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in the public interest

# Crime inspection 2014

Essex Police

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# How effective is the force at cutting crime?

## Overall summary

Essex Police has significantly re-organised how it delivers policing within the county. The new model moves resources and accountability away from central control and out to the local policing areas. It is part of the force's response to austerity, with HMIC previously assessing that the force was responding well to the financial challenges it faces.

The force works well with partners to reduce and prevent offending and to tackle anti-social behaviour. It has made great progress in improving services to victims of crime and anti-social behaviour. Essex Police needs to continue these efforts to ensure that the improvements become the norm in terms of the day-to-day approach that police officers and staff take towards victims.

There is clear evidence of a commitment by the force and its staff to prevent crime and reduce offending. The force has taken significant steps to increase its ability to identify and deal with those victims of crime who are particularly vulnerable.

Essex Police faces challenges in respect of levels of crime. The force needs to do more to improve its standards of investigation and supervision of investigators, and to improve the training and professional expertise of its staff. The way that it responds to calls for the service from the public requires improvement.

While anti-social behaviour is not articulated as a specific force priority within the force's *Plan on a Page*, it is implicit across all relevant areas of the plan and we found evidence of good work taking place in the neighbourhood teams to tackle anti-social behaviour although more could be done to learn from what works and to share good practice.

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 found Essex Police's approach to crime recording is good, with a high degree of accuracy. Individual force reports are available at <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/>

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

#### Good

The force has strong and effective partnership working arrangements that contribute to a range of crime prevention and reduction initiatives.

Force and community priorities are clear and understood by operational officers, with evidence that they direct policing activity.

HMIC found that the force's ability to measure the impact of its activities and to learn from what has worked is limited. The force has recognised this and is starting to develop better ways to evaluate activities.

### How effective is the force at investigating offending?

#### Requires improvement

Officers contact and update victims of crime appropriately and in a timely fashion.

The integrated offender management process is well understood, accepted by all, and effective.

Investigations are not of a good enough quality and there is a lack of effective supervisory scrutiny or review. There is limited evidence of the use of investigation plans. Domestic abuse investigations are subject to a more rigorous approach.

Limited evidence of effective identification and disruption of organised crime groups indicates that prevention and disruption opportunities are missed.

The force faces significant challenges in training and accrediting staff to the agreed national standard for investigation to improve standards.

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

#### Good

Although not articulated as an explicit force priority, there is strong evidence of good partnership working to tackle and prevent anti-social behaviour, with a number of initiatives across the force.

The force engages well with communities to understand what they want and need.

We found a visible neighbourhood policing team presence, with good evidence of programmes to divert young people or those at risk away from crime or anti-social behaviour. The force should ensure that this strong neighbourhood approach is not diminished as a result of further force restructuring.

The force's two anti-social behaviour recording systems duplicate each other unnecessarily and pose a risk to the management of incidents.

