

# PEEL

## Police efficiency and effectiveness 2018

An inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland



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# Executive summary

## Efficiency

We assess the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) as being **good** with respect to its efficiency.

The service has a thorough understanding of the demand that it faces now and is likely to face in the future. It knows the capability and skills of its workforce and has thought about how those may change over time. It also has a well-developed process of priority-based resourcing (PBR), which helps it to allocate resources and supports the change management team.

We have not identified any causes of concern with respect to efficiency, but we have identified some areas in which the service could improve. For example, it should develop plans to meet its future need for investigative staff. This is particularly relevant given that the service has recognised that many of its detectives are close to retirement.<sup>1</sup> We also recommend that the force should enable officers to complete [DASH assessments](#) on their mobile data devices.

## Effectiveness

We assess the PSNI as being **good** with respect to effectiveness.

The service is effective in keeping people safe and reducing crime. Since our last inspection, it has developed a training programme in problem-solving policing, and is training sergeants in investigation quality and file standards. Investigating officers have access to a good range of support, including forensic crime scene investigation and a cyber crime centre.

It has good strategies for protecting vulnerable people and supporting victims. The service has a thorough understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability in Northern Ireland, and officers and staff recognise it as a priority. Call handlers now identify vulnerability at the first point of contact, through effective use of the [THRIVE model](#) in the control room.

The service continues to develop its understanding of mental health. It works well with a wide range of partner organisations to tackle vulnerability, although partnerships are at different stages of maturity across Northern Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> This same vulnerability has been identified as a problem for England and Wales police forces. See: [PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016 – A national overview](#), HMICFRS, 2016, page 52.

There are a few areas where the service could be more effective. These include:

- introducing a single, standard form for the referral of vulnerable people;
- providing preventative health screening for officers in high-risk roles; and
- issuing clear guidance on when officers should use body-worn video devices.

# Introduction

The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, Section 41(2), as amended, requires that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspect and report to the Department of Justice (Northern Ireland) on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (called PSNI or the service) each year.

In accordance with the Act, in 2018 the Department of Justice (DoJ) commissioned HMICFRS to inspect the efficiency and effectiveness of the PSNI. The continued suspension of the elected Assembly in Northern Ireland meant there was no Minister of Justice; our 2018 commission came from the DoJ's permanent secretary.

We applied the inspection methodology we use in England and Wales, focusing on the following questions:

- Efficiency – how efficient is the service at keeping people safe and reducing crime? Specifically, how well does it understand the demand it faces; how well does it use its resources; and how well does it plan for the future?
- Effectiveness – how effective is the service at reducing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe? Specifically, how well does the service protect vulnerable people and support victims?

This report sets out the findings of our inspection, which took place in PSNI during June 2018. For some aspects of the inspection, we adopted a similar methodology to our inspections of police forces in England and Wales. We recognise that some policing challenges in Northern Ireland are different to those in England and Wales. Where it was appropriate to do so, we have provided comparisons.

For further information about HMICFRS inspection methodology, and our previous reports on the efficiency and effectiveness of the PSNI, see [our website](#).

# The service in numbers



## Calls for assistance

PSNI

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Incidents per 1,000 population for the 12 months to 31 March 2018

**301**

**262**



## Crime

PSNI

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Crimes (excluding fraud) recorded per 1,000 population for the 12 months to 31 March 2018

**53**

**82**

Change in recorded crime (excluding fraud) comparing the 12 months to 31 March 2017 and 31 March 2018

**0%**

**+13%**



## Crime outcomes

PSNI

Charged/summonsed - proportion assigned to offences recorded for the 12 months to 31 March 2018

**20%**

Evidential difficulties; suspect identified (victim does not support action) – proportion assigned to offences recorded for the 12 months to 31 March 2018

**20%**

Investigation complete – no suspect identified – proportion assigned to offences recorded for the 12 months to 31 March 2018

**34%**



## Anti-social behaviour

PSNI

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

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Anti-social behaviour incidents per 1,000 population for the 12 months to 31 March 2018

**33**

**28**

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Change in anti-social behaviour incidents comparing the 12 months to 31 March 2017 and 31 March 2018

**+3%**

**-9%**

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## Domestic abuse

PSNI

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

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Domestic abuse incidents per 1,000 population for the 12 months to 31 March 2018

**16**

**16**

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Domestic abuse as a percentage of all recorded crime for the 12 months to 31 March 2018

**15%**

**13%**

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# Summary of inspection judgments

For this inspection we adopted a risk-based approach, so did not inspect all aspects of PSNI's performance. Therefore, some of these judgments are carried forward from our previous inspection, in 2017.

	<b>Efficiency</b>	 <b>Good</b>	<b>Last inspected</b>
	Understanding demand	 Good	2018
	Use of resources	 Good	2018
	Planning for the future	 Good	2018
	<b>Effectiveness</b>	 <b>Good</b>	<b>Last inspected</b>
	Preventing crime and tackling anti-social behaviour	 Good	2017
	Investigating crime and reducing re-offending	 Good	2017
	Protecting vulnerable people	 Good	2018
	Tackling serious and organised crime	 Good	2017

# Efficiency



# How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and reducing crime?



## Good

We assess the PSNI's efficiency as good. This is consistent with 2017, when we assessed the PSNI as good for efficiency. It was also good in each of the following elements: understanding demand; using resources to manage demand; and planning for future demand.

We found one area for improvement:

### Area for improvement

- The service should take steps to ensure it has enough trained investigators to meet current and future demand.

## Understanding demand

The PSNI has a good understanding of demand. We considered how well the service understands the demand it faces now and is likely to face in the future. This includes the potential impact of policing the land border between the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union after Brexit.

We also inspected the PSNI's efforts to identify more complex demands such as terrorism in Northern Ireland, and hidden demand including modern slavery and child sexual exploitation. We examined how the service oversees the arrangements it has in place to manage and reduce demand.

### Understanding current demand

As we commented in the [efficiency inspection of 2017](#), the demands on policing in Northern Ireland are more wide-ranging than those faced by most forces in England and Wales. The PSNI faces the ongoing threat from dissident terrorist activity in Northern Ireland, and the potential challenge of policing the only land border between the UK and Europe, should the UK leave the European Union.

In 2017, we concluded that the PSNI had a good understanding of the demand that it faced. In 2018, we were pleased to see that the service had continued to develop its

understanding of demand. It had achieved this, in large part, by adopting the [force management statement](#) (FMS) approach. The PSNI is not required to complete an FMS, as forces in England and Wales are, but it has benefited from doing so.

