

PEEL 2021/22

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of West Midlands Police

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Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how good West Midlands Police is in 13 areas of policing. We make graded judgments in 11 of these 13 as follows:

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

We also inspected how well West Midlands Police meets its obligations under the [strategic policing requirement](#), and how well it protects the public from armed threats. We do not make graded judgments in these areas.

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.

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](#), 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 Midlands 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 last year.

The force must get better at investigating reported crimes

The force must improve how it carries out proportionate, thorough and prompt investigations into reported crimes. I saw some examples of good practice, including the detective academy. But the force lacks capacity in its investigation teams and investigations aren't always overseen effectively. So it is less likely that investigations will have a satisfactory result for the victim. This is an area for improvement.

The force makes good use of stop and search data

The force has made progress against the national recommendations for monitoring and analysing stop and search data. It has published its analysis and it continues to monitor its data. This will result in a fairer service to the public.

The force works with relevant organisations to prevent crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability

West Midlands Police works with relevant organisations to prevent crime, [anti-social behaviour](#) and vulnerability. It acts on the results of evidence-based policing methodology, and its use of data complements this well. This helps it give a better service to the public.

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

I was pleased to see the force using problem solving and working with other organisations to prevent crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability. And it is improving its workforce's understanding of problem solving. This, in turn, will improve how it prevents crime and anti-social behaviour.

The force's new systems and training help control room staff identify risks more accurately when members of the public make contact

The force has introduced new systems and training so that [control room](#) staff can identify risks more accurately when members of the public make contact. It responds

appropriately to incidents, including those involving [vulnerable people](#). It makes sure it can draw on relevant expertise when responding to incidents involving vulnerable people. It understands demands on response officers, but the routine use of overtime to manage this demand puts pressure on their wellbeing.

The force doesn't always respond to incidents involving vulnerable people as promptly as it does to other types of incident

I am pleased with some aspects of the way West Midlands Police [protects vulnerable people](#). But it can't meet the demand for its services in protecting vulnerable people with the resources it has.

The force should review how it manages sex offenders

West Midlands Police needs to improve its management of sex offenders. It should make sure it has the capacity and capability to mitigate the risk sex offenders pose to the public.

The force is meeting its strategic policing requirements well

We also inspected how well West Midlands Police meets its obligations under the strategic policing requirement, and how well it protects the public from armed threats. We don't make graded judgments in these areas but the force is performing well in this respect.

Too many of the force's staff still need to be vetted, but the force is reducing this number by around 350 people per month

West Midlands Police hasn't yet met the recommendation made in 2019 that all forces should comply immediately with national guidance on vetting. But it has made progress and it has an achievable plan to meet this recommendation. I will continue to review the force's progress.

The force has an ambitious target to increase workplace representation

I am pleased by the force's efforts to make sure its workforce reflects its diverse communities. It uses a range of measures to help create a workforce that reflects the community it serves.

West Midlands Police is good at operating efficiently but could do more

The force is good at strategic planning, organisational management and providing value for money. But there is an area in which it could improve in this respect; it should make sure that when it responds to changes in demand it assesses how its decisions may affect its ability to address its priorities.



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 us to assess the extent to which the force is doing all it can to reduce crime. This is a narrative assessment. 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 Midlands Police prioritises public safety and protecting people from serious harm. We identified that it analyses and uses data well, and that it is developing its use of problem solving. The force and its partner organisations collaborate to prevent crime and safeguard vulnerable people. Other factors contributing to the force's ability to reduce crime are:

- call handlers' use of THRIVE to prioritise the force's response to incidents;
- improved crime recording practices, particularly for sexual and other violent crimes;
- data analytics tools that help it to identify when and where crimes are most likely to happen;
- its public health approach to prevention;
- the [continuing professional development](#) of investigators supported by the Detective Academy (as we discuss further in the Investigations question later);
- its more consistent multi-agency risk assessment arrangements that support safeguarding; and
- its [integrated offender management \(IOM\)](#) programme.

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:

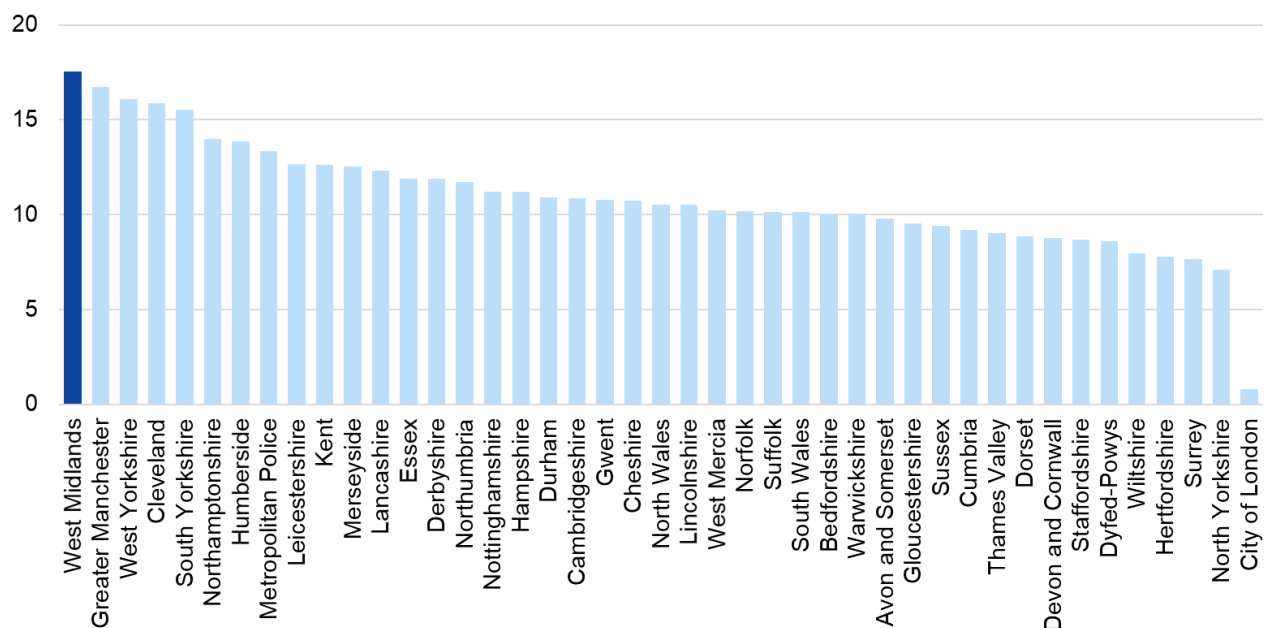
- it doesn't identify, record and respond to behavioural crimes well enough;
- it doesn't investigate some crimes effectively, so some offenders will escape justice and victims won't get the service they deserve;
- it doesn't have enough capacity and capability in its investigation teams to cope with demand; and
- it has posted experienced neighbourhood officers into investigation roles, which affects the force's ability to build effective relationships with people and solve problems in the short term.

Performance in context

As part of our continuous assessment of police forces, we analyse a range of data to explore performance across all aspects of policing. In this section, we present the data and analysis that best illustrate the most important findings from our assessment of the force over the last year. For more information on this data and analysis, please [view the force report on our website](#) and select the 'About the data' section.

For all offences recorded by West Midlands Police in the year ending 31 March 2021, the force was given a crime severity score of 18, making it the highest of all forces in England and Wales. The crime severity score calculates the amount of harm caused to society by crime, with each crime given a severity weighting; more serious crimes are given a larger weight and less serious crimes are given a lower weight.

