



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Crime inspection 2014

Devon and Cornwall Police

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How effective is the force at cutting crime?

Overall summary

Devon and Cornwall Police has clear strategic priorities in relation to crime prevention and anti-social behaviour. They are consistent with the priorities set by the police and crime commissioner and by the Peninsula Partnership, an umbrella body which includes all of the statutory partners within Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Partnership working is strong with evidence of effective joint working at all levels, this is especially so across neighbourhoods. The co-location of resources with partners is widespread and has led to better information sharing and action to resolve community issues. This is particularly prominent in relation to anti-social behaviour where joint working is aimed at addressing vulnerability, repeat incidents and safeguarding issues.

Investigations are generally of a good standard and conducted in a timely manner, with robust supervision, direction and scrutiny. A 'victim-centred service' is a stated aim of the force; initial contact with victims is good but HMIC found that the service is variable in the later stages of investigations.

Force leaders set and drive clear strategic priorities to reduce crime and prevent re-offending. Investigations of crime are of a good standard and victims generally receive an effective service. The force has made significant progress in clamping down on anti-social behaviour which has improved the quality of life for local people.

This year, HMIC undertook an inspection into the crime data integrity of all 43 police forces, to determine the extent to which police-recorded crime information can be trusted at a national level. HMIC has concerns about Devon and Cornwall Police's approach to crime recording, which is not as accurate as it should be. Individual force reports are available at <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/>.

How effective is the force at reducing crime and preventing offending?

Good

Effective processes are in place to ensure operational activity is aligned to the priorities set out in the police and crime plan.

Crime reduction and the prevention of re-offending are at the heart of police business in Devon and Cornwall.

A victim-centred approach is a stated priority for the force and this is routinely translated into operational activity.

The force could do more to establish a systematic approach to disrupt and deter the activity of organised crime groups (OCGs).

The force works well with partners. Through the sharing of information, joint analysis and case management, there is clear focus to prevent crime and protect the vulnerable.

How effective is the force at investigating offending?

Good

HMIC found that investigators' initial contact with victims is responsive and informative. However, in later stages of investigations, there is less assurance that standards are maintained.

The force works well with other agencies to manage 'prolific' and 'high harm' offenders and reduce the occurrences of re-offending.

Investigations are generally of a good standard, conducted in a timely manner with strong supervisory oversight.

Organisational learning is underdeveloped. It requires a more structured approach to ensure that a culture of continuous improvement becomes widespread in the force.

HMIC expresses concern about the capacity of the force to manage the volume of domestic abuse victim referrals.

How effective is the force at tackling anti-social behaviour?

Good

There are effective arrangements to identify repeat incidents of anti-social behaviour.

Neighbourhood beat managers and police and community support officers (PCSOs) have a sound appreciation of vulnerable victims in communities and the safeguarding provisions that are available to protect them.

There are effective arrangements in place to share information and provide early intervention to prevent the escalation of anti-social behaviour.

Introduction



This inspection looks at how effective police forces are at cutting crime. The public expects the police to reduce, prevent and investigate crime, bring suspects to justice and, in conjunction with other services and agencies, care for victims. To assess each force's effectiveness, we looked at three specific areas:

- How effective is the force at reducing crime and preventing offending?
- How effective is the force at investigating offending?
- How effective is the force at tackling anti-social behaviour?

Methodology

During our inspection we analysed data and documents from forces, and conducted in-force inspections. We interviewed the senior officers responsible for crime, neighbourhood policing and victim care in each force. We held focus groups with frontline police officers, investigators and police staff, and observed their activities first hand. We also reviewed 20 crime investigations in each force and interviewed heads of partner organisations such as local authorities. We focused on anti-social behaviour and the offences of: burglary dwelling; serious sexual offences; and violence with injury on this inspection. We chose to focus on these offences because they cover the areas of acquisitive and violent crime and the protection of vulnerable people. This has allowed us to make an assessment of how well the force treated the victim throughout the investigation – examining in particular how well officers gathered evidence and how well they were supervised.