Using the FMS approach, the service had collated and analysed data across six categories:

- prevention and deterrence;
- investigations;
- protecting vulnerable people;
- dangerous and repeat offenders;
- disrupting organised crime; and
- responding to major incidents.

The service had also included an assessment of terrorism in Northern Ireland and legacy issues linked to incidents that occurred before the Northern Ireland peace agreement.

In addition to the FMS analysis, the service completes an annual strategic assessment. Combining its data and intelligence with that of other bodies, including local councils and health authorities, it has generated a wider understanding of the threats and risks facing the communities of Northern Ireland. This assessment applied the recognised approach to [management of risk in law enforcement](#) (MoRiLE) and has informed the service's decision-making.

### **Withdrawal from the European Union**

At the time of our inspection, the UK's preparations for withdrawal from the European Union (at the time, scheduled to take place no later than 29 March 2019, but since postponed) were well underway. Although Brexit affects all police forces, it is of particular significance to PSNI. We were encouraged to see that the service had prepared several contingency plans to meet varying demands, including the possibility of seeking additional resources.

### **More complex demand**

The PSNI has continued its efforts to identify and assess hidden demands – those that are less likely to be reported to the police and which are more likely to affect vulnerable people. The strategic assessment describes three main areas that PSNI should focus on:

- violent extremism, including terrorism in Northern Ireland;
- serious and organised crime, including drug trafficking, money laundering and extortion; and
- vulnerability, including the exploitation of children, domestic, elder and child abuse, and hate crime.

The service works closely with a range of other bodies to tackle these problems, at both local and national levels. For example, the PSNI has worked closely with the local councils, health and support services to establish support hubs across Northern

Ireland. These hubs bring together local service providers to identify and support the individuals and families who put the most pressure on local services. They aim to resolve the underlying issues making these individuals and families vulnerable.

At a national level, the service works very closely with a wide range of law enforcement agencies in the UK and the Republic of Ireland to tackle serious and organised crime, and cross-border crime, and to maintain national security. The partners include the National Crime Agency, HM Revenue & Customs, Border Force, Immigration Enforcement and An Garda Síochána (the police service of the Republic of Ireland).

## **Governance**

Managing demand effectively also involves having good internal processes. We inspected how well the service identifies and tackles inefficiency. We also looked at how it promotes innovation by encouraging staff to suggest new and better ways of doing their jobs.

The chief constable chairs the service executive board, which considers the strategic challenges the service faces in responding to current and likely future demand. The board's membership includes the organisation's senior leaders and several non-executive members drawn from outside the police service who provide a different perspective and independent challenge.

The deputy chief constable leads the priority-based resourcing (PBR) board, which oversees the change projects aimed at dealing with demand. The board meets monthly and oversees the co-ordination of all the PSNI's organisational change projects. Because of its wide scope, the board can allocate resources based on an extensive understanding of the evidence.

The PBR board and the service executive board are supported by an established change management team. This team oversees major change projects and also reviews policies, service guidelines and working practices to identify wasteful processes and ensure that procedures are efficient and effective. The team often uses post-implementation reviews to assess whether projects have been successful.

Since our last inspection, the PSNI has reduced inefficiencies. For example, it has withdrawn from a commercial contract to supply control room services and returned the staff to the PSNI, leading to a better alignment between staffing levels and demand. It has also improved how the control room assesses calls for service with the recent introduction of THRIVE. Since 2017, operators in the control room have received training in the application of THRIVE and we found good evidence that resourcing decisions were routinely based on the level of threat, harm and risk.

The service's good understanding of demand has benefited other major change projects, including the district policing review which the PSNI began in 2018. This review involved extensive consultation with police officers, staff, local communities, and [policing and community safety partnerships](#) (PCSPs). This highlighted local priorities and how policing services could be carried out in the future. This review was ongoing at the time of the inspection and we will monitor its progress with interest.

## Use of resources

The PSNI uses its resources well. Police forces spend around 80 percent of their budget on staffing, so it is vital the workforce is as productive as possible. Forces need to have access to the skills they need both now and in the future.

Forces also need to make good decisions about how to allocate their resources to get the best value for the public. This cannot be done in isolation, so forces must work with other police forces and local organisations to ensure they provide the best service to the public at the most appropriate cost.

### **Workforce capability**

We inspected how well the PSNI understands the skills it needs, the skills it has in the workforce, and what steps it is taking to ensure a match.

The service has developed a comprehensive understanding of the skills and abilities of its workforce through the PBR process. The qualifications, skills and capabilities of individual officers and staff are recorded on the HR system (called SAP). This information is available to local commanders and branch heads, and informs the deployment of officers and staff to specific operations and specialist roles.

The service has integrated its HR development plan with the PBR process. The PBR board meets monthly to monitor and oversee change programmes. Proposed changes in workforce numbers or profile must be presented for consideration by the PBR board. The board brings together senior leaders from across the organisation, including operational commanders and the heads of all headquarters departments and support functions. This allows broad consideration of resourcing decisions.

The PBR board is the single point of approval for all resourcing decisions and it applies a robust and challenging process to all applications for changes in workforce numbers or profile. The board's first consideration is how proposed changes align with the policing plan and the strategic priorities of the service. The board also considers the skill set required.

As we mentioned in our 2017 report, the service has an ageing workforce. At the time of inspection, around 20 percent of police officers were eligible to retire within three years. The organisation has surveyed all officers in their last two years of service to find out when they intend to retire.

The service continues to recruit new officers to fill existing vacancies and to increase the number of police officers, with intakes of probationer officers planned throughout the year. While this is good in the long term, it is having a short-term impact on local policing teams, many of which have high proportions of probationer officers. For example, many probationer officers are not qualified to drive police vehicles, and there is also a need for more experienced officers to act as tutors and mentors. There is also an increased demand on supervisors, responsible for the officers' development.

Despite this recruitment, several specialist departments are struggling with workload and capacity, including the rape crime unit, and the child abuse and cyber crime teams. The service is aware of this and plans have been made through the PBR process to increase resources in these critical areas.

Levels of sickness absence and the number of police officers on restricted duties continue to have a detrimental impact on both the operational capacity and the financial sustainability of the service. The PBR board considers the redeployment of officers on restricted duties when making resourcing decisions.