# 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.

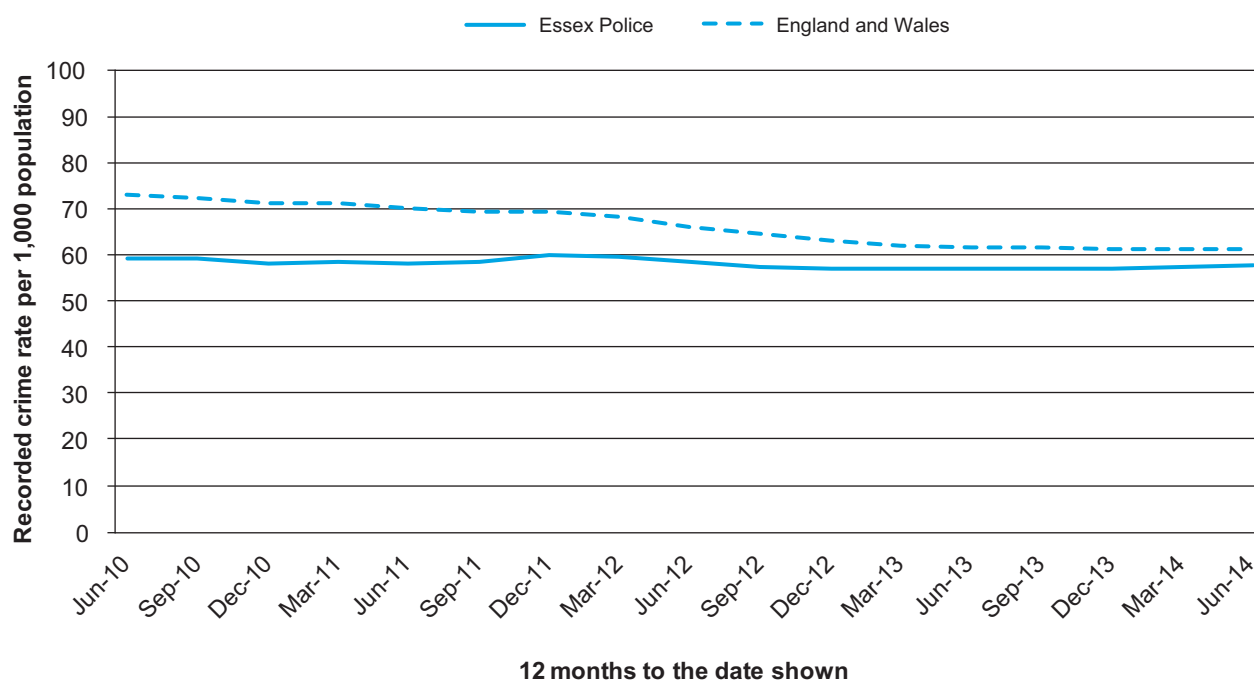
## Crime

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 2 percent in Essex 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 2 percent in Essex, compared with a reduction of 16 percent across England and Wales.

During the 12 months prior to the end of June 2014, recorded crime, (excluding fraud), in Essex increased by 2 percent, 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 Essex (per 1,000 population) compared with the rest of England and Wales.

12 months to June 2014	Essex Police rate (per 1,000 population)	England and Wales total rate (per 1,000 population)
Crime excluding fraud	57.2	60.7
Victim-based crime	51.7	53.9
Sexual offences	1.1	1.2
Violence with injury	5.6	5.9
Burglary in a dwelling*	10.3	8.9
Anti-social behaviour incidents*	30.7	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](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/crime-and-policing-comparator)

Essex's detection rate, (for crimes excluding fraud) for the 12 months to the end of March 2014, was 26 percent, which was in line with the 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

The force's Plan on a Page document sets out its core values, principles and priorities, and is published. There is good knowledge of this document amongst supervisors but less so among constables and other frontline staff.

The priorities laid out in the Plan on a Page document are followed in the daily pacesetter meeting; this meeting discusses incidents and reported crime, and allocates resources according to the priorities of the force and the risks to the public. HMIC found this to be an effective way to allocate resources to crime prevention and dealing with incidents. A good illustration of this is Operation Insight, which uses analysis and a range of preventive tactics to reduce dwelling burglary by targeted or hotspot patrols, visiting neighbouring premises and giving crime prevention advice, (also known as cocooning). Since its introduction, the force says it has seen a 9.8 percent reduction in burglary. This linking of intelligence, prevention and detection activity appears to be effective. Other preventive work allocated at the pacesetter meetings includes a focus on specific areas of the night-time economy to reduce alcohol fuelled anti-social behaviour and assault.

The force consults widely and effectively with its communities through a number of methods including extensive use of social media and a system called Essex community messaging that allows for two-way exchange of information.

## Quality of victim contact

The force has made a significant investment in training its staff in the requirements of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and has a stated intention to improve victim and customer care and contact. We found clear evidence of a good understanding by frontline staff of the need to support victims appropriately from the outset and also a good understanding of vulnerability. This has been assisted by recent improvements to the question set and drop-down menu that help call-takers readily identify if a person is vulnerable when answering calls for service from the public. By getting this right at the outset victims are more likely to get a better service from the police. Support from the force or partner service providers should then be on hand to address any immediate needs and continue throughout the course of the investigation.

Staff make good use of victim contracts and there is evidence, supported by our file review and examination of live cases, of victims being updated about the progress of an incident in a timely fashion. There is evidence of supervisory review of this, but a number of officers expressed concern that this is becoming a computer-generated 'tick box' exercise rather than an addition to the quality of victim care. The force should continue to monitor this, as there is potential for it to undermine the good progress that has been made so far.