Victims are at the heart of this inspection. Victims are entitled to a service from the police; this includes regular information about their case, an opportunity to provide an impact statement where relevant and to be consulted on potential criminal justice outcomes. When the police provide this service to victims, it increases victim satisfaction and builds trust and confidence in the police.

As part of this inspection, we considered how well forces deal with domestic abuse, alongside other offence types. HMIC published a report in March 2014 on how well forces tackled domestic abuse and provided support to victims. As a result of that inspection all forces were asked to provide an action plan setting out how they were improving services to victims of domestic abuse and we have reviewed the action plans developed by forces. The action plans have not informed the judgments made in these reports.

The crime inspection provides HMIC with the first opportunity to test whether the force's approach to improving how it tackles domestic abuse is beginning to have an effect and this forms part of our overall assessment of the force.

How effective is the force at reducing crime and preventing offending?

HMIC looked at how the leadership of the force deploys its resources to reduce the volume of crimes being committed, maximise the quality of victim contact, and ensure that the force focuses on community priorities while mitigating national threats.

We looked at how the force prevents crime, how it uses police tactics such as stop and search powers to prevent and detect crime and reduce offending. We also looked at how the police work with other agencies such as social services to reduce crime.

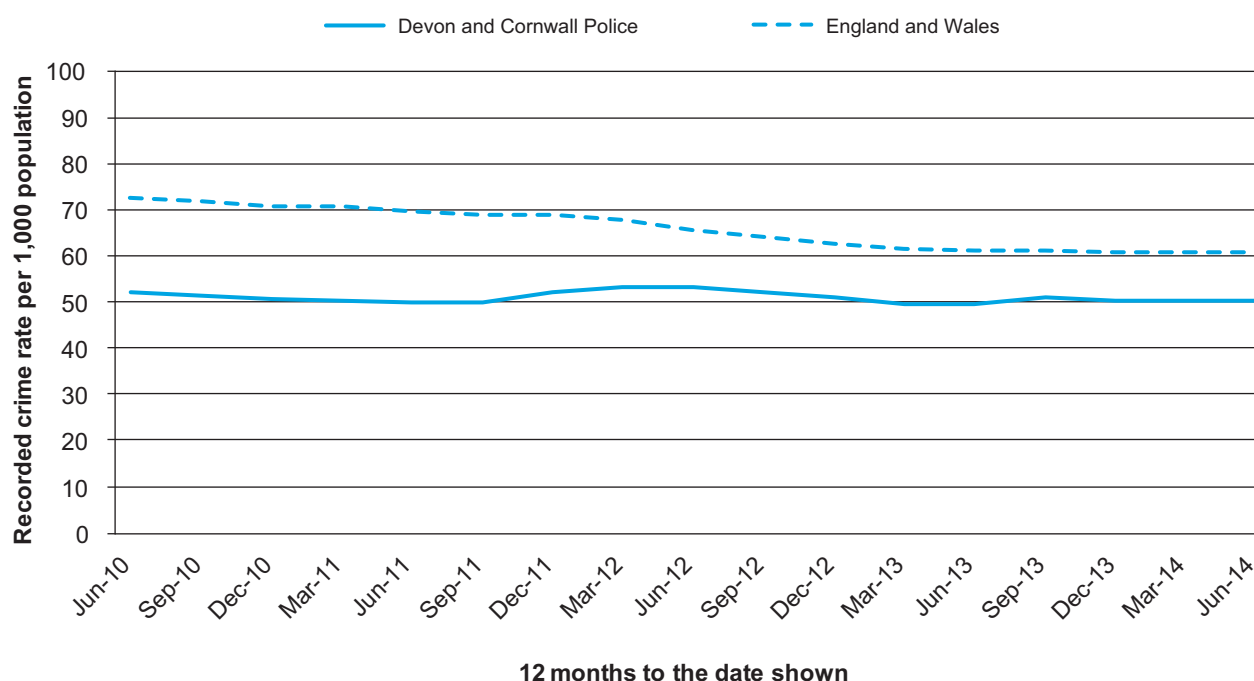
Crime

In 2010 the Home Secretary set a clear priority for the police service to cut crime. When compared with the 12 months to June 2010, recorded crime (excluding fraud) in the 12 months to June 2014 reduced by 4 percent in Devon and Cornwall compared with a reduction of 16 percent across all forces in England and Wales.