Crime severity score across forces in England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2021



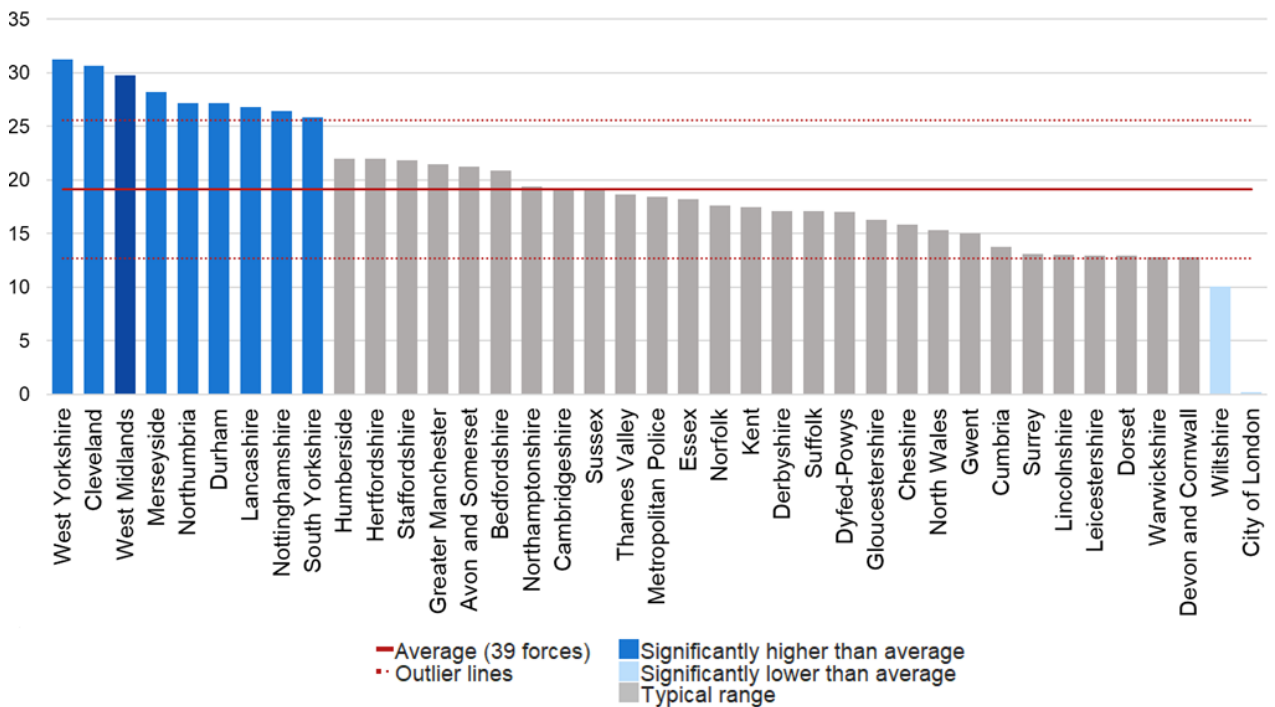
The crime severity score is a result of high levels of serious crime recorded by West Midlands Police. In the year ending 31 March 2021, West Midlands recorded the highest rate of firearms offences (24.5 offences per 100,000 population) and knife crime offences (1.55 offences per 1,000 population) of any force.

In our most recent crime data integrity inspection, we found that 93.2 percent of violent crimes reported to the force are recorded (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.4 percent). This is a significant improvement since our 2018 re-inspection, which found

the force was recording 78.2 percent of violent crimes (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.9 percent). We estimate that this improvement meant the force recorded an extra 18,500 violent crimes for the year ending 31 January 2021, the period covered by our inspection.

In the year ending 31 March 2021, West Midlands Police recorded 29.8 [domestic abuse](#)-related incidents per 1,000 population. This is much higher than other forces, and the England and Wales rate of 20.4. This may indicate how well the force is at identifying domestic abuse incidents, but it could also be driven by differences in the prevalence of domestic abuse in the force area.

Domestic abuse-related incidents recorded per 1,000 population across forces in England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2021



Providing a service to the victims of crime

Requires improvement

West Midlands Police requires improvement at providing a service for victims of crime.

Crime data integrity

Good

But the force is good at recording crime.

Area for improvement

The force needs to improve how it investigates reported crimes and must make sure that its investigations are proportionate, thorough and prompt.

The force isn't investigating crime well enough due to a lack of capacity and capability in investigation teams. Too often, there are delays in allocating cases to investigators; and investigation plans are missing or not followed or updated. Supervisors aren't overseeing investigations effectively. The force doesn't act with enough care to victims. It doesn't explore all reasonable lines of enquiry. And it misses opportunities to pursue evidence-led prosecutions. A force can pursue an evidence-led prosecution when victims no longer support police action, which can happen in domestic abuse cases.

Due to the above factors, it is less likely that investigations will result in positive criminal justice outcomes. And it means that some offenders aren't brought to justice, and victims are let down.

In the next 12 months, the force needs to make sure that:

- it has enough trained investigators to investigate crime;
- it allocates cases to investigators quickly;
- it investigates cases promptly;
- investigators follow investigation plans and pursue reasonable lines of enquiry;
- it supervises investigations effectively in accordance with agreed standards;
- it takes investigative opportunities, including evidence-led prosecutions;
- it completes victim needs assessments; and
- it provides enhanced services to support people who are vulnerable, intimidated or persistently targeted, or are victims of serious crime.

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.

The force doesn't meet targets for handling call demand

The force isn't meeting the national target for answering 999 calls, which is 90 percent of calls answered in 10 seconds. The force's data shows it answers 87.6 percent of calls within the target time. We also found that the force doesn't answer non-emergency [101](#) calls quickly enough. Only two thirds are answered within its locally-set target of three minutes and about one fifth are abandoned by callers. Although members of the public don't always get a prompt response to their phone call, the force offers other contact methods, including live chat. Alternative contact channels are important because if the public trusts and uses them, then demand on 101 and 999 calls will reduce.

Overall, call handlers assess risks well and resources are deployed appropriately

Call handlers are polite and professional. They record details correctly and use risk assessments to ensure the police respond to incidents appropriately. In most cases where a person's vulnerability was evident, it was identified and recorded accurately, and the force's response reflected its risk assessment. But our audit showed that sometimes wider vulnerability and [safeguarding](#) needs are missed. For example, the force doesn't always identify that there are other vulnerable people in the same household. So these people might not receive the service they need.

The force has improved its standards of crime recording but needs to do more to ensure crimes involving vulnerable victims are recorded properly

We audited 50 incidents of anti-social behaviour where a person targeted a specific individual or group (ASB-P). Of these, 20 should have been recorded as crimes. Only 11 were. The missing crimes included cases of [harassment](#), public order offences and criminal damage involving neighbours. Some officers don't recognise the difference between ASB-P and behavioural crime. Behavioural crime involves repetitive incidents that can have serious effects on vulnerable victims.

Reassuringly, the force has improved the speed at which it records crimes. Its recording is now more accurate, too. These improvements are significant and reflect the importance senior leaders place on crime data integrity and the work done by the force's log quality team. This team actively reviews incident logs so that reports of crime are recorded properly. It gives useful feedback to officers to drive improvements.

We found that 95.49 percent of all crime was recorded accurately, with 97.69 percent of sexual offences recorded well. Most crime is recorded within 24 hours. This is more positive for victims because it means the force takes their reports of crime seriously.

The force allocates crimes in accordance with its policy, but some victims are not getting the service they deserve

The force's crime screening policy supports decisions about how it will act on a reported crime. We saw that most crimes were allocated to the right investigators from the outset. But some decisions to discontinue investigations didn't take account of obvious lines of enquiry. We also found that victims weren't routinely informed about these decisions. So they were unaware that their reports wouldn't be investigated further.

The area for improvement from 2018 still applies. The force should make sure that it improves how it collects diversity information from crime victims

It should make sure it uses this to inform its compliance with its equality duty. The force's data for victims of crime shows that age and gender are well recorded. But other [protected characteristics](#) (ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation) are not. The force should be collecting this information. It would help it to understand the extent to which each protected group is affected by crime and how this differs from the experiences of those without protected characteristics. This would tell the force whether it needs to respond to some victims in a different way.

The force needs to apply national guidance and rules when deciding on the outcome it applies to each report of crime

We looked at how well the force applies national guidance and rules when deciding how to handle cases when they conclude. We reviewed 19 cases that resulted in the issue of cautions. A caution was appropriate in all but one of them. But we noted that the force didn't always consult victims about the use of cautions. More positively, the force managed [community resolutions](#) well, with victims' views reflected in all cases we examined.

Sometimes, victims may decide not to support an investigation. We scrutinised 30 of these types of cases, known as [‘outcome 16’](#). The force had categorised most (28 out of 30) of these accurately. But only three contained an auditable record that the victim was withdrawing their support. The force needs to make sure that these records clearly describe why victims have withdrawn their support. This will allow records to be supervised and audited effectively so that they reflect victims’ wishes. As well as these records, we examined 30 where the police believed it was not in the public interest to proceed with the case. This is known as ‘outcome 10’ and we found that it wasn’t applied properly in 22 cases. Some of these cases should have been referred to the Crown Prosecution Service to consider. So, some offenders who should have received a formal sanction may have escaped justice. Since our audit, the force has acted to make sure it only uses this outcome when justified.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Good

West Midlands Police is good at treating people fairly and with respect.