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, Essex Police had a victim satisfaction rate of 82.4 percent ( $\pm 1.6$  percent), which is lower than the satisfaction rate in England and Wales of 85.0 percent ( $\pm 0.2$  percent). Its current rate is higher than the 79.8 percent ( $\pm 1.7$  percent) recorded for Essex Police in the previous year.

## Use of police tactics

The force has a range of partner and community forums to inform and promote crime prevention activity e.g., a rural crime forum and a business crime forum, both chaired by the police and crime commissioner, which has led to the exchange of information in relation to theft from retail premises. These forums involve the direct allocation of tasks to partner agencies and contribute to an effective and co-ordinated manner of working.

There is some evidence that the force has begun to learn lessons at senior level, and of efforts to introduce independent academic evaluation of new projects. This includes senior detective training and development. There is limited evidence that this is influencing changes to operational practice or informing operational staff. There is no central place to record good practice to be used by frontline staff.

## Partnership working and information sharing

The force has a range of effective multi-agency partnerships, for example the Essex crime prevention forum and the drugs testing on arrest initiative that prevents and reduces crime. Some include police being co-located with partners and most involve the allocation of activity to the most appropriate agency and monitoring of results, to provide a multi-agency response. These partnerships operate at an oversight and governance as well as an operational (or tactical) level and there is a consistent message from staff and partners that that these relationships are helping to reduce crime in Essex.

The force has taken steps to improve its response to so-called hidden or less well reported crimes such as human trafficking and child sexual exploitation, hate crime, and sexual assault. Each local policing area now has a dedicated single point of contact for modern slavery and, encouragingly, the force has set up a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) in Thurrock unitary authority area to share information and develop responses to child abuse and child sexual exploitation. However, there are no MASHs in Essex County Council area or Southend unitary authority area and the projects to introduce them are at different stages of development. There are co-located multi-agency hubs in both Southend and Essex that share information about those at risk. Essex County Council engagement in the MASH has been slow but is now increasing. This will greatly assist the effectiveness of the service provided to victims.

## 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 action plan submitted by Essex Police. We found the force has set out activity that is in line with the agreed national priorities for forces outlined above. The plan includes summaries of improvements made and the force's intentions to improve further. This includes a number of actions to review the structures, processes and policies the force has to tackle domestic abuse. There is no clear direct reference to the HMIC force recommendations in the plan, but information within the submitted action plan supports most activity required from the HMIC recommendations.

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.

HMIC found evidence that Essex Police has made considerable progress in tackling domestic abuse. The force has recently introduced dedicated domestic abuse investigators and teams and has introduced specific vulnerability and repeat victim question sets for its call-takers and officers to identify vulnerability at the earliest opportunity. The focus of the improvement work has been in respect of high and medium-risk victims. Some partners expressed concern that there is insufficient attention and resources in place for protecting medium-risk domestic abuse victims, and that officers are not reviewing all incidents when assessing risk. This was echoed by officers, who stated that the dispatchers in the force control room are not always passing on full details of previous incidents over the radio. This means that responding officers are not always given the information they need to be able to best protect the victim. Staff within the central referral unit subsequently review the decisions made by the attending officers. Their review takes into account all previous incidents and significant database research. There are a concerning number of open incidents held by the force control room; this means there is no means of accurately tracking whether the force is responding as it should to a range of incidents including emergency situations. The force should continue to monitor the way in which it manages cases of domestic abuse under its new operating model to ensure that these considerations are addressed.

## Recommendations

- Essex Police should continue to take action to improve the way it assesses, reviews and responds to victims of domestic abuse, especially those initially graded as medium risk. The force should ensure appropriate monitoring and oversight of the process is established to improve service.

## Summary

Good

- The force has strong and effective partnership working arrangements that contribute to a range of crime prevention and reduction initiatives.
- Force and community priorities are clear and understood by operational officers, with evidence that they direct policing activity.
- HMIC found that the force's ability to measure the impact of its activities and to learn from what has worked is limited. The force has recognised this and is starting to develop better ways to evaluate activities.

# 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 force leadership demonstrates a strong commitment to identifying and protecting vulnerable people and the force has invested significantly in training to deal with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. HMIC found good evidence that staff are contacting and updating victims appropriately and that there is supervision of this contact.