Over this period, victim-based crime (i.e., crimes where there is a direct victim such as an individual, a group, or an organisation) decreased by 6 percent in Devon and Cornwall, compared with a reduction of 16 percent across England and Wales.

Looking at the 12 months prior to the end of June 2014; recorded crime (excluding fraud) in Devon and Cornwall increased by 1 percent. This is compared with a 1 percent reduction across England and Wales.

Figure: Recorded crime rate (per 1,000 population) between June 2010 and June 2014.



By looking at how many recorded crimes and incidents of anti-social behaviour occur per 1,000 population, we get an indication of how safe it is for the public in that police area. The table below shows crime and anti-social behaviour rates in Devon and Cornwall (per 1,000 population) compared with the rest of England and Wales.

12 months to June 2014	Devon and Cornwall Police rate (per 1,000 population)	England and Wales total rate (per 1,000 population)
Crime excluding fraud	50.1	60.7
Victim-based crime	43.1	53.9
Sexual offences	1.3	1.2
Violence with injury	6.5	5.9
Burglary in a dwelling*	4.3	8.9
Anti-social behaviour incidents*	27.2	36.8

***Note that anti-social behaviour data is for the 12 months to March 2014 and the rate for burglary in a dwelling is the rate per 1,000 households, not population.**

We have chosen these types of crime to give an indication of offending levels in the force area. We are not judging the effectiveness of the force on recorded crime rates only. For information on the frequency of other kinds of crimes in your area, go to www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/crime-and-policing-comparator

Devon and Cornwall's detection rate (for crimes excluding fraud) for the 12 months to the end of March 2014 was 25 percent which was broadly in line with the figure of 26 percent for England and Wales.

The new crime outcomes framework was introduced in April 2014. It replaces a previous framework for recording how the police finalise investigations through what was known as 'sanction detections' (e.g. charges and/or summons). The new crime outcomes framework is designed to support police officers to use their professional judgment to ensure a just and timely outcome which reflects the harm to the victim, the seriousness of the offending behaviour, the impact on the community, and which deters future offending. Data on the full range of outcomes achieved as a result of investigations (not just detections but also, for example, community resolutions such as mediation known as restorative justice) will be available from July 2015 and used in future HMIC inspections.

Meeting the needs of the community

HMIC found the force has effective relationships with statutory partners throughout Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. This partnership is referred to as the Peninsular Partnership and provides the structure for sharing information and the setting of joint priorities. The force conducts a strategic assessment based on threat, harm and risk which is completed in tandem with the peninsular planning cycle. This is an effective mechanism which ensures that all public sector service providers address locally identified priorities in unison.

The office of the police and crime commissioner has placed strong emphasis on prioritising those crimes that cause the greatest harm, particularly to the most vulnerable members of society. In support of this priority the police and crime commissioner has encouraged greater reporting from victims who are reluctant to come forward or are likely to mistrust the service they receive. At the time of inspection, there had been an increase in the numbers of people reporting sexual offences.

The force and the office of the police and crime commissioner are working together on a victims' commissioning project to provide an improved service for victims in Devon and Cornwall. The force has also completed a self-assessment to evaluate the quality of its current services to victims and has concluded that the establishment of a dedicated victim care unit will provide a better service.

Quality of victim contact

HMIC found that consideration of vulnerability and safeguarding is integral to daily decision-making and a consistent theme in the force process for assigning tasks. There are effective procedures in place for call handlers to identify risk factors associated with callers when contact is first made with the force. A dedicated risk manager reviews the service provided to victims. This reinforces the risk assessment procedure and has previously been commended by HMIC.