Progress on national recommendation

In 2017, we recommended that all forces should monitor and analyse comprehensive stop and search data to understand reasons for disparities. We recommended they take action and publish the results by July 2018.

This year, we found that West Midlands Police has made progress against many areas of this national recommendation. It holds regular meetings to monitor and understand stop and search data, and it has trained its workforce on [unconscious bias](#). But it can do more to understand the different numbers of searches identified as drugs possession or drugs supply, and how these align with its priorities.

We asked forces to publish their understanding of disparity and the action taken to address it by July 2018. The force submitted its analysis to the [police and crime commissioner's](#) (PCC) strategic policing and crime board in June 2020. We confirmed that this report was published on the PCC's website.

Main findings

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

The force should continue to develop its understanding of how it uses stop and search, and force, to make further improvements

The force hasn't met all the elements of our 2017 recommendation relating to stop and search. The data it monitors about the use of [Section 60 searches](#) doesn't include data about how well the reason for the authorisation of the power relates to the outcome.

In the year ending 31 March 2020, West Midlands Police recorded 11,187 uses of force. We estimate the number of these incidents by looking at how many arrests the force has made. Each arrest would usually count as a single use of force, so we would expect the number of arrests and the number of records on the use of force to

be similar. For West Midlands Police, we expected there to be an estimated 54,906 use of force records. This is much higher than the 11,187 it recorded, so it may not be recording all uses of force. West Midlands Police has decided not to comply with the [National Police Chiefs' Council's](#) (NPCC) recording requirements on compliant handcuffing. But officers do complete a record when they use handcuffs during a stop and search.

These omissions don't mean the force is less committed to using coercive powers correctly. But it isn't monitoring their fair and appropriate use as effectively as it could. So it may be missing opportunities to improve.

West Midlands Police engages with its communities well and it seeks their views to understand what matters most to them

The force and the PCC use a range of methods to engage with communities including [World Café events](#) and community meetings held by [neighbourhood policing teams](#). These allow people to raise concerns and ask questions.

The force uses social media channels, including its online messaging system WMNow, to communicate with its communities. These channels provide helpful information about local policing initiatives and matters of community interest. They are based on market research, are reflected in local engagement plans and help to ensure messages reach the widest audience. The force told us that 70,000 people subscribe to WMNow. To build public confidence, the force needs to give its communities more information about how it responds to their concerns.

The force offers good opportunities for people to volunteer. These include:

- the special constabulary;
- [independent advisory groups](#);
- neighbourhood watch; and
- the police cadet scheme.

We noted the force's commitment to the Coventry City of Culture, and Commonwealth Games events. It is using these to engage with its diverse communities.

The force has improved its fair use of stop and search powers, and the workforce understands the importance of treating people with fairness and respect

West Midlands Police has introduced a citizens' charter that clearly describes the standards the public should expect of its workforce. The charter reinforces the importance of treating people with dignity and respect. These expectations appear to be well understood by the workforce, and officers know what constitutes appropriate grounds for stop and search. Our audit of stop and search records found that 93 percent included an appropriate rationale to support the action taken. This is an improvement since our previous inspection. Officers use [body-worn video](#) during most stop and search encounters, and the PCC has committed to increasing usage to 100 percent of the time. Supervisors scrutinise stop and search, and use of force records, although this should be done more routinely.

Well-established scrutiny panels operate throughout the force. These help it to improve by examining and challenging how officers use [stop and search powers](#), and force. At each meeting, panel members review body-worn video footage and records to give feedback to officers. However, the force needs to provide updates to its scrutiny panels in a more consistent way to explain to members the action that has been taken because of their feedback.

During our reality testing, we found widespread use of 'reflective practice' which we previously identified in our [report on the disproportionate use of police powers](#). This is where officers review body-worn video footage with a trained supervisor to identify good practice and areas for development. This approach is to be commended. When we reviewed some video recordings of stop and search encounters, we found that officers treated people fairly and respectfully.

West Midlands Police is taking opportunities to improve how stop and search powers and force are used, but it needs to address backlogs in training

Officers are offered training in addressing bias when exercising their powers. But this tends to be based on e-learning methods and completion rates are low.

The force has introduced a 'fairness in policing team' that is helping to develop new practices. Examples of these practices include sessions with frontline officers to discuss factors relating to disproportionality. These sessions are held in what is known as a 'brave space' to encourage officers to reflect on their behaviours and counter biases. The force has also invited members of the public who are disproportionately affected, including young black men, to speak about their experiences. This helps officers and [staff](#) understand the effects of their actions.

We found that the force has backlogs in annual personal safety training for operational officers; approximately one third of them are no longer up to date in their training. The force is addressing this and we will review its progress.

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

Good

West Midlands Police is good at prevention and deterrence. In this section, we set out our main findings.

Main findings

The force works with other organisations to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour, and to protect those who are vulnerable

The force's operating model reflects its commitment to effective neighbourhood policing over the longer term. There are dedicated neighbourhood teams tackling local problems. Preventing crime and protecting vulnerable people are strategic objectives for the force. Its tasking and co-ordinating meetings allocate resources to its priorities and review progress. Partner agencies, like Wolverhampton Community Safety Partnership, also attend these meetings and contribute well. They told us they valued the way neighbourhood teams work with them to achieve positive results for people.

Although the force prioritises crime prevention, it has posted experienced officers from its neighbourhood policing teams to support its criminal investigation and protection of vulnerable people departments. This short-term measure is intended to help the force respond to increased demand.

We deal with this in more detail below, in the section 'Strategic planning, organisational management and value for money'.

West Midlands Police acts on the results of evidence-based policing methodology, and its use of data complements this well

A significant part of the force's approach to tackling violence affecting younger people is called Project Guardian. It puts most of its resources in places where analysis shows there are problems with knife crime and youth violence. We saw how committed staff work with partner organisations to prevent harm to young people. The force is using the Coventry City of Culture, and the Commonwealth Games events to engage with communities. It works with them on the root causes of crime that can lead to gang-related violence.

Alongside Project Guardian is the violence reduction unit (VRU). This team takes a broader, public health approach to reducing violent crime. It includes representatives

from health, education, and other organisations from the public and private sectors. It supports a wide range of activities. For example, it educates pupils about the practical steps they can take to keep themselves and others safe. It shows them how they can participate in positive interests. And it creates employment opportunities for young people. But the short-term nature of funding arrangements for Project Guardian and the VRU inhibits the force's ability to plan for the longer term. Any reductions to the current provision is likely to affect its capacity to protect the public.

The force has developed its use of data-driven insights (DDI). And it uses predictive analytics to help it respond to policing problems effectively. So it can identify when and where crimes are most likely to happen. Officers can search for up-to-date information about people, offenders and locations easily using a mobile app called Qlik. This means they can analyse local problems. These tools support preventative work and reduce demand on analysts.

We observed how the force uses analysis in practice, in different tasking and co-ordination meetings. We saw that it was combined with a professional judgment tool to support operational decision-making. The force calls this approach 'precision policing', where a combination of data and evidence-based practice is used to decide how to tackle crime. The force also works with academic institutions. This helps it understand what works and why some types of demand have changed, including reports of domestic abuse during the pandemic.

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

We were pleased to see that problem-solving methods are applied by officers and staff beyond the neighbourhood teams. Proven techniques for analysing crime and disorder problems are used in tasking and co-ordinating meetings throughout the force. It applies the [SARA \(scanning, analysis, research and assessment\)](#) model to solve problems and a new records management system called Connect allows the recording, reviewing and sharing of problem management plans. This supports continuous improvement.

The force's response to missing children is a notable example of problem solving. Teams identify places where children are exposed to the risk of exploitation and intervene to reduce harm. Another example is the force's approach to street racing. Local authorities, the police and other agencies collaborate under Operation Hercules to mitigate the serious threat to public safety caused by organised dangerous driving.

The force needs to improve its workforce's understanding of what works and how sustainable results can be achieved by problem solving

The force has acted on the need to embed problem-solving approaches. On its intranet it has useful go-to good practice guides that staff can view on mobile devices. The force's eight neighbourhood policing units (NPU) have problem-solving advisers. CPD events bring together the police and partner organisations, and student officers get trained in the use of the SARA model. At the time of our inspection, the force was reviewing the training programme for its neighbourhood teams, to make sure it remains relevant.