The service has developed new ideas and skills through collaboration with other institutions. For example, it has made links with Ulster University to offer paid placements to full-time students in a variety of support functions. This has brought in different perspectives and new skills, particularly in technology, and it also improves the employment prospects of the students. The service is now looking to extend this successful initiative to other universities across Northern Ireland.

In addition to the established workforce of police officers and police staff, the PSNI continues to use of contracted staff in several areas. These include security guards, public enquiry assistants and safety camera operators.

### **Leadership capability**

We inspected how well the PSNI understands the skills it needs and the skills it has in its leaders, and what steps it is taking to ensure that they match.

Launched in 2017, the PSNI leadership strategy provides a positive foundation for leadership development across the service. Designed to encourage and develop excellent leadership, the strategy was devised in consultation with staff. It identifies the leadership skills required at three levels:

- emerging leaders – sergeants and staff equivalents;
- established leaders – inspectors, chief inspectors and staff equivalents; and
- executive leaders – superintending ranks and staff equivalents.

The matrix of skills and capabilities required in each of these levels is reviewed on an annual basis to identify new or emerging requirements.

The service also has Talent Watch, a scheme designed to identify individuals with leadership potential. All staff are required to complete an individual performance review with their line manager each year. During that review either the member of staff or their line manager can identify them for inclusion in the Talent Watch programme. Anyone placed on the scheme then receives an individually-tailored development programme. The service is using an occupational psychologist from the Police College to further develop its approach to talent management.

The service has brought leaders in from outside the organisation and has been successful in recruiting police officers at various levels from other forces in England, Scotland and Wales as well as police staff leaders from the public and private sector.

The PSNI offers a good range of development opportunities for its leaders. These include internal and external work placements, coaching, mentoring and personality profiling. One such opportunity is the executive leadership programme, which provides intensive development and support for officers and staff considering applying for the most senior positions in policing, through the senior police national assessment centre process. During the inspection several staff told us that they had benefited from this programme.

The service has also developed an exchange programme with the police service in the Republic of Ireland, An Garda Síochána. Under the scheme, officers from both forces undertake a series of secondments in the other force over a 12-month period. The service also encourages and promotes secondments for police staff through the Northern Ireland civil service interchange programme. These initiatives have increased the skills, experience and capability of senior leaders.

### **Allocating resources**

We inspected how well the PSNI uses its understanding of demand to allocate its resources to provide the best service to the public. To assess this, we considered the extent to which the service understands what it can provide within its budget.

### **Prioritisation and cost**

The priorities for the PSNI are set out in the annual policing plan, developed by the Northern Ireland Policing Board in consultation with the service and the communities of Northern Ireland. The chief constable is held accountable by the policing board for the efficient and effective execution of the policing plan. Area commanders are required to produce annual local policing plans. These align with the service's overall plan and are devised in consultation with local communities.

The service prioritises its activity based on a good understanding of its current and likely future demand, the priorities established by the national and local policing plans and the continuing threat to national security.

The PBR board is an effective forum for prioritisation decisions. The service is now in the second year of the PBR process. It involves each department head and area commander identifying the current and likely future demand for their services. They set out the level of resources needed for their service, together with the associated costs. Area and departmental heads provide a range of costed options, from supplying the minimum statutory requirement, through to a more comprehensive service provision. This allows the service to make informed decisions based on cost and benefit. It also enables the service to prioritise the resourcing of different functions and services.

The PBR board includes members from support departments such as finance, HR, ICT, estates, and vehicle fleet. This means that the service has a very good understanding of the cost of its services and can make informed decisions in the face of competing demands.

## **Funding and longer-term investment**

The funding arrangements for the PSNI differ from those of forces in England and Wales. The service receives the bulk of its funding from the Department of Justice through the Northern Ireland Executive. Unlike forces in England and Wales it does not have the ability to raise funds through local council tax precept, nor can it accrue financial reserves.

The continued absence of an elected Assembly meant that public sector budgets in Northern Ireland for 2017/18 were allocated by senior civil servants. The annual nature of funding to the PSNI and continued uncertainty over future settlements mean that the service is severely restricted in its ability to plan for long-term investment. We would encourage a future elected Assembly to recognise the need for a longer-term approach to police funding.

The service has effective governance mechanisms in place to ensure that investment decisions are aligned to the strategic priorities set by the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the chief constable. The finance delivery group is responsible for ensuring the affordability and execution of the strategic plans set by the service executive board. All corporate investments are subject to project and programme management procedures, from the original outline business case through to execution and post-project evaluation. In addition to internal scrutiny, business cases for major capital projects are also reviewed by the Department of Justice. The PBR board monitors the progress of all corporate change projects monthly.

The service is supported by an information and communication services (ICS) department, which has a comprehensive digital strategy aligned to both workforce and service plans. The ICS department is a constituent member of the PBR board, which ensures that information technology is fully considered as part of any proposed changes or improvements. This provides some evidence of how technology is becoming integrated into the culture of the PSNI to improve service standards and drive efficiencies.

Recent ICS projects have included the digitisation of court files to enable more effective sharing with the public prosecution service. The service has also provided a mobile technology platform to allow officers to access police systems remotely while on patrol. However, the short-term, annual budget setting process within Northern Ireland limits the ICS department's ability to 'invest to save'.

## **Working with other organisations**

We inspected how well the PSNI works with other bodies. This can include working jointly with other police forces, local public sector organisations, the private and voluntary sectors. We looked at whether the service has a clear rationale for the decisions it has taken about how it works with other organisations, and whether it has a good understanding of how successful its joint working is.

The PSNI continues to work effectively with a wide variety of partners including other police forces and law enforcement agencies across the UK and the Republic of Ireland, as well as a range of local services partners. At the national level, for example, in tackling cross-border criminality between Northern Ireland and the

Republic, the service works with the National Crime Agency, HM Revenue & Customs, the Revenue Commissioners, and An Garda Síochána.

The service also works with the voluntary sector, on the Paramilitary Crime Task Force, through which they seek to educate young people on the dangers of becoming involved in organised crime and paramilitary activity.

The PSNI is a member of the independent advisory group on domestic abuse, working with the courts, public prosecution service, and support services including Women's Aid, Victim Support, the NSPCC, Men's Advisory Project and others, to develop a consistent and effective response to domestic abuse across Northern Ireland.