A range of other checks and balances are in place in the force control room to protect victims. When calls are received on the '999' or '101' system which do not amount to an allegation of crime, supervisors still review the circumstances to assess if the caller is vulnerable. This will, for example, ensure that people being subjected to anti-social behaviour receive an appropriate response from the police.

An important measure of the impact of changes to service delivery for the public is how satisfied victims are with the overall service they receive when they seek police assistance. In the 12 months to the end of June 2014, Devon and Cornwall Police had a victim satisfaction rate of 84.3 percent (± 1.5 percent) which is broadly in line with the satisfaction rate in England and Wales of 85.0 percent (± 0.2 percent). Its current rate is broadly in line with the 84.2 percent (± 1.6 percent) recorded for Devon and Cornwall Police in the previous year.

Use of police tactics

There are effective procedures in force to align resources to threat, harm, risk and demand. We found that the daily management meetings (DMM) and force daily (FDT) meetings for assigning tasks follow a consistent agenda focusing on incidents of significance, vulnerability and reviewing resource allocation. At neighbourhood level locally identified priorities are reviewed over the longer term through targeted intervention meetings (TIMs) and local partnerships review the safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable victims.

The force's approach to dismantling and disrupting organised crime groups (OCGs) lacks structure and a shared understanding of responsibilities and expected outcomes. In addition we found that where officers had been allocated management of OCGs at neighbourhood level, they received no training or guidance regarding their roles. The force is aware of these shortcomings and has plans to address them.

There are also strong links with primary and secondary schools. Officers share information with schools and contribute to action plans to support children who are likely to be drawn into criminality and offending behaviour.

Partnership working and information sharing

The force is regarded as a valued and trusted partner within the Peninsula framework. Representatives from organisations we spoke to were particularly complimentary about the decision to second three superintendents into council community safety units. HMIC also saw good evidence of the force and the councils engaging on joint analytical work to identify the priorities set in the peninsula strategic assessment (PSA).

Local partnerships also operate effectively to identify crime trends, put in place early interventions to prevent escalation, and safeguard victims. The 'ViST' pilot in Torbay is a good example of the use of a joint vulnerability assessment to identify the best available support measures to protect victims. 'Blurred Lines' is a university-based initiative to heighten understanding of rights and responsibilities in the law relating to sexual offences. There is also effective joint working with 'Sure Start' which is identifying unreported crimes committed against black and Asian women who have been too frightened to come forward to the police.

Domestic abuse

In March 2014 HMIC published the results of its inspection of 43 forces on the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic violence, with a focus on outcomes for victims and whether risks to victims are adequately managed. This included clear recommendations for each force about improvements it should make. As a result of this inspection all forces were required to produce and publish an action plan setting out the steps they were taking to improve the services to victims of domestic abuse. This plan should demonstrate that HMIC recommendations are being addressed and also explain how:

- the leadership will ensure the changes necessary and hold the right people to account;
- the police response when a victim first contacts them (by a 999 call or by visiting a police station) and when they first attend the scene of the incident is improved;
- the force will ensure there is a high quality investigation of all domestic abuse crime;
- victims will be properly supported and offenders properly managed; and
- the training and learning provided to officers ensures they can give the best available response to the victim.

HMIC has made an initial consideration of the plan submitted by Devon and Cornwall Police. We found that the plan sets out how the force is improving the service to victims of domestic abuse. HMIC found that the action plan outlines activity which is in line with the agreed national priorities for forces outlined above. The plan provides good evidence of the work the force is carrying out to improve its response to domestic abuse. The activity evidenced responds to the specific issues raised by HMIC.

The crime inspection provided us with our first opportunity to test whether changes in the force's approach to domestic abuse were beginning to have a positive effect.

