though the full benefits of the centre will only be realised when supporting technical capabilities are fully established.

The force has limited intention for future collaborations

The force collaborates with the local fire and rescue services, universities (on student officer training, for instance) and other regional organisations such as regional organised crime units. The force has produced a self-assessment to consider whether its collaboration arrangements are in line with our [Hard Yards](#) collaboration recommendation. Beyond these examples, West Mercia Police has no clear strategic intent, nor capability to proactively seek out, develop or progress collaborations. Police forces have a duty to collaborate where it is in the interests of efficiency or effectiveness, and to keep collaboration opportunities under review. West Mercia Police should do more to seek out further opportunities to improve services through collaboration.

The force is taking steps to improve its financial management capabilities, but its savings and investment plans remain challenging

The force has taken steps to improve its financial management. It is working with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy to improve the skills of finance staff and improve the force's financial management capabilities. This is demonstrated in the force's budget planning work, which considers costs and service provision. This allows the force to understand what is affordable and what it can provide against PCC objectives and force priorities. Its savings targets for the next financial year are in the upper quarter of the forces in England and Wales, and its investment aims are substantial. The force's budget and its medium-term financial plan include much-needed provision for IT investment. And budgets also reflect growth plans in under-resourced areas such as investigator roles, and new activities such as early intervention and prevention officer posts. It is therefore important that the force has highly effective financial management arrangements in place to meet its imminent savings and investment aims.

The force needs to save an additional £13m from its annual revenue in the period from April 2021 to March 2025. It met its savings target in 2020–21 and plans for 2021–22 are in place. Detailed plans haven't yet been published for future years. However, the force's comprehensive PBP exercise across all departments, with consultant support throughout, involved a thorough assessment of current services and costs.

The force understands its future demand and is planning to have the right resources in place to meet future needs

The force plans to change its operating model and is investing in its technical infrastructure to make sure it is equipped for the future, and this is supported by PBP. Its workforce uplift plans are well managed and well understood, with resources directed towards the force's priority areas to help it best meet demand in the longer term. And it has planned its promotion activity through to 2024 to support effective succession planning within its workforce. An enterprise architect has also been employed to support workforce modernisation over the next five years. This will help improve future workforce capacity through increased efficiency and effectiveness.

West Mercia Police's data problems limit its understanding of demand, and managers don't always draw appropriate conclusions from data. However, the force has invested in a four-year data and integration project to help address these and other shortcomings. The force has capable analysts. Its strategic assessment and force management statement is informed by professional judgement and the Government's [management of risk in law enforcement \(MoRiLE\)](#) programme, and also takes into account future demands facing the force. This statement is also informed by an annual comprehensive insight report, which analyses a wide range of internal and external factors to understand West Mercia Police's operating environment. The force carries out projections and pilots as the basis for future plans, for example as part of its continuing work in improving in digital forensics. These approaches help the force understand and plan for future demand.

The force has introduced effective strategic planning arrangements and a performance framework to help it address what is important locally and nationally

The force has increased its long-term planning capacity, investing in additional analytical resources to understand future demand and help improve its future plans. Governance and force-level plans are developed and managed centrally, with much of the operational implementation taking place through local policing areas (LPAs). The force uses a performance management framework and balanced score cards to link strategic, operational and tactical activity to force priorities. We found that force priorities are understood by the workforce and feature appropriately in forums such as tasking meetings and force performance boards.

We were told that the force struggled to maintain consistency across its five different LPAs, with central teams reporting five different versions of process, policy and multi-agency working. To help address this, chief officers run quarterly performance meetings at LPA level to check that local performance is consistent and effective. The force is also developing an overarching corporate plan to bring together its various operational and strategic plans. This will help further clarify and direct all force assets towards organisational goals.

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