At the local level, each policing area is represented on the local policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs). These groups are chaired by the local council, and bring together services including health, education and local councils to tackle the priorities identified by local communities. PCSPs consist of political and independent members; the political members are appointed by the council and the independent members are appointed by the Northern Ireland Policing Board. The PCSPs are jointly funded by the Policing Board and the Department of Justice. The service actively supports PCSPs with dedicated resources, including community planning sergeants and a community engagement officer at chief inspector level, in each district.

In our report last year, we commented on the excellent work of the support hub in Derry City and Strabane. During this inspection we were pleased to see that there are now four support hubs established across Northern Ireland. By bringing together the police and other local public and support services, these hubs can identify those individuals and families in local communities who place the greatest demand on local services. This multi-agency approach has improved the sharing of information between agencies and allowed staff to work with these people to identify and address underlying issues. Early indications are that this approach has the benefit of reducing demands across several agencies, including the police.

## Planning for the future

The PSNI is planning well for the future. To be efficient, a police force needs not only to understand the present, but also to be able to make reasonable predictions about future demand, how its workforce will change and the impact upon partners. It needs to have adequate plans to meet the operational and financial problems facing the service in the future.

We inspected how well the PSNI analyses trends in its current demand to predict likely future demand. We also assessed the extent to which it has taken account of changing public expectations and technology. In addition, we examined how the service intends to work with other organisations and forces in the future.

## The planning process

The service has used the force management statement (FMS) approach to collating and analysing data to develop a good understanding of recent trends in demand, and to make predictions about likely future demand. For example, acquisitive crime, such as theft and burglary, has decreased in recent years, but the number of crimes involving vulnerable people has increased. The service anticipates that these trends are likely to continue but with an increase in cyber-related crime.

As part of the PBR process, all district commanders and heads of department were required to undertake an annual assessment of current demand for their services and predict likely changes in demand over the coming years. Alongside the FMS approach, the service continues to undertake an annual strategic assessment based on the latest available information. This is informed by the national strategic threat assessment, which identifies new and emerging threats. This co-ordinated approach, supported by information from its main partners, is designed to ensure that the service has the richest possible picture of existing demand and likely future trends.

Through the development of local community plans in conjunction with PCSPs, the service has developed a good understanding of public expectations and priorities. The [annual policing plan for 2017–18](#) was published by the Northern Ireland Policing Board, following consultation with the PSNI, interested parties and the public. The service has dedicated community engagement officers in each district who are responsible for ensuring that the service remains aware of changing priorities and future considerations.

The service has a good understanding of what advances in technology will mean both for policing and for criminals. It has recently invested in a dedicated cyber crime centre (CCC). The CCC was established to keep people safe through prevention, protection and enforcement. The centre has the expertise to investigate cyber crime as well as providing forensic and technical examination of mobile telephones and other digital devices seized by the PSNI. It has increased the service's capability and capacity to prevent and detect cyber crime and provides online information and advice to businesses and the public, through its [public-facing website](#).

## Leadership – succession planning

We inspected whether the PSNI has plans in place to recruit a workforce with the necessary skills, and to develop its future leaders.

In developing its leadership strategy, the service has improved its understanding of the skills and capabilities it needs in its future leaders. All chief officers have identified the skills and capabilities needed by leaders in each of their departments, both now and for the future.

The service has systems in place to identify those with leadership potential. Police officers and staff complete an annual performance review with their line manager. Individuals identified with leadership potential are put forward for the Talent Watch scheme, which offers bespoke support and development opportunities. In its first year, the scheme identified 44 police officers and 19 police staff for further support and development. This service intends to make this programme part of routine practice during its second year.

The service manages succession planning for both police officers and staff through its resource development group, reporting to the PBR board. The service also operates a fast-track scheme offering accelerated promotion from constable to sergeant for those junior officers identified as potential future leaders.

## **Recruitment**

On average, the service loses approximately 5 percent of police officers each year, mostly through retirement or resignation. The service plans to retain police officer numbers at just over 6,700 during 2018/19. To achieve this, plans are in place for regular intakes of new recruits during the year.

The service has established, through an officer survey, that up to 37 percent of detectives in the crime operations branch could choose to retire within two years. If this were to happen, there would be an obvious detrimental impact on the investigative capability and capacity of the department. The service should take steps to meet its future need for investigative capability and capacity.

The service also makes use of the apprenticeship scheme to recruit new skills. However, while the service is required to pay the apprenticeship levy, it is unable to recoup any costs, as the necessary enabling legislation has not been enacted, due to the prolonged absence of an elected Assembly in Northern Ireland.

## **Planning for future demand**

We inspected how adequate and realistic the PSNI's plans are, and to what extent it is planning to make savings in the future, including saving to invest in new systems and approaches.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board, in consultation with the public and the service, produces an annual policing plan. The plan sets out the strategic themes and outcomes for the service. The [strategic vision for the PSNI](#) is to "help build a safe, confident and peaceful society". This is to be achieved through the principle of "policing with the community". The policing plan contains nine strategic outcomes and supporting measures or indicators, against which the chief constable is held to account by the Policing Board.

The continuing absence of an elected Assembly in Northern Ireland meant that, at the time of the inspection, the service had not been provided with a substantive budget upon which to make strategic spending decisions. It had been given an indicative budget of £634m, equating to a 3 percent reduction in funding on 2016/17. The service had used this to develop its resourcing plans for 2017/18, which appeared to be realistic and built on sound assumptions. They have been tested internally by the finance delivery group and the service executive board, which includes non-executive members; and externally by the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Department of Justice.

The reduction in budget means that PSNI plans may lead to a change in how the service operates. Proposals to meet the budget reduction include fewer police officers; a review of district policing capability and capacity; and reductions in some support functions such as vehicle fleet, information technology, and estates.

## Savings

The PSNI has a good record of achieving budget savings over a number of years, including responding to a budget cut of £17.2m at the start of 2017–18.<sup>2</sup> In-year savings are returned to the Department of Justice. The introduction of the PBR process in 2016/17 achieved savings of over £20m in its first year.

The service has experienced several years of budget reductions, which has led to a continuing fall in the number of police officers. Some of this has been offset by an increase in the number of police staff, as the service identifies roles where police powers are not required.

Until there is a functioning elected Assembly in Northern Ireland, there is little prospect of public sector budgets being increased and therefore the service continues to plan for future budget constraints through the PBR process.

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<sup>2</sup> [\*Police Service of Northern Ireland annual report and accounts\*](#), PSNI, 2018, page 3.