During the inspection HMIC found that, while domestic abuse was a clear priority for the force and police and crime commissioner, there was a lack of consistent service provided to victims and some significant risks in the way the force operates. We found evidence that Devon and Cornwall had responded to previous concerns raised by HMIC, however, some staff and partners felt that in certain areas, service to victims has not improved. It is recognised that the force intends to provide a better service to victims through the establishment of the sexual offences and domestic abuse investigation teams (SODAIT), however the SODAIT project drew adverse comment from some officers and partner service providers. Concerns included too little consultation, a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities and the capacity of the new unit to consider referrals rapidly enough.

Recommendations

- Within three months Devon and Cornwall Police should ensure that there is clarity of ownership and responsibility in relation to tackling organised crime groups. Relevant staff should be made aware of the tasks they need to perform in order to disrupt and dismantle the group's criminal activity particularly at local level.
- Devon and Cornwall Police should immediately review the operation and resourcing of the sexual offence and domestic abuse investigation teams and the capacity of domestic violence officers to conduct the risk assessments in a timely manner. By January 2015 the force should have commenced implementation of a plan to improve service in relation to its ability to investigate and respond to victims of domestic assault and to risk assessing domestic abuse referrals.

Summary

Good

- Effective processes are in place to ensure operational activity is aligned to the priorities set out in the police and crime plan.
- Crime reduction and the prevention of re-offending are at the heart of police business in Devon and Cornwall.
- A victim-centred approach is a stated priority for the force and this is routinely translated into operational activity.
- The force could do more to establish a systematic approach to disrupt and deter the activity of organised crime groups (OCGs).
- The force works well with partners. Through the sharing of information, joint analysis and case management, there is clear focus to prevent crime and protect the vulnerable.

How effective is the force at investigating offending?

HMIC looked at the range of police tactics and powers used by the force to investigate offending, including how investigations are conducted, whether persistent offenders are diverted from crime and how people vulnerable to repeat crime are supported. We looked at how the force learns from experience in order to improve professionalism in operational practice and leadership.

Vulnerability, risk and victims

The police and crime commissioner and the chief constable have set an objective to be a 'victim-centred' force. This has been reinforced through a training package for all staff but a thorough understanding of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime was not seen everywhere.

HMIC found that initial contact with victims is good but the quality of the 'follow-up' service to victims is less reliable in the latter stages of investigations. Partners reported that, in some cases, repeat victims are reluctant to report crimes to the force on the basis of their previous experience. The force has recognised this as an area for improvement and the formation of the victim care unit in April 2015 is planned to bring in the necessary improvements.

Under current arrangements, victims who contact the force three times in the previous three months are provided with additional support. This centres on action plans that are delivered through neighbourhood policing teams and are monitored through a neighbourhood harm reduction register.

The force provides a 'You matter, we care' leaflet for officers to give to victims. This signposts other organisations that can provide further support. This is reinforced with an additional directory on the force's website which guides victims to specialist services provided by councils and charitable organisations. A review of case files also revealed that the force is making best use of 'victim personal statements' and 'special measures' to provide further support to the most vulnerable. Both of these are 'entitlements' of victims which are mandated by the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. They make provision for victims to explain such things as the trauma they have experienced and allow them to give evidence by video link if they feel particularly intimidated.

Investigation

HMIC found that the force has a clear grading and deployment policy to ensure that officers will attend those crimes that are likely to have a significant impact on the victim. We also found evidence of sergeants allocating investigations of crime in a manner which matches the skills and experience of investigators with any risk factors relevant to victims.

The force has two training programmes which aim to raise standards of investigation and the quality of prosecution files; the 'bringing offenders to justice' development course and the 'gatekeepers' course. The former is designed to maximise investigative opportunities and the latter, aimed at supervisory staff, is to ensure that prosecution files are 'case ready' when they are passed to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). An examination of case files revealed that available evidence is being secured at crime scenes, offenders are being arrested promptly and witness statements are completed to a good standard. The training programmes have played a key role in driving up standards.