Although we identified examples of the force assessing the outcomes of problem-solving initiatives, this isn't yet widespread. So the force can't say how successful they are. It needs to make these assessments routinely. That way it will identify what works, and reduce harm and demand more effectively.

Responding to the public

Adequate

West Midlands Police is adequate at responding to the public. In this section, we set out our main findings.

Main findings

The force has introduced new systems and training so that control room staff can identify risks more accurately when members of the public make contact

The force introduced its new command and control system called Control Works in 2020. It trained control room staff to use a risk-assessment process called [THRIVE](#). So the force identifies risks more accurately and attending officers have better information. When we scrutinised the force's performance during our victim service assessment, we found that control room staff were using THRIVE well. This was apparent in 187 of the 194 cases we reviewed.

We also found that repeat victimisation was identified properly in 131 out of 140 cases. There were no incidences of vulnerable people waiting in control room queues for a long time. When delays happen, there is an escalation procedure. Supervisors actively assess and manage risks. Managers access response time performance information easily, using Qlik dashboards. The force regularly re-assesses demand throughout each 24-hour period. This identifies areas of pressure, allowing the force to move resources in response. The force has made good progress in this area.

We saw the same professional approach to initial contact and emergency response policing in the force's training. New control room staff get 10 weeks of structured classroom training. The force told us it is introducing further role-specific training to develop their skills. This includes a modular programme on responding to [missing people](#).

The force responds appropriately to incidents, including those involving vulnerable people

People can contact the force in several ways. This makes it easier to report crimes and incidents. A development of its online live chat facility is a 'robot' called Bob-E. It interacts with people when they make contact online and quickly directs them to the right services. The force states that Bob-E diverts 29 percent of demand from its call-handling staff, which means they have more capacity to answer calls from the public.

The force also offers online incident recording (OIR), which allows some crimes to be reported via the internet rather than via call handlers. And an interactive voice response system channels calls to the correct place. These are important because, while call-handling performance is scrutinised well, the force doesn't meet national targets. This means a caller's vulnerability might be missed; we highlight this above, in the section 'Providing a service to victims of crime.'

The force can draw on expertise quickly to ensure that it provides an effective response to incidents that meets vulnerable people's needs

Specially-trained staff give expert support. For example, investigators from the locate team and POLSAs (police search advisers) help to find missing people who are at high risk of harm. A new development is the introduction of mental health tactical advisers. They guide officers when they respond to people with a mental health condition. However, mental health professionals who have access to health records aren't based in the force's control rooms. So West Midlands Police can't obtain specialist mental health advice and information as readily as some forces.

The force understands the demands faced by officers responding to calls for service and manages its resources well. But its staff are clearly under pressure and the force routinely uses overtime to cope with demand; this is affecting staff wellbeing

The force's ICT systems let it evaluate current demand. It uses overlapping shifts to make sure it has more resources at peak times. The force has got better at responding to domestic abuse and missing people, but it is having trouble sustaining response levels because demand has changed. It supplements resources using overtime across different functions, including response, investigations and custody.

This means performance varies, especially at busy times. For example, when we reviewed 105 cases, only 73 of these were investigated effectively. We found the force wasn't making the most of early evidential opportunities. But response officers appear to work well together to manage crime scenes, start enquiries and complete handover reports. The Connect records management system also supports the prompt recording of crimes using handheld devices. So other departments can access these reports and provide advice to responding officers in urgent cases. Supervisors lead the response to incidents well, attending scenes and directing their staff. Detective supervisors and specialists from different investigation teams also attend incidents to give support and on-the-ground quality assurance. This increases the likelihood the force's response will be effective.

When we visited different teams, they told us that demand was affecting their wellbeing. Some teams felt more supported than others, with control room staff expressing concerns about the effects of demand. We comment on the force's approach to wellbeing below, in the section 'Building, supporting and protecting the workforce'.

Investigating crime

Requires
improvement

West Midlands Police requires improvement at investigating crime.

This judgment is based on the area for improvement (AFI) we gave in the section 'Providing a service to the victims of crime'. This AFI includes findings from both the 'Investigating crime' and 'Protecting vulnerable people' sections of this report.

We gave the force this AFI so it can understand what it needs to do to make improvements to its investigations to make sure that they are proportionate, thorough and prompt.

Although we consider the force requires improvement at investigating crime, we found some innovative practice in this area, which we have set out below. This is followed by our main findings that relate to how well the force investigates crime.

Innovative practice

West Midlands Police's detective academy supports investigators' recruitment and development

The force's detective academy supports the recruitment, retention, CPD and accreditation of officers and police staff investigators. The force encourages applications from the workforce for investigation roles through bespoke recruitment events. Students receive support to complete the initial crime investigators' development portfolio and the national investigators' exam. Force and regional investigation teams help to refine the investigation training plan so that it reflects local and national developments. This means the force is continuing to develop expertise in investigating crime.

The force's locate team provides effective support to investigations involving missing people

The locate team supports investigations involving missing people seven days a week. It uses THRIVE to prioritise cases. Team members attend meetings throughout the force to review investigations and make sure actions to find missing people are effective. The team co-ordinates the force's response to missing foreign nationals who are trafficked. And it mitigates risks linked to unregulated children's homes. It shares information and intelligence well with local authorities to help identify cases of sexual exploitation. More recently, it has helped develop a modular training package to equip staff with the knowledge they need when responding to reports of missing people.

An app and digital kiosks improve the force's ability to retrieve digital evidence from electronic devices in a timely way

The force prioritises the examination of digital devices using a decision-making app. This was developed in consultation with investigators. It has also introduced digital kiosks for retrieval of evidence from electronic devices. These measures have cut the time needed to examine devices.

Main findings

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

The force understands the importance of carrying out quality investigations on behalf of victims and their families, but it is reacting to the demands of more serious crime by using inexperienced staff

The force's FMS shows that West Midlands Police understands the obstacles to investigating different types of crime, including serious and complex crime. Its Citizen Charter describes the force's commitment to providing better services for victims. And its systems of governance support planning and help leaders to review performance. It uses analysis to determine which teams need more support. The force's decisions reflect the priorities and threats.

Some neighbourhood officers are moving into roles where they will investigate complex cases. It will take time for these officers to develop their skills and experience to investigate effectively. The force is responding to demand by allocating resources to investigation roles. But current demand is outstripping its predictions. So it needs to consider if existing plans will meet its capability and capacity needs for predicted future investigative demand. There are also consequences for the force's ability to reduce crime and engage with communities.

The force aspires to give a good service to the victims of crime but isn't meeting its own standards. High levels of demand are affecting investigators' wellbeing

Investigators are committed to supporting victims and realise that it is important to keep them updated. But the quality of the force's victim contact and care often isn't good enough. This applies to serious crimes, including offences of rape. During reality testing, we encountered teams that couldn't accept more cases because they had exceeded their capacity to investigate their current caseload.

Student officers spend time with tutors on investigation teams to develop their skills. But we found that some tutors were also managing high caseloads, which was affecting their ability to both support students, and to investigate. We learned about the detrimental effects of excessive demand on investigators' wellbeing. It also affects the quality of service. To manage expectations, victims were warned that they may receive limited contact from investigators during investigations. So victims cannot be assured the force will give them the services they should expect.

The force identifies opportunities to improve its forensic capabilities

The force has piloted the role of digital crime scene manager (DCSM) to give [senior investigating officers \(SIOs\)](#) technical advice and support. DCSMs are skilled and experienced in the examination of digital devices. They act as a single point of contact during the early stages of investigations. They attend briefings and co-ordinate the examination of devices to ensure they are prioritised and only examined if necessary. They help prepare forensic strategies and quality assure reports to ensure they are accurate. Feedback from SIOs indicates they value this role because it improves investigations and reduces unnecessary demand. The force is considering its pilot to see if the role should be made permanent.

Significant new ICT developments this year give the force opportunities to make improvements

Staff can access information more easily using a system called Connect. Its inbuilt quality assurance processes support investigators when they prepare files. But the quality of investigations is an area for improvement, as we have highlighted above in the section 'Providing a service to victims of crime'.

Protecting vulnerable people

Requires improvement

West Midlands Police requires improvement at protecting vulnerable people.

This judgment is based on the area for improvement (AFI) we gave in the section 'Providing a service to the victims of crime'. This AFI includes findings from both the 'Investigating crime' and 'Protecting vulnerable people' sections of this report. This is so the force can understand what it needs to do to improve how it supports victims.