# Effectiveness



# How effective is the service at keeping people safe and reducing crime?



## Good

We assess the PSNI's effectiveness as good. This is an improvement since our vulnerability inspection of 2016, when the service was judged to require improvement. It was also good in each of the following areas:

- preventing crime and tackling anti-social behaviour;
- investigating crime and reducing reoffending;
- protecting vulnerable people; and
- tackling serious and organised crime.

We found the following areas for improvement:

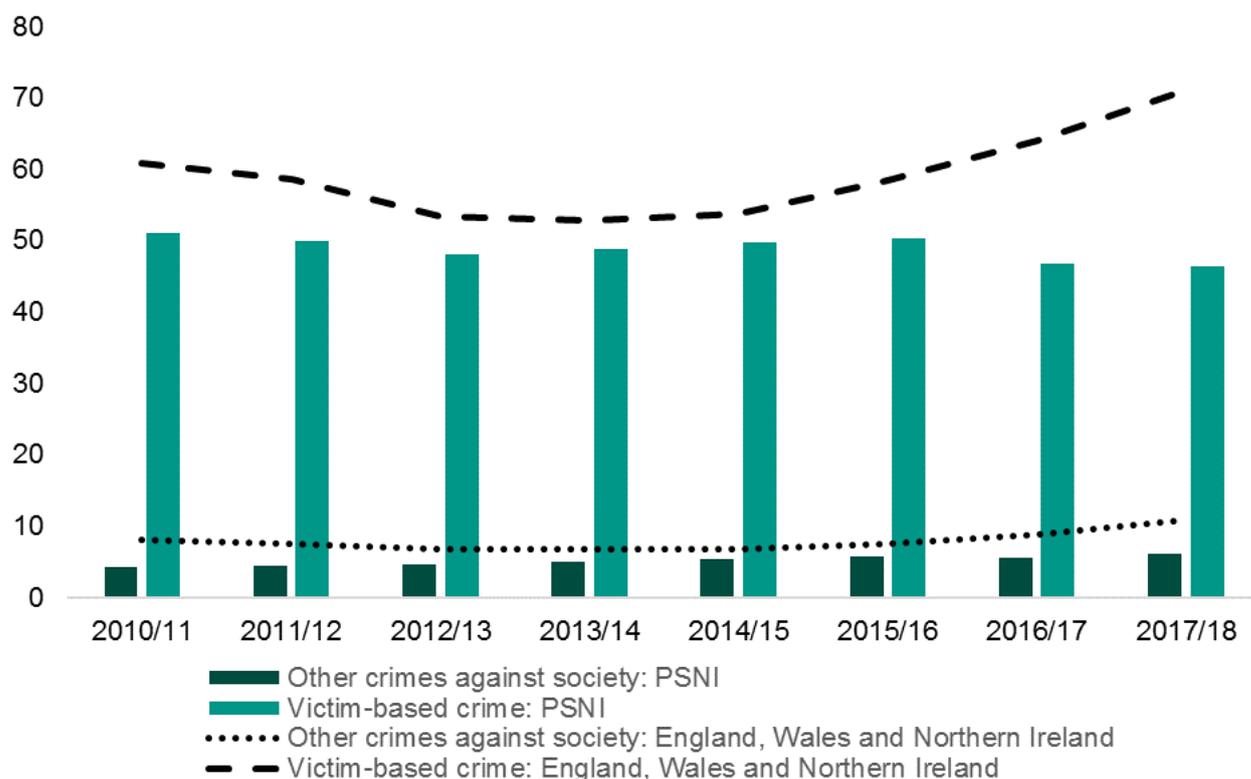
### Areas for improvement

- The service should consider making the DASH assessment available for officers to use on their mobile devices.
- The service should consider introducing a standardised referral form for vulnerable people to ensure greater consistency in the safeguarding support provided.
- The service should ensure that clear guidance is provided to all officers on when it expects officers to use body-worn video devices.
- The service should extend the provision of preventative health screening to officers in high-risk roles within the public protection branch.

## Preventing crime and tackling anti-social behaviour

The area was last inspected in 2017, when we judged the service to be good at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe.

**Figure 1: Police recorded crime per 1,000 population for PSNI, compared with England, Wales and Northern Ireland from 2010/11 to 2017/18**



The PSNI is good at preventing crime and tackling anti-social behaviour. In 2017, we found that:

- the recorded crime rate was relatively stable and below the recorded rate for England and Wales;
- the service had a good understanding of the threat and risk of harm within the communities it serves; and
- it took effective action to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour, working well with partner organisations to identify problems and respond early.

In 2017, we also found that the service's approach to problem solving was in its infancy and lacked consistency, and we identified two areas for improvement:

- The PSNI should ensure that frontline officers, particularly those in neighbourhood teams, consistently apply the service's problem-solving methodology.
- The PSNI should ensure that it can identify and record the lessons learned from problem-solving activities.

In this inspection we found that since 2017:

- The service had developed a training programme in conjunction with the Open University. The programme includes instruction on the service's approach to problem solving. At the time of this inspection, over 1,700 frontline staff had received this training.
- Lessons learnt from problem-solving activity are now monitored and disseminated by the 'what works' steering group.

## Investigating crime and reducing re-offending

The PSNI is good at investigating crime and reducing re-offending. In 2017 we found that officers and police staff in the call management centre applied the '[golden hour](#)' principles well, maximising the preservation of evidence. The standard of investigations was generally good, especially those undertaken by detectives in the more serious or complex cases. However, we also found the service could do more to improve the standard of volume crime investigations (like theft or criminal damage) by ensuring more effective supervision.

During this inspection we found investigating officers had access to a good range of investigative support, including forensic crime scene investigation. The service's cyber crime centre, supported by district eCrime support units, provided recovery of evidence from a range of digital devices. However, like forces across England and Wales,<sup>3</sup> the increased demand for these specialist services has resulted in a backlog, particularly in computer examinations. The service is aware of this and has plans in place to increase resourcing to meet the increased demand.

In our 2017 inspection we found that the service worked well with partner agencies to tackle prolific offenders and reduce re-offending. It had good systems in place to manage the threat posed by the most dangerous and sexual offenders, although again we found that the management of those cases categorised as lower risk needed improvement.

In 2017 we identified three areas for improvement:

- the service should improve the supervision of crime investigations, particularly in those cases investigated by uniformed officers;
- it should continue efforts to reduce backlogs in its forensic examination of digital devices in criminal investigations; and
- it should introduce measures to ensure the effective management of suspects circulated as 'wanted for arrest'.