HMIC assesses that investigations are generally of a good standard; they are conducted in a timely manner, directed towards satisfactory conclusions and subjected to rigorous supervision. The only shortcoming is an inconsistent use of investigation plans which is evident in some areas more than others.

Tackling repeat and prolific offenders

The force has a well-established and systematic procedure to manage criminals who persistently re-offend or who are likely to cause the most harm in society. The procedure is referred to nationally as the integrated offender management (IOM) programme. In Devon and Cornwall the programme is referred to as 'Turnaround'. The 'Turnaround' model has previously been identified as good practice by HMIC and it has recently been strengthened by the addition of housing associations and the voluntary sector. These organisations now work alongside the police, councils and the probation service in providing effective measures to break into the offending cycles of prolific and dangerous criminals.

It is recognised that IOM is a costly, resource-intensive way of curbing offending behaviour and is focused exclusively on the most harmful cohort of offenders. However it is encouraging that the force is putting the IOM principles to effective use in other successful projects. Examples include a project in South Devon where housing support is given to the homeless who are routinely involved in shoplifting. Collaboration with a number of health trusts has led to joint working between the police and mental health nurses. Better screening of detainees in custody centres and identifying the immediate needs of individuals suffering from mental health issues are helping vulnerable individuals move away from crime.

Learning from experience

Organisational development and continuous improvement lack structure and rigour. The corporate procedure to identify learning and disseminate best practice across the force is in its infancy. This is referred to as the 'Learning the Lessons' process and has begun to catalogue case studies that may be relevant to the force. As yet, however, there appears to be little means to communicate important issues or include them in corporate training cycles.

There were examples at a local level, of leaders taking responsibility for the continuing professional development of their staff, for example, a recent seminar in Cornwall for detectives provided expertise in relation to human trafficking investigations and the use of new legislation to obtain domestic violence protection orders (DVPO) and domestic violence protection notices (DVPN). In addition, neighbourhood teams in some areas reported receiving safeguarding training and informal input on the new anti-social behaviour legislation.

Most opportunities to seek out organisational learning and continuous improvement appeared fragmented. Where they do exist they appear to fit more with a 'bottom up' approach as opposed to a structured organisational drive towards improvement.

Recommendations

- Within three months, Devon and Cornwall Police should develop and commence the implementation of an action plan to improve the quality of victim service and contact which will ensure that:
 - (a) investigating officers and police staff are aware of the standards required within the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and have the professional skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties;
 - (b) supervisors know what is expected of them in driving up standards;
 - (c) there is appropriate monitoring and oversight of quality and timeliness of victim service and contact; and
 - (d) feedback from victims is used to improve the service provided.

- Within six months, Devon and Cornwall Police should ensure that there are methods in place to:
 - (e) systematically review and evaluate the benefits from both current tactics and new crime fighting and anti-social behaviour initiatives;
 - (f) systematically capture learning and good practice in crime prevention and local problem solving; and
 - (g) share learning and good practice across the force.
- Within three months, Devon and Cornwall Police should review the operation of the learning and development function in relation to the prioritisation and coordination of requirements and by March 2015 the force should commence implementation of an action plan to improve the service provided.

Summary

Good

- HMIC found that investigators' initial contact with victims is responsive and informative. However, in latter stages of investigations, there is less assurance that standards are maintained.
- The force works well with other agencies to manage 'prolific' and 'high harm' offenders and reduce the occurrences of re-offending.
- Investigations are generally of a good standard, conducted in a timely manner with strong supervisory oversight.
- Organisational learning is underdeveloped. It requires a more structured approach to ensure that a culture of continuous improvement becomes widespread in the force.
- HMIC expresses concern about the capacity of the force to manage the volume of domestic abuse victim referrals.

How effective is the force at tackling anti-social behaviour?

HMIC looked at how the force prevents and tackles anti-social behaviour; in particular the way victims are treated. We looked at the quality and consistency of victim contact across the force and whether victims of anti-social behaviour were dealt with in a comparable way to victims of other crimes.