The force has recently introduced dedicated teams to deal with domestic abuse cases with the intention of making further improvements to the service provided to the most vulnerable. However HMIC found the practice of holding a large number of open incidents in the control room could undermine this intention. There are dual concerns; firstly, call-handlers might be unable to keep abreast of victims' needs with so many open incidents (there were 1,200 open incidents when HMIC visited the control room); secondly, the practice of contacting investigators from the control room by email has no failsafe method to confirm receipt of the email. Both could potentially lead to shortcomings in the service to victims. As part of its supervision of incidents, the force should ensure there is an active management system for such cases to prevent delay.

The force has ways of managing referrals, including out-of-hour referrals of serious sexual assault cases. This includes the notification of the night duty detective inspector and the notification of the sexual offences team in the morning. However, the team is not necessarily always in the office to receive the information, and there is no means of checking that someone in the team has picked up the case later in the day, which can lead to unacceptable delays in contacting the victim, distress for the victim and could potentially lead to a loss of evidence.

In addition, intelligence relating to the vulnerability of victims is not always passed over the radio to the attending officer. There is concern that this may result in the wrong risk assessment being made in relation to an incident.

There is limited evidence from the file review that HMIC conducted as part of this inspection, that victim personal statements or special measures e.g., measures such as screens – or giving evidence via video link – that allow vulnerable victims to give the best possible evidence, are routinely considered or implemented in a timely fashion, although officers in the specialised units did display a good knowledge of their use.



## Investigation

The force has specialist investigators for domestic abuse and serious sexual assault and HMIC found that these investigations are more robust than investigations relating to other crimes, and they receive better supervision.

During the inspection, and the review of crime files, HMIC found inconsistencies in the skill and training of staff involved in the investigative process. There is very limited use of investigation plans on crime reports. There is also limited evidence of appropriate supervisory interventions or review of investigations, and limited evidence being recorded that victim's views are being considered when deciding on the appropriate outcome for a crime. The overall standard of crime investigation in Essex Police falls below that required and opportunities for resolving crimes are missed.

## Tackling repeat and prolific offenders

The force has a systematic, embedded and effective integrated offender management (IOM) process<sup>1</sup>, through which the force and its partners manage the risk and threat posed by the most prolific offenders to prevent them re-offending. This multi-agency approach uses a range of techniques, including voluntary tagging and diversionary activity to promote a carrot and stick approach to offenders. The force believes all of this has contributed to a reduction in the offending rate for this group of offenders. The programme is now being extended to include prolific domestic abuse offenders.

The force has a collaborative programme with Kent Police that includes the serious crime directorate (SCD). Part of the role of the SCD is to identify and manage organised crime groups (OCGs) – criminal networks often involved in serious crime. The force has adopted the national threat, risk and harm scoring system to grade OCGs according to their risk, with Tier One being the most harmful and Tier Four being the least harmful.

The inspection found very limited evidence of any OCG tasking or disruption outside of that done by the SCD against the Tier One groups. There is no apparent local responsibility for specific groups at any level, with limited evidence of disruption or active intelligence collection plans. Officers in Essex Police view OCGs as being the sole responsibility of the SCD, leading to a lack of activity and the missing of opportunities to disrupt these groups or to prevent them from developing into groups that present a risk of more serious harm.

<sup>1</sup> There is no standard national definition of who should be considered for integrated offender management arrangements. Essex Police decides who needs to be managed under these arrangements using its own scoring system.

The force has introduced a project where burglary offenders serving or awaiting a prison sentence for offences already committed are visited by a specialist team of officers. These offenders are encouraged to fully admit their offending history in order to be admitted to a programme that gives them practical support to prevent them re-offending once released from prison. There are strong links with the IOM process mentioned earlier. This unit has delivered very good outcomes and intelligence about dwelling burglary offences. There is a need for clarity over who is responsible for contacting and updating the victim of the crimes admitted by this group, to ensure that the wishes and needs of the victims are being met.

## Learning from experience

The police service introduced the professionalising investigation programme (PIP) a number of years ago. This is an agreed set of national standards for investigation. Level one is intended for frontline uniformed staff, level two for detectives and level three for managers of serious or complex investigations.