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<sup>3</sup> [Online and on the edge: Real risks in a virtual world – An inspection into how forces deal with the online sexual exploitation of children](#), HMIC, 2015, page 24.

During our current inspection we found that in response to our 2017 inspection, the service has made these improvements:

- It has introduced a two-day training programme for operational sergeants. Most sergeants have completed the training, which covers investigation quality and file standards.
- It is training frontline staff to 'triage' digital devices, to assess the likelihood of evidence being recovered. This has led to a reduction in the number of devices submitted for forensic examination. The service has also increased the capacity of the district eCrime support units through additional resourcing.
- Senior managers now oversee the management of suspects and wanted persons through the 'wanted gold group'.

We will monitor progress on these areas for improvement in future inspections.

## Protecting vulnerable people and supporting victims

The PSNI is good at protecting vulnerable people and supporting victims. This is an improvement since we last inspected the service in our 2016 vulnerability inspection, when we judged the service to require improvement.

By applying the FMS approach to its assessment process, the service has gained a good understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability. The service is now good at identifying vulnerability at the first point of contact and providing an initial response according to the assessment of threat risk and harm.

The quality of investigation of crimes involving vulnerable victims is generally good and the most serious and complex crimes are investigated by accredited and experienced detectives.

The service works effectively with a wide range of partners to tackle vulnerability; however, partnerships do not work consistently across the 11 local council districts across Northern Ireland.

The chief constable has committed to "protecting and supporting the most vulnerable members of [the] community" as part of the PSNI's strategic co-operation with partner agencies and in line with the [Annual policing plan for Northern Ireland 2017–18](#).

The service defines a vulnerable person as someone in need of special care, support or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect.

The service has an established process of daily management meetings (DMMs) at which vulnerability is a standing agenda item. The DMM process involves senior leaders in each policing district and operational department reviewing and assessing current workloads, incidents of note, and incoming demand, to prioritise the deployment of resources. All the officers and staff we spoke to were aware that vulnerability was a priority and were able to articulate what it was and how they would respond to it.

The service uses the [National Intelligence Model](#) and a process of strategic and tactical intelligence assessment, co-ordination and task allocation. As part of the tactical intelligence assessment, each policing district identifies those people who make the most frequent calls for police service.

## **Identifying vulnerability**

We were encouraged to see that the service has continued to improve the way it identifies vulnerability at the first point of contact. This was particularly evident in the contact management centre, where training was made available to control room staff, in the identification of vulnerability and the application of the THRIVE model. We found good evidence that THRIVE was being correctly and routinely applied to all incoming incidents, at the appropriate threat level.

This was complemented by a system of primary and secondary checks on the accuracy of the assessment of calls for service. The application of THRIVE and the system of primary and secondary checks means the service has an effective system to identify repeat callers and victims at the earliest stage.

A small number of call-handling staff have received enhanced crisis communications training, which focuses on identifying and engaging effectively with the most vulnerable people at times of crisis. Those who had received this training were better equipped to identify vulnerable callers, particularly those experiencing mental ill-health. It would be beneficial if the PSNI extended this training to more frontline staff, including those in public enquiry offices and contact management roles.

Working with the Open University, the service has developed a training package to support the Policing with the Community programme. This modular course is available online, to all officers and staff, although it is intended for those working in local policing teams. The course includes a specific module on identifying and dealing with vulnerability. We spoke to several officers who had undertaken this training, all of whom felt that it had been beneficial in developing their understanding and response to vulnerable people.

## **Initial response**

The service generally responds quickly to incidents involving vulnerable people, including incidents of domestic abuse. We found that decisions on the required response were influenced primarily by the level of threat and vulnerability presented, rather than on resources.

Police officers attending incidents of domestic abuse are required to complete a DASH assessment. All the officers we spoke to understood the importance of doing this face to face with the victim at the time of the incident. Each DASH assessment is subject to supervisory review, before the incident can be finalised with the control room. A further review of the DASH assessment is then made by the central referral unit.

Staff in the central referral unit felt that the standard of assessments was generally good, and we reached the same view through a small dip-sample of DASH assessments. The system of supervisory and specialist review ensures that appropriate referrals to support agencies are made promptly.

Most officers felt they had received sufficient training to make correct assessments, although some expressed frustration at the bureaucracy involved in completing and submitting the forms. Officers attending domestic abuse incidents complete a handwritten DASH assessment and then telephone the crime recording unit to have the details input on the Niche records management system. The service should

consider making the DASH assessment form available for completion and submission on its mobile data platform.

The service has a policy of positive action in response to domestic abuse and we found good evidence that officers were aware of this. Sergeants routinely supervise the response to domestic abuse incidents. This ranges from discussing the response and proposed safeguarding measures with attending officers by mobile telephone or radio, to attending incidents in person. Many officers told us that sergeants would routinely attend incidents being dealt with by less experienced officers.

Social services and other interested parties involved in adult care, also confirmed that officers generally undertook appropriate initial safeguarding measures. Officers we met had a good understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities, and several referred to the Service Instruction, which sets out the responsibility on officers from the initial attendance, through the investigation process and beyond.

Responding to incidents that do not involve domestic abuse, the service does not have a standard form for referring vulnerable people to support agencies. Such referrals rely on individual officers submitting emails to the central referral unit. We found a lack of consistency in the quality of information in such referrals. The service should consider introducing a standardised referral form for vulnerable people to ensure greater consistency in the safeguarding support provided.

Since we last inspected the PSNI's response to vulnerability in 2016, the service has introduced body-worn video devices for frontline officers across Northern Ireland. Officers were generally positive about their introduction, and we heard examples of cases in which video evidence captured at the scene of domestic abuse incidents had been used to successfully prosecute perpetrators, even though the victim had declined to provide evidence at court. However, some officers were not sure when the devices should be used, citing the potential conflict with individuals' right to privacy. The service should ensure that clear guidance is given to all officers about when it expects officers to use the devices.

The service has combined intelligence from a range of sources to build up a profile of the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Northern Ireland. Many officers have received training to help them identify those children potentially at risk of exploitation. Together with social services, the PSNI has developed a joint standard risk assessment screening tool, to highlight young people at risk of exploitation. Specialist officers meet monthly with partner agencies (including social services) at the CSE risk management meeting, to review and monitor those at risk and develop individual support plans.