Community contact and victim care

HMIC found effective systems and local engagement in the identification and support of victims of anti-social behaviour. There are also effective arrangements to identify repeat incidents of anti-social behaviour at the first point of contact. We found that neighbourhood beat managers and PCSOs had good knowledge of victims that had been persistently targeted in their communities and were involved in safeguarding plans to support them. Safeguarding plans are recorded on the force crime reporting system and are used effectively to draw in support from external organisations, for example social landlords.

The neighbourhood harm reduction register is refreshed every three months and identifies repeat incidents of anti-social behaviour. Details of repeat victims are circulated to neighbourhood teams and police inspectors draw in external organisations to ensure effective case management to prevent escalation and reduce re-offending.

The force is using a range of communication methods to engage and listen to the community. Along with the use of Facebook and Twitter at the neighbourhood level, the force is increasingly using the 'Have your say' discussions and has re-launched the 'police and community together' (PACT) forums to listen to communities. These meetings identify the community's top priorities which then become the focus of operational activity. In addition there is evidence of PCSOs conducting surgeries in supermarkets, libraries, schools and shops as alternative venues.

The practice of abstracting neighbourhood officers for other duties within the force was criticised by partner organisations and the officers themselves. Partners consistently commented on the value of neighbourhood beat managers and PCSOs especially in relation to their understanding and identification of what matters most to local people. HMIC believes the abstraction of resources may have a detrimental impact on the force's ability to provide effective neighbourhood policing and respond to anti-social behaviour.

Partnership working

Anti-social behaviour is a priority in the PSA with partners and the force providing effective leadership to deliver greater consistency and effective interventions. Partnership analysts conduct research and produce profiles of emerging issues to prioritise activity and the allocation of resources.

At a neighbourhood level, effective arrangements exist to share information, provide a cohesive response and put in place early interventions to prevent escalation. A range of joint working mechanisms assess risk and prioritise action. These meetings also review the effectiveness of tactics and powers e.g., anti-social behaviour contracts (ABCs) and orders (ASBOs), and have a clear focus on preventing victimisation and diversion.

Partners consistently expressed their appreciation for the support provided by the force's legal department to progress anti-social behaviour cases.

Improving services to the public

In the 12 months to March 2014, Devon and Cornwall Police recorded 46,033 incidents of anti-social behaviour. This is a reduction of 1 percent against the previous 12 months.

HMIC found evidence of the force putting in place additional measures to identify newly settled and hidden communities in a drive to support victims. In particular the force has developed strong ties with the Kurdish, Polish and Muslim communities across the two counties. Dialogue with these communities is both structured and sensitive. In many cases faith workers have been important in drawing communities closer to the police.

The use of restorative justice as an alternative to prosecution is widespread in Devon and Cornwall Police. The force has invested in training staff for this role and the dedication it has shown in avoiding the unnecessary criminalisation of young people is held in high regard by partners.

Recommendation

- Within three months, Devon and Cornwall Police should review the abstraction of neighbourhood beat managers and PCSOs to assess the impact on its ability to deliver effective neighbourhood policing and tackle local problems.

Summary

Good

- There are effective arrangements to identify repeat incidents of anti-social behaviour.
- Neighbourhood beat managers and PCSOs have a sound appreciation of vulnerable victims in the neighbourhood and the safeguarding provisions that are available to protect them.
- There are effective arrangements in place to share information and provide early intervention to prevent the escalation of anti-social behaviour.

What each judgment means

HMIC uses four categories for making judgments, two are positive and two are negative. The categories are:

- outstanding;
- good;
- requires improvement; and
- inadequate.

Judgment is made against how well the force cuts crime. In applying the categories HMIC considers whether:

- the way the force is cutting crime and reducing offending is good, or exceeds this standard sufficiently to be judged as outstanding;
- the force requires improvement in the way it cuts crime, and/or there are some weaknesses; or
- the force's effectiveness at cutting crime is inadequate because it is lower than is expected.