Main findings

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

The force understands the nature and scale of vulnerability in the communities it serves through its analysis of a wide range of information

The force's This Work Matters strategy reinforces the importance it places on protecting the most vulnerable. Strategic boards provide effective governance and the FMS shows an understanding of vulnerability demand.

The force uses data well to analyse and identify patterns of offending. And it has trained its workforce to make it more skilled at identifying vulnerability using THRIVE risk assessments. These measures have exposed hidden harm, with the force recording more crime, including violence and hate crimes. Supported by the VRU, the force analysed other organisations' data to identify areas where young people are particularly vulnerable to violence and being drawn into organised crime. It has allocated resources to these 'impact areas' and we learned how officers refer vulnerable children for help so they don't carry knives or become involved in [county lines](#) drug dealing.

The force faces significant difficulties in responding to domestic abuse, child abuse, child [sexual exploitation](#), crimes of rape and other sexual offences, modern slavery and human trafficking, hate crime and reports of missing people. But it has made progress against several of our long-standing recommendations.

It is important that officers and staff identify accurately, and respond effectively to, vulnerable people. During our inspection, we examined a selection of child protection cases and found examples where obvious vulnerability was missed. Behavioural crimes and those relating to anti-social behaviour also need to be

consistently and accurately identified. Many 101 calls are abandoned, which we highlight above in the section 'Providing a service to victims of crime'. And local practices for screening standard risk cases of domestic abuse differ throughout the force. So it won't completely understand vulnerability. This will affect the force's ability to respond to the needs of vulnerable people.

The force provides safeguarding and support for vulnerable people including those at risk of exploitation

The most serious incidents involving vulnerable people are reviewed at management meetings that take place three times in every 24 hours. The force's systems let it evaluate how quickly it is responding to incidents at any given time. It prioritises reports of domestic abuse and missing people, which includes children who go missing and are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Responding officers complete domestic abuse risk assessments using a mobile app, and these reports are scrutinised well. Crime recording processes prevent the inadvertent submission of incomplete records.

Officers and staff understand how important it is to safeguard vulnerable people effectively. The force has improved how quickly it responds to domestic abuse incidents. But demand has increased and it doesn't always respond to them as promptly as some other types of incidents. It uses [domestic violence protection notices](#) frequently to prevent perpetrators from returning to the victim's home, with more being converted to orders. But it now needs to increase the capacity of its civil interventions team to support this work.

The force works well with partner organisations to keep vulnerable people safe

This is illustrated by its successful work with the immigration service to find and safeguard many vulnerable missing people who have been trafficked. Response officers and those from the [Central Motorway Police Group \(CMPG\)](#) are trained to identify cases of exploitation and give support. Recently, 24 missing foreign nationals were safeguarded. The force makes clear links between organised crime and the exploitation of vulnerable people. Officers visit young people throughout the force area who are at risk of being drawn into county lines drug dealing. And the serious youth violence board in Coventry oversees interventions that support people who are vulnerable to gang exploitation. The new serious organised crime and exploitation (SOCEX) hubs in Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Coventry are anticipated to help the force and its partners protect vulnerable people, but it was too soon for us to assess how effective these developments are.

The force contributes to the effectiveness of [multi-agency risk assessment conferences \(MARAC\)](#)

MARACs are well established across the West Midlands. Each of the seven local authorities hold them. There are regular virtual meetings that include the police and other agencies to review cases. The frequency of these meetings depends on local circumstances, particularly demand. Some areas have large numbers of cases to review.

The central MARAC team supports a consistent approach to safeguarding. We observed several MARAC meetings. We saw how trained staff supported experienced chairs to make sure actions were tracked and updated, and participants were well prepared. The conferences include people from children's services, housing, health, social services, probation services, education, and the adult safeguarding team, as well as independent advisers on domestic and sexual violence. These meetings consider a range of effective measures to protect people, including the [domestic violence disclosure scheme](#), Clare's Law, and the use of protective orders.

We spoke to several participants, and they expressed positive views about how MARACs have developed over the last year. Confidential surveys are used to obtain victims' experiences of the service they receive in the short, medium, and longer term. This allows the MARACs to make improvements and to assess the extent to which repeat victimisation is reduced.

Local arrangements support the effectiveness of [multi-agency safeguarding hubs \(MASHs\)](#)

The force contributes to the work of MASHs throughout the West Midlands. It collaborates with partner agencies to manage risks and reduce repeat victimisation. Although MASHs have often operated virtually during the pandemic, using video conferencing, agencies are usually located together in the same building. This supports the sharing of information. When we visited the MASH in Coventry, we noted how information sharing arrangements give officers direct access to social services' systems. So they have a full range of information available to them to help them make prompt and effective decisions to safeguard children and young people.

The force understands vulnerability demand and the resources needed. But higher demand affects the wellbeing of staff who protect vulnerable people

The force's analysis gives clear assessments of the demand it and its partner organisations face. Senior leaders use a system of [priority-based budgeting](#) (PBB) to review resources allocated to protecting vulnerable people.

We saw how, over the longer term, the force has invested available resources in this work, including its locate and safeguarding teams. It plans to supplement these teams by moving resources into them. It expects to fill the vacancies created with new recruits who will join under the policing uplift programme (the national recruitment initiative of 20,000 officers).

The force understands that many public protection roles pose a high risk to wellbeing and it is acting to better support its workforce. We describe this further in the section 'Building, supporting and protecting the workforce', below. This is important because many staff told us they were fatigued.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

West Midlands Police is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Area for improvement

The force should review how it manages sex offenders to make sure it has the capacity and capability to mitigate the risks they pose to the public

This includes its ability to proactively identify further offences and breaches of preventative orders. It should assess:

- the opportunities and risks presented by the introduction of new technical equipment;
- the effectiveness of current monitoring capabilities in identifying breaches;
- the processes staff follow to determine how digital devices should be examined;
- training requirements for sex offender managers (SOMs);
- the management of investigative demand by online child sexual exploitation and SOMs teams; and
- the suitability of training and welfare support for staff who view images during investigations.

During our inspection we reviewed how well the force manages sex offenders. We found that it doesn't use preventative or ancillary orders as well as other forces. It fails to exploit all opportunities to identify new offences or breaches of preventative orders. This is because it doesn't yet have the same technical capabilities as some other forces, despite support from its [digital forensic](#) unit. Some staff who manage or investigate sex offenders lack confidence in the processes they should follow when examining digital devices. We identified examples of investigations being handled by SOMs who don't have the training they need to investigate cases involving indecent images of children effectively. As well as affecting the quality of investigations, this is affecting SOMs' welfare.

Main findings

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

The force has improved how it manages offenders and has invested in training for offender managers

In early 2020, we made several national recommendations following our [thematic inspection of integrated offender management](#) (IOM). The force has made good progress on these. It has developed a comprehensive three-day training programme for staff and officers involved in its IOM scheme. This includes a manual of guidance with clear information about procedures. It reviews and updates this training based on their feedback. Offender managers work alongside National Probation Service staff. This supports effective decision making and the regular flow of [intelligence](#) between them. At monthly meetings managers review who is in the IOM programme and use a risk assessment tool to prioritise which perpetrators should enter the programme.

There is a wide range of schemes to help reduce the likelihood of further offending. These include programmes for the perpetrators of domestic abuse. Their allocation is reviewed at ‘one day, one conversation’ meetings. The force’s use of fixed and flexible IOM cohorts reflects national guidance and local priorities, including violence and serious acquisitive crime (theft, robbery or burglary). The force views its IOM programme as important and is committed to preserving its resources for this work, despite the investigative demands it faces. When we visited offender managers, they were clear in their view that IOM is effective. But the force would benefit from a deeper understanding of how its IOM programme is reducing offending.

The force needs to ensure that neighbourhood and response teams are aware of the most dangerous offenders in their areas

We found that some teams’ knowledge of dangerous offenders is very limited. This suggests an inconsistent approach to briefing staff across the force. It needs to be more consistent in providing information to officers and police community support officers, so that they are clear on what they can do to mitigate the risks offenders pose to public safety. It is essential that officers recognise opportunities to take enforcement action, submit intelligence and safeguard vulnerable people.

The force apprehends and manages suspects and offenders effectively to protect the public from harm

The force prioritises the arrests of outstanding suspects using a harm algorithm. This algorithm is based on risk factors, including the frequency of offending and the gravity of the offence. It generates useful performance information about wanted people that is accessible using a digital dashboard. This is scrutinised at daily management meetings. We observed how senior leaders also review performance at monthly strategic meetings. The force has taken steps to ensure its staff are clear about when they should circulate wanted people on the [Police National Computer](#). Different teams of officers are tasked each day with locating suspects and offenders and they are held to account for the action they take. These measures mean the force is more likely to prevent and reduce crime.