### **Mental ill-health**

The problems of mental ill-health are growing; as is society's understanding of the consequences of mental health conditions on the provision of public services. The impact of mental ill-health on policing across the UK is becoming more acute, requiring police forces to work with social services and health providers to respond more effectively to keep the most vulnerable safe. In Northern Ireland, drugs used to treat mental ill-health are prescribed at twice the rate as that in England and Wales.

The PSNI recognises the increasing demand it faces in dealing with mental health issues. At the time of the inspection, it had just launched a new strategy – Mental Health in Policing. The service has improved its knowledge and understanding of mental ill-health. For example, according to the service’s own analysis, it deals with around 60 incidents per day related to mental ill-health.

The service has appointed a strategic lead for mental health, who works closely with the five health trusts across Northern Ireland. The service helped draft and implement the wider ‘health in criminal justice’ strategy. Inspectors have been appointed in each policing district, responsible for promoting and developing the local partnership approach to tackling issues associated with mental ill-health.

Training for officers and staff in mental ill-health issues is inconsistent. We spoke to officers who had received training, but others had not. The service should make sure its training is delivered consistently.

Most police officers we spoke to, particularly frontline uniformed officers, said that they often spent extended periods of time looking after vulnerable people displaying signs of mental ill-health. For example, we were told that it is quite common for police officers to spend several hours, and often a full shift, escorting vulnerable people to hospitals, and waiting with them until appropriate health professionals can take responsibility. Police officers should not be left in this position for extended periods. The service is aware of this and is working with health trusts to find a solution.

The service continues to see a significant proportion of people coming into police custody displaying signs of mental ill-health. It has responded by providing custody sergeants and detention officers with ‘applied suicide intervention skills’ training, to improve the identification and response of those at risk of self-harm or suicide. Mental health professionals are employed to act as intermediaries in the custody suite and to support detainees experiencing mental ill-health.

We spoke with staff from mental health trusts, social services and the voluntary sector, who work with the PSNI on mental ill-health issues. They spoke in positive terms about the service, describing the PSNI as ‘the driving force’ behind partnership activity.

Except for the intermediaries in custody suites, at the time of our inspection, officers did not have easy access to advice or support from trained mental health professionals, either in the control room or in the form of a mental health triage scheme. At the time of inspection there was a plan to run a pilot scheme in July 2018, in one of the five health trust areas, as part of which mental health professionals would work two evenings a week to provide an on-street triage scheme. This initiative is limited in scope and the effectiveness of this pilot may benefit from future inspection. We support the PSNI’s intention to develop similar initiatives with other trusts across Northern Ireland.

## Investigating crimes involving vulnerable people

The service generally investigates crimes involving vulnerable victims to a good standard. Most investigations we looked at were allocated to officers with the appropriate skills and experience. In most cases, we found that investigation plans were being set, there was good evidence of supervisory oversight, and vulnerable victims were being kept informed of the progress of investigations.

Investigations into the most serious and complex crimes, such as rape, child abuse, child sexual exploitation and cases of high-risk domestic violence are allocated to officers in the public protection branch. All officers working in the branch are either accredited detectives, qualified to PIP<sup>4</sup> level 2, or are working to achieve accreditation. This means that staff undertaking the most complex investigations are suitably qualified.

Encouragingly, the proportion of crime investigations which result in a positive outcome (charge, summons or out of court action) in Northern Ireland remains higher than the rate in England and Wales.

Officers working in many of the specialist departments, including the rape and child abuse units, had unsustainably high workloads. In the rape crime unit, we found officers managing an average of over 20 active investigations each, while in the child abuse investigation team the average was over 30. Through the PBR programme, the service has already identified the need to increase resourcing in these areas. However, at the time of inspection the positive impact had yet to materialise.

Many staff, particularly those in the public protection branch, told us that the service's well-being provision had improved over the last 12 months. This indicates that the service recognises its duty of care to officers working in these highly stressful roles. It provides proactive, preventative occupational health screening for those working in high-stress roles in the intelligence branch. However, the same screening is not routinely provided for officers in the public protection branch. We think it should be, so we would urge the PSNI to extend preventative health screening to officers in these high-risk departments.

## Partnership working

The service works well with social services and other partner agencies to ensure appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable people. It plays a central role at the children's safeguarding board and in the adult safeguarding partnership.

To manage the risk posed by dangerous and sexual offenders, the service works with partners including the Probation Board for Northern Ireland; Northern Ireland Prison Service; local council health and social care departments; and voluntary organisations. As part of the [Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland](#) (PPANI), offenders are categorised according to the level of risk they present. Partners use

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<sup>4</sup> The [Professionalising Investigations Programme](#) (PIP) aims to ensure staff are trained, skilled and accredited to conduct the highest quality investigations. PIP level 1 – priority and volume crime investigations, PIP level 2 – serious and complex investigations, PIP level 3 – major investigations and PIP level 4 – strategic management of highly complex investigations.

the [Risk Matrix 2000](#) assessment model to categorise offenders from level 1 up to the most dangerous offenders at level 3. At the time of our inspection, there were 1,235 offenders at level 1, 97 at level 2 and 7 at level 3. All were being managed in the community.

The service is the lead partner in the [multi-agency risk assessment conference](#) (MARAC) process. MARACs are established in each local council area and meet monthly or fortnightly, according to demand. All victims of domestic abuse who are assessed as high risk are referred to the MARAC process. On receipt of a new referral the conference will review the initial safeguarding response and ensure that victims are provided with appropriate safeguarding. The MARAC process ensures there is an effective and co-ordinated response to support high-risk victims of domestic violence.

The partners involved in the MARAC process were generally supportive of the service. Many felt that the absence of independent domestic violence advocates, which are common in England and Wales, meant the voice of victims was not necessarily heard. Referrals to the MARAC can be made by the police or any other agency.

We also found evidence of effective partnerships at the local level, for example, the Belfast Partnership Group. This is a multi-agency group that brings together the city council, the police, and youth, probation and housing services. The aim of the group is to provide both proactive and reactive safeguarding support to those young people who are at risk of, or have been the victim of, paramilitary-style assaults.

In each of the 11 policing districts across Northern Ireland, the service is involved in the statutory PCSPs. This has led to the development of multi-agency support hubs in 4 of the 11 districts. These hubs bring together local statutory and voluntary service providers, who share information to identify those individuals and families who place the greatest demand on local services. Often the demands of these people on a single agency would be unlikely to lead to any intervention. However, by pooling their knowledge, partners can identify those who are most vulnerable and identify the most appropriate agency to work with them to resolve any underlying issues.