Essex has introduced a senior detective forum to provide continuing professional development for officers at PIP level three. There is little evidence of investigative training or development for other detectives and frontline staff in the field of investigation. The force has a significant number of staff undertaking detective duties who are not accredited detectives at PIP level two and is unclear as to how many staff are accredited to the PIP level one standard. This presents a significant challenge for the force as it strives to improve its service and levels of investigation and is of substantial concern to HMIC.

## Recommendations

- Immediately, Essex Police should review the process of holding open incidents within the control room and assess the impact on victim service, risk management and investigations. By January 2015 the force should implement an action plan to address any issues identified.
- Within three months Essex 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, especially in relation to Victim Personal Statements and Special Measures, 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 three months Essex Police should develop and commence the implementation of an action plan to improve the quality of investigations which will ensure that:
  - (a) investigating officers are aware of the standards required, especially in relation to investigation plans, and have the professional skills and expertise to fulfil their duties;
  - (b) supervisors know what is expected of them in driving up standards;
  - (c) the right resources are targeted in the right areas; and
  - (d) there is appropriate monitoring and oversight of investigative quality.
- Within three months, Essex Police should ensure that there is clarity of ownership and responsibility in relation to the tackling of organised crime groups with relevant staff being made aware of the tasks they need to perform in order to disrupt and dismantle the groups' criminal activity.
- By 1st April 2015, Essex Police should develop and implement an action plan to ensure that by 1st April 2016 the appropriate number of officers have the nationally accredited skills to fulfil their investigative duties.

## Summary

Requires improvement

- Officers contact and update victims of crime appropriately and in a timely fashion.
- The integrated offender management process is well accepted, understood and effective.
- Investigations are not of a good enough quality and there is a lack of effective supervisory scrutiny or review. There is limited evidence of the use of investigation plans. Domestic abuse investigations are subject to a more rigorous approach.
- Limited evidence of effective identification and disruption of organised crime groups indicates that prevention and disruption opportunities are missed.
- The force faces significant challenges in training and accrediting staff to the agreed national standard for investigation to improve standards.

# 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 evidence that the force is delivering a good service to victims of anti-social behaviour. There is consistent use of victim contact contracts and strong visible neighbourhood policing teams communicating and reassuring victims and communities. The force has a number of ways to engage with its communities and is making good use of social media and technology to assist in this (including internet forums, Essex community messaging and Twitter).

## Partnership working

The force has a number of partnership schemes to prevent and reduce anti-social behaviour and has a regular force-wide anti-social behaviour meeting with partners. Officers and partners are generally of the view there are strong working arrangements in place; appropriate service is provided by the most appropriate agency to ensure a truly multi-agency response to tackling with problems. Examples include Operation Bennison, a multi-agency initiative using a range of tactics, including licensing legislation and noise pollution measures, to tackle anti-social behaviour and disturbances involving excessive use of alcohol at certain licensed premises. The force is also a key partner in early intervention programmes, working with social services and housing providers to assist so-called troubled families, using housing and benefit legislation, as well as diversionary tactics, to disrupt and prevent anti-social behaviour at an early stage.

## Improving services to the public

The force uses two systems to record problem solving and anti-social behaviour activity, with no clear guidelines on which one should be used and when. As a result, opportunities to learn and share good practice are missed and neither is effective as a database to assist in problem solving. There is limited evidence of assessment or evaluation of projects and this too limits the extent of organisational learning.

HMIC found patchy use and knowledge of restorative justice and community resolutions for incidents. The force does have a pilot scheme in the west of the county which is intended to improve the force's use of this means of resolving crimes and incidents.

In the 12 months to March 2014, Essex Police recorded 53,836 incidents of anti-social behaviour. This is a reduction of 4 percent against the previous 12 months.

## Summary

Good

- Although not an explicit force priority, there is strong evidence of good partnership working to tackle and prevent anti-social behaviour with a number of initiatives across the force.
- The force engages well with communities to understand what they want and need
- We found a visible neighbourhood policing team presence, with good evidence of programmes to divert young people or those at risk away from crime or anti-social behaviour. The force should ensure that this strong neighbourhood approach is not diminished as a result of further force restructuring.
- The force's two anti-social behaviour recording systems duplicate each other unnecessarily and pose a risk to the management of incidents.

# 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 significantly lower than is expected.