The force has effective arrangements to monitor the use of pre-charge bail and released under investigation

The force manages pre-charge [bail](#) and the use of [released under investigation \(RUI\)](#) effectively. During our reality testing, we saw how investigators use the THRIVE risk assessment process to help them decide how to safeguard vulnerable victims. They understand the importance of getting these assessments right. A supervisor must authorise changes to pre-charge bail. The force's new Connect system supports the management of bail and RUI cases. It keeps in one place information about the status of cases and factors affecting risk assessments. It also gives reminders at 14 and 28-day intervals, so that any extensions are considered properly.

The force works with immigration enforcement to identify and manage arrested foreign nationals effectively

During our inspection, we confirmed that the force makes referrals to [ACRO](#) (criminal records office) to check for any previous convictions foreign nationals might have. There are effective safeguards to ensure these checks performed. The force's ICT systems remind users to complete the checks, and custody staff provide a further level of quality assurance.

The force is using nationally recognised risk assessment tools more consistently to manage dangerous offenders

In our last PEEL inspection report we mentioned a backlog of risk assessments. The force is now using these risk assessment tools more consistently and the assessments are done in a timely way.

The force uses the [active risk management system \(ARMS\)](#) to manage the risk posed by sexual offenders. We found that ARMS is used on most occasions in line with [authorised professional practice](#), and performance is assessed at criminal justice service improvement meetings. So the force is more likely to manage the risks posed to the public by sexual offenders effectively.

The force ensures that multi-agency processes are in line with national standards

We found that [multi-agency public protection arrangement \(MAPPA\)](#) meetings reflect guidance. They have trained police MAPPA chairs so that they have the knowledge necessary to fulfil their roles. Offender managers contribute to these panels and give information to other agencies to help prepare risk management plans. Multi-agency panels screen all referrals and there are good working relationships between the police and probation service. Team members also visit offenders before their release from prison. They explain the benefits and consequences of participation in the IOM programme.

Disrupting serious organised crime

Good

West Midlands Police is good at managing [serious and organised crime](#).

Area for improvement

West Midlands Police should make sure it has effective processes for identifying, understanding and prioritising serious and organised crime (SOC), including mapping and scoring

During our inspection, we identified that local teams were gathering and acting on intelligence when investigating SOC. This is positive. But some investigations had not been [mapped](#) and scored properly. So they weren't being tackled using the force's full capabilities.

As of 31 March 2021, the force had the lowest number of active organised crime groups (OCGs) compared with its most similar forces. Our fieldwork found the force hasn't completed the nationally recognised risk assessment tool ([MoRiLE](#)) for all identified OCGs, which means it won't fully understand the risks and demand they present.

Main findings

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

The force needs to make sure that neighbourhood and response teams are aware of the most dangerous offenders in their areas

When we spoke to response and neighbourhood teams, we found their knowledge of local criminals varied considerably. Some observed a lack of up-to-date information about SOC, although they understood the need to submit intelligence about criminal activity. The force needs to ensure response and neighbourhood teams can contribute more consistently. We have also made this point above, in the section 'Managing offenders and suspects'.

The force works well with the [regional organised crime unit \(ROCU\)](#) and its partners to respond to threats and disrupt SOC using a range of tactics

An assistant chief constable leads the response to SOCEX. They chair a co-ordination meeting based on themes that include county lines drug dealing and organised exploitation. The force has prepared a SOC strategy, supported by a strategic assessment and a series of profiles covering different SOC threats. As the largest force in the region, West Midlands Police makes a significant contribution to the ROCU (over and above its proportionate allocation) and has a strong relationship with it. It allocates resources to respond to threats at local, regional and national tasking and co-ordination meetings, and uses [covert tactics](#).

There are eight local responsible officers (LROs) across the force who manage known OCGs. They have access to advice and support, including specialist gangs teams who identify and disrupt emerging gangs and work to deter young people from joining them. LROs are well placed to access help from other organisations for prevention initiatives. Staff are held to account for progress against local [4P](#) plans. Some LROs were new to their role and had mentors to support their learning and development. This is essential given the nature of this work.

We found that the force works well with its partners and information sharing practices are effective. At partnership meetings, intelligence and disruption options are openly discussed. The force also identifies alternative powers and uses them to frustrate organised criminals. The force is committed to a 'whole system', long-term approach to tackling SOC. It identifies good practice and improvement opportunities, recording the results of debriefs on a system called 'corporate memory'. In Birmingham, we observed the SOC gangs co-ordinator briefing the community safety partnership on the results of a review of the local approach to SOC. The co-ordinator's recommendations showed a commitment to improvement.

The force innovates to improve its response to SOC

New developments include SOCEX hubs in Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Coventry. They bring organisations together to improve safeguarding and maximise opportunities to disrupt SOC. The 'Datalab' is a sophisticated system that analyses information from a wide range of sources to tackle threats including county lines, violence and exploitation. We look forward to learning about the outcomes of these advances.

The force has a consistent and structured approach to identifying people at risk of being drawn into SOC or whose offending is likely to become more serious

The VRU performs an essential role in co-ordinating different agencies' activities to prevent SOC. Throughout the force area, strong partnership approaches identify, assist and deflect people from SOC. At meetings, action points are clearly raised and followed through. This ensures that responsibility rests with the right agencies and progress is made.

We saw effective partnership working in Coventry. The serious youth violence board identifies young people who are vulnerable to gang exploitation and oversees preventative measures. Other good examples involve schools and religious groups,

and the use of a range of powers and orders, including injunctions, to prevent subjects uploading material to social media platforms.

The force works with the ROCU, National Probation Service and prisons with regular meetings to share information and intelligence. This also ensures that offenders are recalled to prison appropriately. Offender management units support LROs with the 'pursue' and 'prevent' elements of 4P plans, so they are more likely to be effective. The force's Connect system notifies offender managers automatically when individuals might be involved in further offending, so they can intervene early. Offender managers also monitor the release of at-risk offenders and visit them prior to release, to explore opportunities to prevent them from being drawn back into organised crime.

Meeting the strategic policing requirement

We don't grade forces on this question. In this section, we set out our main findings for how well West Midlands Police meets the strategic policing requirement (SPR).

Main findings

West Midlands Police understands the threats in the strategic policing requirement and prioritises them alongside local policing objectives

The force prioritises the threats listed in the SPR and it works with neighbouring forces and other organisations to address them. The SPR covers serious threats that cut across police force boundaries, namely terrorism, a national cyber-security incident, SOC, threats to public order, civil emergencies, and child sexual abuse.

We found the six SPR threats to be an integral part of the force's business planning procedures. Responsibility for each is allocated to a [senior officer](#). These are included in the force's strategic assessment, the FMS and the police and crime plan, and the force uses MoRiLE to reappraise each threat annually.

The force works well with neighbouring forces and other organisations to address SPR threats

The force has a prominent role in the [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#) and it leads other forces in the region to counter SPR threats. One of the force's assistant chief constables holds a senior role within the LRF (co-chair) and co-ordinates the region's response to public order, firearms and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear matters. The force also provides counter-terrorist specialist firearms officers (CTSFOs) for the region. And it is a major contributor to the ROCU and CMPG.

The force understands its responsibilities to the [regional information and co-ordination centre](#). These are activated when resources must be mobilised, for example, in response to a large-scale public order incident. It has worked with its neighbouring forces to ensure that each force's planned contributions to [mutual aid](#) are based on accurate information. This means each can continue to operate effectively. There are good systems to identify and mobilise officers if they are needed urgently.

The force routinely makes sure it has enough capacity and capability to address the SPR threats

The force's governance structures and workforce development programmes mean it prepares for, and can meet, SPR threats. It reviews these requirements regularly and they are clearly defined in its FMS. For example, we saw how the force's resilience board had identified that it wouldn't have enough inspector-level officers with public order commander skills in future. So the board is overseeing action on this.

The force takes part in a comprehensive testing and exercising programme that involves other public sector agencies and the military. This programme has been developed to assess police and partner organisations' capabilities. Exercises correspond with identified threats. They are based on their likelihood, impact and other factors, including those highlighted by post-incident reviews.