The longest-established hub is in the Derry City and Strabane district. According to data collated by the service, the clients who have been engaged with the hub for more than 12 months have made just over 25 percent fewer calls for service. This benefits local services by reducing the demand they face but, more importantly, targeted interventions can improve outcomes for vulnerable people. We encourage partners in other districts to engage in this collaborative activity.

## **Tackling serious and organised crime**

The PSNI is good at tackling serious and organised crime. In 2017, we found that the service had developed a good understanding of the threat and risk that serious and organised crime and terrorism posed to the communities of Northern Ireland.

The service had effective relationships with a wide variety of partners, including law enforcement agencies throughout the UK and the Republic of Ireland. It had effective processes in place to investigate, disrupt and dismantle organised crime groups (OCGs) and made good use of serious crime prevention orders to manage the most dangerous offenders. The service worked well to prevent, deter and divert people

away from involvement in terrorism, and serious and organised crime, making good use of a range of media to educate and inform local people and promote its success in tackling serious and organised crime.

In 2017 we also identified three areas for improvement:

- the service should consider adopting a tiered approach to the formal review of OCGs, in which tier 1 OCGs are reviewed monthly, tiers 2 and 3 OCGs reviewed quarterly and tier 4 OCGs reviewed every 6 months;
- it should work with the National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS) to secure direct access to the integrated ballistics intelligence database; and
- it should adopt the national scale (major, moderate, minor, none and negative) to measure its disruptive effect on organised criminals.

The service has considered these areas for improvement and it:

- is satisfied with its approach to the review of OCGs, which is more stringent than the tiered system used in England and Wales;
- has engaged with the Home Office and, at the time of this inspection, was providing training to officers to enable direct access to the NABIS system; and
- has decided not to adopt the national scale to measure its disruptive effect on organised criminals. However, we are pleased to see that the service has introduced a 'negative' assessment in its existing assessment mechanism.

This inspection has not examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the alternative approach PSNI is taking to reviewing OCGs and measuring levels of disruption. However, we judged the service's response to serious and organised crime to be good in 2017, and we will examine these areas for improvements again in the future.

# Conclusion

We assess PSNI's efficiency and effectiveness as good. There has been an improvement since our last inspection in 2017. The service has responded well to budgetary constraints and has been able to make savings whilst continuing to improve its ability to keep people safe.

The inspection identified that the service is inhibited in its ability to plan for long-term investment, with the absence of an elected Assembly and the present annual nature of funding settlements. We encourage a future elected Assembly to recognise the need for a longer-term approach to police funding.

The service has used the force management statement process to assist in assessing the demand for its services now and in the future, and the capacity to respond to this demand. PSNI has demonstrated that it has a good understanding of demand and is deploying its resources appropriately to meet its priorities.

The service is generally good at investigating crime and reducing re-offending, and we noted that there had been a positive response to most of the areas for improvement identified during our 2017 inspection.

This inspection has identified several areas for improvement related to ensuring sufficient future capacity and capability to meet investigative demand; and helping staff in their response to incidents of vulnerability, such as domestic violence.

The PSNI continues to maintain clear and effective governance, through appropriate structures. These include the service's executive board and its priority-based resourcing board.

The service has improved its understanding of threat, harm and risk, applying the principles of THRIVE to assess vulnerability and deploy the most appropriate resources.

PSNI has maturing partnership arrangements with social services, child safeguarding bodies, probation service and others. This inspection found evidence of good practice, particularly related to the development of multi-agency support hubs in 4 of the 11 policing districts of Northern Ireland. We encourage partners in other districts to engage in this collaborative activity.

The service is good at tackling serious and organised crime and responding to the demands of terrorism. In our inspection of PSNI in 2017, we highlighted three areas for improvement related to serious and organised crime. The service has chosen not to progress two of these areas for improvement in favour of alternative approaches. We will consider how effective these alternative approaches are during future inspections.

# Annex A – About the data

Data in this report is from a range of sources, including:

- Police Service of Northern Ireland;
- Home Office;
- Office for National Statistics (ONS); and
- our inspection fieldwork.

We set out the source of this report's data below.

## Methodology

### Data in the report

British Transport Police was outside the scope of inspection. Any aggregated totals for England, Wales and Northern Ireland exclude British Transport Police data, so will differ from those published by the Home Office.

### Population

For all uses of population as a denominator in our calculations, unless otherwise noted, we use ONS mid-2017 population estimates. This was the most recent data available at the time of inspection.

### Force in context

#### Calls for assistance

We collected this data directly from all 43 police forces in England and Wales. For PSNI, this data was taken from the PSNI public call data publication.

#### Recorded crime and crime outcomes

We took this data from the July 2018 release of the Home Office police recorded crime and outcomes data tables and the October 2018 PSNI release of recorded crime and November 2018 PSNI release of outcomes data. These data all cover the 2017/18 financial year period.

Total police-recorded crime includes all crime (except fraud) recorded by all forces in England and Wales (except BTP). Home Office publications on the overall volumes and rates of recorded crime and outcomes include British Transport Police, which is outside the scope of this inspection. So England and Wales rates in this report will differ from those published by the Home Office.

Police-recorded crime data should be treated with care. Recent increases may be due to forces' renewed focus on accurate crime recording since our 2014 national crime data inspection.

Other notable points to consider when interpreting outcomes data are listed below.

- Crime outcome proportions show the percentage of crimes recorded in the 12 months ending 31 March 2018 that have been assigned to each outcome. This means that each crime is tracked or linked to its outcome. So this data is subject to change, as more crimes are assigned outcomes over time.
- Under the new framework, 37 police forces in England and Wales provide outcomes data through the Home Office Data Hub every month. All other forces provide this data via a monthly manual return.

For a full commentary and explanation of outcome types please see the Home Office statistics, Crime outcomes in England and Wales: year ending March 2018.

### **Anti-social behaviour**

This data is taken from the PSNI anti-social behaviour statistical bulletin. The figures for England and Wales is taken from Home Office NSIR calls to service data.

### **Domestic abuse**

We collected this data directly from all 43 police forces in England and Wales. For PSNI, the figures were taken from the PSNI Domestic abuse Annual Trends 2004/05 to 2017/18 publication.

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