The force debriefs following exercises and operations using a structured system. So it identifies learning and then the risk and organisational learning forum assesses if the force needs to change operational practice. Commanders and specialists have trained in [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles](#). CPD events ensure each organisation can respond to incidents effectively. Notably, the force has a new command and control suite called C3. This significant development provides a sophisticated state-of-the-art facility that supports the response to civil emergencies.

The force plans to meet changing future demands posed by SPR threats

The force projects gaps in its capabilities and uses PBB to determine which functions it must allocate resources to. It is using the policing uplift programme to build capacity in critical operational areas, including child sexual exploitation and child abuse, by allocating resources to these threats.

Protecting the public against armed threats

We don't grade forces on this question. In this section, we set out our most noteworthy findings for how well West Midlands Police protects communities from armed threats.

Main findings

West Midlands Police has an important role in national armed policing

West Midlands Police has a significant role in maintaining armed policing in the Midlands region. As well as responding to threats in the West Midlands, it hosts the regional hub of the national CTSFO network.

The force understands the threats facing communities in the West Midlands, but there is room for improvement

The threats are set out in its [armed policing strategic threat and risk assessment \(APSTRA\)](#) which is published annually. We found that the force's APSTRA fell short of NPCC standards. It didn't include a four-year projection of demand, nor did it detail the average response times to incidents, the time taken to resolve them, or the tactics used. Without this data, the force couldn't accurately determine the resources it needs to protect the public effectively. Since our inspection, the force has updated its APSTRA so it now includes more information.

West Midlands Police is well prepared to respond to incidents requiring armed officers

In the West Midlands, [armed response vehicle](#) officers attend most armed incidents. Standards of training, deployment and command of armed operations are assured. We found the force's capacity to respond to armed incidents to be rapid and dependable.

Sufficient CTSFOs are on hand to take part in complex and high-threat firearms operations

West Midlands Police hosts the regional base of the national counter-terrorism network. It has enough capability to provide local, regional and national support, and specialist expertise, should incidents escalate.

West Midlands Police complies with national approval procedures for the acquisition of weapons and specialist munitions

In response to the [Anthony Grainger Inquiry](#), we reviewed the force's procedures for acquiring new weapon systems and specialist munitions. The force understands how to document these procurements and the role of the [designated chief officer](#) in reviewing them. It is also familiar with its responsibilities to the NPCC armed policing lead and the Home Office, both of which are involved in testing and evaluating new weapons and munitions. The force hasn't considered acquiring new weapons systems since January 2020, when new national guidance was published.

West Midlands Police has enough, well-trained firearms commanders

The report into the death of Anthony Grainger was also critical of the competence of the officers in command of the operation. Strategic and tactical firearms commanders must be both occupationally and operationally competent. We examined governance procedures and interviewed firearms commanders. We were assured that they are properly trained, their performance is monitored and they are fit to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

Firearms commanders are familiar with the use of specialist munitions

As part of firearms operations, firearms commanders are responsible for the authorisation and tactical deployment of specialist munitions. It is important that they are familiar with the benefits and risks of these devices and the physical effects they have on people. The authorisation and use of specialist munitions forms part of strategic and tactical firearms commanders' training and development. Firearms commanders are confident in the authorisation of specialist munitions and how they can contribute to the successful conclusion of armed operations.

West Midlands Police has effective plans to address foreseeable threats and they are tested in a programme of exercises

We expect forces to have plans to address foreseeable threats. In the West Midlands, there are operational plans for sites that may be the target of terrorist attacks. These include shopping malls, sports stadia and [heritage sites](#). These plans are tested regularly in exercises involving other blue light services and the military.

Unarmed staff are trained in how to respond to terrorist attacks

The force has circulated guidance from the national Counter Terrorism Police Headquarters on the role of unarmed officers. It recognises that unarmed officers are likely to be the first to respond to terrorist attacks. It gives them instructions on their main responsibilities. West Midlands Police has also tested how control room staff would respond to a surge in emergency calls during such an attack.

West Midlands Police routinely debriefs armed operations to identify areas for improvement

We saw that West Midlands Police conducts debriefs on firearms training exercises. It also reviews the outcomes of all firearms incidents that officers attend. This helps ensure it identifies best practice and areas for improvement. We also found that this knowledge improves training and operational procedures.

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Adequate

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

Progress on national recommendation

In 2019, we recommended that all forces should immediately comply with all elements of the national guidance on vetting, including making sure that all personnel are vetted to the appropriate standard. Forces should also have a clear understanding of the level of vetting required for all posts, and the current level of vetting held by all their officers and staff. Forces should make sure all personnel have been vetted to a high enough level for the posts they hold.

This year, we examined West Midlands Police's progress against this national recommendation. In our 2018/19 inspection, we found that 52 percent of the workforce (over 5,000 officers and staff) didn't have up-to-date police vetting for their role. In this inspection, we found that approximately 19 percent of the workforce need vetting. While this is still too high, we noted that the force had reduced this number from around 5,600 to 2,300 and is reducing it further by around 350 per month. The force has automated many of its vetting processes to improve efficiency. We found it has an achievable plan to meet this recommendation. We will continue to review the force's progress.

Innovative practice

West Midlands Police uses a range of measures to help create a workforce that reflects its diverse communities

The force has an ambitious target to increase workforce representation. Of the 2,800 officers it is recruiting as part of the policing uplift programme, it is aiming for 1,000 to be from under-represented groups. It uses targeted recruitment campaigns based on market research to encourage applications from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) candidates. Recruitment campaigns include 'You're made for this' which highlights the diverse nature of policing. Focus groups offer views about adverts aimed at the 18–30 age group to make them more effective. The force exploits social media and used an audio advert to target listeners using a commercial music streaming service. It engages with potential applicants at events and the force seeks support from community leaders to encourage applications.

The force identifies points in the recruitment process where candidates are more likely to fail selection. It ensures these points of attrition don't affect any groups disproportionately. Throughout the force there are recruitment ambassadors who are volunteers who encourage applications. The force has strong links with public and private sector bodies to develop new approaches to recruitment and retention. This range of measures means the force recruits more people from under-represented groups.

Main findings

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

The force promotes an ethical culture, with clear leadership that emphasises continuous improvement rather than blame

The chief constable demonstrates clear leadership on ethical issues and inclusion. He meets with all newly promoted supervisors to reinforce the standards the force expects of them. The force's values, its 'This Work Matters' strategy, and the citizens' charter are an explicit commitment to providing better, fairer public services. Engagement helps to encourage a culture of learning and development, rather than blame, and the force provides opportunities for this, with 'Ask the Boss' and 'Brave Space' sessions promoting open and honest conversations about issues of concern to the workforce.

'WM Conversations' is the force's brand for the regular discussions about performance, aspirations and wellbeing that are expected to take place between staff and their supervisors. We found these structured discussions are used well throughout the force. They encourage reflective practice to help staff learn and improve, and achieve positive outcomes for the public. And after significant incidents, debriefing takes place so that lessons can be learned. This helps to avoid a blame culture.

Staff also showed they understood the [Code of Ethics](#) and how this applies to their work. So the public can expect higher standards of behaviour from the force.

There are ways for the workforce to raise ethical dilemmas. But many of the officers and staff we spoke to didn't know about the force's internal [ethics committee](#). Those that did know were unaware of its decisions. The [professional standards department](#) (PSD) gives information on ethical dilemmas, called 'dilemma of the month'. The PCC holds a committee where strategic dilemmas are considered. Staff told us they would escalate concerns to their line managers or to the PSD. But the force needs to do more to promote the work of its ethics committee. This would mean operational dilemmas could be raised for discussion and feedback so staff can learn about expectations and their obligations.

The force supports a greater sense of belonging and inclusion among its workforce

We saw good strategic oversight, governance and resources dedicated to equality, diversity and inclusion. The strategic diversity and inclusion board is chaired jointly by the deputy chief constable and the deputy PCC. It scrutinises progress against the force's 'fairness and belonging' plan that covers a range of themes, including race and the progression of women in policing. Each of the force's departments has a diversity and inclusion plan.

The force uses academic research to help it improve. We saw how a recent study examined the relationship between [procedural](#) and [organisational justice](#). As a result, the force changed its internal selection processes to ensure the workforce views them as fair. Through these processes, the force is now identifying and promoting greater numbers of female candidates, and BAME candidates. The force's 'Inspire' programme offers mentoring, coaching and lessons in leadership to develop officers from ethnic minorities. This is commendable. There are also opportunities for the force to consider other initiatives that could enhance the retention and progression of people from minority backgrounds. For example, the use of third-party companies or the [College of Policing's](#) positive action learning sets programme.

We noted that, although the force is good at monitoring potential disproportionality in its vetting decisions based on race and gender, it doesn't yet do so for people with other protected characteristics. But it has plans to introduce these checks so that its vetting decisions are fair.

The force understands and improves the wellbeing of its workforce

Wellbeing emerged as a theme in this inspection. We identified how the force frequently supplements resources using overtime. And some staff are unable to take all their annual leave entitlement because of operational pressures, so they accrue it. These factors affect wellbeing. The force bases its understanding of workforce wellbeing on feedback. It uses a survey to determine the views of its workforce. This allows it to make a wellbeing plan which is reviewed by a strategic board. Departmental wellbeing meetings support this plan. During reality testing, many staff told us that they felt the force took their wellbeing seriously.

We assessed how well the force has responded to its workforce's concerns. Changes include a new employee assistance programme that supports staff 24 hours a day. The force also put more resources into the [occupational health unit](#) (OHU). The force had a peer assessment under the national [Oscar Kilo](#) initiative to identify other practical steps it can take to improve wellbeing. It recently launched a 'wellbeing for investigators toolkit' to support personal resilience and mental wellbeing.

The force maintains and improves the wellbeing of its workforce and understands the links between learning and development, diversity and inclusion and wellbeing

The force responded quickly to the demands of the pandemic by anticipating its workforce's understandable concerns about safety. It reviewed and amended its policies and procedures to ensure their wellbeing was supported effectively. It identified clinically vulnerable staff and, where it was possible, enabled them to work from home. It distributed laptops to support home working and all roles were risk assessed. There were many more measures to ensure staff were safe and these remain under review.

These have proven to be valuable steps and many staff we spoke to appreciate the force's support for their wellbeing. The force's 'This Work Matters' strategy acknowledges the importance of sustaining a healthy, capable and engaged workforce and West Midlands Police acts on this. Wellbeing is important because some staff we spoke to are frequently exposed to distressing situations and need help to manage their resilience. The force should make sure that staff working in high-risk posts understand the importance of regular wellbeing screening. The force should ensure that screening is used consistently to improve staff confidence in it, because then they will be more likely to access the support they need.

The force would benefit from ensuring supervisors not only possess operational skills, but also the skills to support the wellbeing of their staff. Some supervisors need to improve how they manage stress, absences, flexible working arrangements and reasonable adjustments in the workplace. We found examples of staff absent due to sickness who felt that they weren't supported well. But the OHU gets many referrals, which suggests supervisors can recognise when staff need support.

The force understands its learning and development needs well

The force's workforce plan reflects its current and future needs. It is based on a skills database that identifies when training is needed. It forecasts when new intakes of recruits are joining and it uses information from line managers to capture training requests. The plan reflects the region's training requirements and those arising from the force's change programme. It includes public order training and the use of new ICT.

A commissioning governance board co-ordinates training. The training plan reflects the NPCC's Policing Vision 2025. So the force prioritises training effectively and in accordance with local and national requirements.

Progress in recruiting new officers against the force's uplift plan is scrutinised well by senior leaders and the PCC. The force has embraced the requirements of the policing

education qualifications framework (PEQF) initial entry routes. It states that 16 groups of police constable degree apprenticeship and nine groups of degree holder entry programme officers were recruited by 31 December 2020. The force also gives opportunities for people to join while they are completing a degree. The force collaborates with other regional forces to maintain consistent standards of training. Staffordshire University provides quality assurance.

The force protects its information technology

During our last PEEL inspection, we identified an area for improvement. It related to how the force monitored its information technology to protect its data. This year we found the force has made improvements and we are satisfied that it has made good progress. So the public can be confident that the force can protect people and its data better.

The force needs to re-establish regular links with its partner organisations to identify abuse of position for a sexual purpose more effectively

We raised this problem of serious corruption in 2016. The force developed effective relationships with organisations that support vulnerable people to mitigate this. But these relationships have lapsed. The force should review how it can identify officers and staff who may be [abusing their position for a sexual purpose](#). It is good at looking for links between internal cases of sexual harassment and members of the workforce who might abuse their position for a sexual purpose.

Strategic planning, organisational management and value for money

Good

West Midlands Police is good at operating efficiently.

Area for improvement

The force should make sure that when it responds to changes in demand, it assesses how these decisions may affect its ability to address its priorities

The force understands the problem of responding to changes in demand. These pressures have become more acute during the pandemic. Sophisticated data analytics capabilities provide a comprehensive picture of demand and reflect its investments in new technology. So the force can identify and respond to new threats and risks effectively.

Investigation teams are stretched and the force has allocated more resources to support homicide investigations. Levels of serious crime, including homicide, are exceeding the force's predictions and are affecting its ability to manage demand effectively. The force recognises that it must make sure it has enough trained investigators so it can investigate crime effectively. Officers are being posted to investigation roles, but many new investigators aren't yet accredited. So, the force has to rely more on those who are accredited to carry out complex investigations. And tutors often don't have enough capacity to give support.

The shortage of investigators is a national problem. The force has taken action in this respect and posted neighbourhood officers into investigation roles. The reason why it had to do this was because some officers didn't want to volunteer for these roles. The force invests significantly in neighbourhood policing and is supplementing its teams by recruiting more officers. But moving experienced neighbourhood officers is likely to have consequences in the short term. Neighbourhood teams frequently support response officers in responding to calls from the public. They stop crimes from being committed in the first place and solve problems.

Serious violence and offences affecting young people are force priorities, but the consequences of posting officers away from neighbourhood work on crime reduction and community engagement are unclear. The force needs to make sure that it minimises the negative effects these moves might have. And it must make sure that officers and staff understand the reasons behind the decisions that affect them.

Main findings

In this section we set out our other findings that relate to how efficient the force is.

The force's strategic planning processes are supported by effective governance arrangements and analysis. So resources are allocated to the force's priorities

Its three-year strategy, called 'This Work Matters', is based on public feedback and reinforces the importance of understanding the concerns of people and the policing needs of communities. Its priorities are aligned to those in the PCC's police and crime plan. Senior leaders each hold responsibility for the priorities, and performance is reviewed through different boards.

The force makes good use of sophisticated data. It routinely evaluates progress using data driven insights. These processes ensure that the force's finance and workforce plans align well with each other.

The force manages its implementation of the policing uplift programme effectively. So, extra recruitment is affordable and sustainable. It is deliberately using the uplift programme to address current and future demand. Its plans assess the logistical support needed, including estates, vehicles, equipment and training. Plans also take full account of major events including Coventry City of Culture, the Commonwealth Games 2022, COP26 and the development of HS2.

The force applies a well-established system called priority-based budgeting to review different aspects of its operating model by considering threats and risks and allocating resources to its priorities. And it is integrating the preparation of its [force management statement](#) (FMS) with its annual business planning cycle. This is a positive step, because it will help it assess current and future demand.

The force uses advances in technology to help it respond to current and future needs

The force has invested in new digital technology to help manage demand and serve the public better. These are significant developments that reflect how well the force's long-term change programme has progressed. They include:

- a new command and control system;
- greater digital forensics capabilities;
- innovative new digital contact methods;
- the introduction of Office 365; and

- new records management and data analytics capabilities that replace old systems and can be used on handheld devices.

Most are recent developments and we saw how the force reviews and monitors its change programme in a robust way. So it will maximise the benefits of these developments, which will provide opportunities for the force to better understand its demand. In doing so, the force can record more crime accurately. It can identify vulnerability more quickly to improve safeguarding. And it can encourage the public to make more use of online contact methods to improve access to its services.

The force manages its finances well

The force's governance arrangements continue to improve efficiency and productivity. It has a strong track record of improvement. The [medium-term financial plan](#) describes a balanced position, but budgetary pressures mean the force has drawn on its [reserves](#) repeatedly to fill gaps. The force uses its reserves prudently and, despite significant cost pressures, can balance its budget. It continues to invest in its change programme to improve services and achieve savings.

The force collaborates to improve services

The force maintains mature and well-established collaborations. These include legal services, counter-terrorism, CMPG and the regional organised crime unit. It identifies opportunities to participate in more regional collaborations. During 2019, the force collaborated with the other three forces in the region as part of the PEQF programme. It recently completed a project with partner organisations to enhance and expand automatic numberplate recognition capabilities across the regional motorway network.

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