

PEEL 2021/22

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of North Wales Police

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Overall summary

Our judgments

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

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

We also inspected how effective a service North Wales Police gives to [victims](#) of crime. We don't make a graded judgment in this overall area.

We set out our detailed findings about things the force is doing well and where the force should improve in the rest of this report.

Data in this report

For more information, please [view this report on our website](#) and select the 'About the data' section.

Important changes to PEEL

In 2014, we introduced our police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections, which assess the performance of all 43 police forces in England and Wales. Since then, we have been continuously adapting our approach and this year has seen the most significant changes yet.

We are moving to a more [intelligence](#)-led, continual assessment approach, rather than the annual [PEEL inspections](#) we used in previous years. For instance, we have integrated our rolling crime data integrity inspections into these PEEL assessments.

Our PEEL victim service assessment will now include a crime data integrity element in at least every other assessment. We have also changed our approach to graded judgments. We now assess forces against the characteristics of good performance, set out in the [PEEL Assessment Framework 2021/22](#), and we more clearly link our judgments to causes of concern and areas for improvement. We have also expanded our previous four-tier system of judgments to five tiers. As a result, we can state more precisely where we consider improvement is needed and highlight more effectively the best ways of doing things.

However, these changes mean that it isn't possible to make direct comparisons between the grades awarded this year with those from previous PEEL inspections. A reduction in grade, particularly from good to adequate, doesn't necessarily mean that there has been a reduction in performance, unless we say so in the report.

The operating context for Welsh forces

It is important to recognise the fact that forces in Wales operate in a different context to those in England. Although policing and justice aren't devolved to Wales, essential services such as healthcare, accommodation, education and social services are. This means that Welsh police and justice activities take place in unique performance and legislative contexts. In Wales, devolved and non-devolved organisations work in partnership to provide the best level of service possible to local people.

Sometimes this means that forces in Wales will have to comply with both English and Welsh regulatory requirements.

HM Inspector's observations

I am pleased with some aspects of performance of North Wales Police in keeping people safe and reducing crime, although it needs to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service.

These are the main findings I consider most important from our assessments of the force over the past year.

The force should make sure it supervises investigations thoroughly and gains a better understanding of victims' needs and wishes

North Wales Police needs to make sure that supervisors provide timely and effective direction of investigations. The force should also consistently record the needs of and impact on victims of crime and improve how it records the reasons why victims withdraw their support for an investigation. Well directed, thorough investigation and victim care are important to maintain public confidence.

The force is prioritising the prevention and deterrence of crime, and its approach to early intervention and prevention is innovative

North Wales Police has worked with academic partners and the national problem-solving crime prevention programme to develop a cost-benefit model for crime prevention that police forces can use to understand how effectively they spend public money to reduce crime and victimisation. The force works well with its communities and other organisations to solve problems.

The force needs to make improvements so that it operates as efficiently as possible

The force is committed to collaboration to help provide value for money and it has an ambitious IT strategy. However, the force needs to do more work to better understand the future demand for its services. And it needs to consider how it can best use resources to meet current and future demand across all areas of the force.

The force has improved how it ensures that the public is treated with fairness and respect, but it needs to continue to improve how it records the use of force and stop and search

North Wales Police makes good use of data and scrutiny measures to inform [organisational learning](#), and its workforce has a good understanding of how to treat people fairly. However, the force can't yet show that it has a full understanding of how often and how fairly its officers use force. The force must be able to demonstrate to the public that its use of police powers is appropriate and effective. The force plans to introduce new technology to improve how it records and monitors the use of force, and I look forward to seeing the progress of this work.



Wendy Williams

HM Inspector of Constabulary

Reducing crime assessment

We have identified seven themes underpinning a force's ability to reduce crime effectively which, taken together, allow an assessment of the extent to which the force is doing all it can to reduce crime. This is a narrative assessment, as police recorded crime figures can be affected by variations and changes in recording policy and practice, making it difficult to make comparisons over time.

The force has a focus on problem-solving and early intervention. We found good examples of problem-solving and of officers working with partner agencies to prevent crime and safeguard vulnerable people. Other factors contributing to the force's ability to reduce crime are:

- Call handlers accurately use [THRIVE](#) to identify vulnerability and repeat victims, and accurately record crime.
- Crime prevention advice is given at first point of contact.
- Each local policing area has dedicated problem-solving advisers for advice and local direction, and problem-solving takes place in both specialist teams and local policing teams.
- Vulnerability and [safeguarding](#) needs are identified and mitigated in most investigations.
- An effective [integrated offender management \(IOM\)](#) programme is in place.

I am pleased that the force is addressing the right areas of policing to reduce crime. But there are some areas that may negatively affect the force's ability to reduce crime. These are:

- not always attending priority calls for service within agreed timescales;
- not completing victim needs assessments in all cases, which could lead to victims withdrawing support for prosecutions; and
- not consistently supervising crime investigations to a good standard, resulting in a lack of progress to promptly bring offenders to justice.

Providing a service to the victims of crime

Victim service assessment

This section describes our assessment of the service North Wales Police provides to victims. This is from the point of reporting a crime through to the end result. As part of this assessment, we reviewed 90 case files.

When the police close a case of a reported crime, it will be assigned what is referred to as an 'outcome type'. This describes the reason for closing it.

We also reviewed 20 cases each when the following outcome types were used:

- A suspect was identified, and the victim supported police action, but evidential difficulties prevented further action (['outcome 15'](#)).
- A suspect was identified, but there were evidential difficulties, and the victim didn't support or withdrew their support for police action (['outcome 16'](#)).
- Police decided that formal action wasn't in the public interest ('outcome 10').

While this assessment is ungraded, it influences graded judgments in the other areas we have inspected.

Main findings

In this section, we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force provides a service to victims of crime.

While this assessment is ungraded, it influences graded judgments in the other areas we have inspected.

The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency and on-emergency calls

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

The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency and non-emergency calls as it isn't meeting national standards. When calls are answered, call handlers use a structured process to assess the victim's vulnerability. However, checks to establish if the victim is vulnerable or a repeat victim aren't always completed, which means this may not be taken into account when considering the response the victim should have. In most cases victims are given advice about crime prevention or the preservation of evidence.

The force doesn't always respond to calls for service promptly

A force should aim to respond to calls for service within its published time frames, based on the prioritisation given to the call. It should change the call priority only if the original prioritisation is deemed inappropriate, or if further information suggests a change is needed. The response should take into consideration risk and victim vulnerability, including information obtained after the call.

Attendance wasn't always within recognised force timescales. Victims sometimes weren't informed of the delay and their expectations weren't met. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage. However, we found that when call priorities were changed this was appropriate.

The force allocates crimes to appropriate staff

Police forces should have a policy to make sure crimes are allocated to appropriately trained officers or [staff](#) for investigation or, if appropriate, not investigated further. The policy should be applied consistently. The victim of the crime should be kept informed of who is dealing with their case and whether the crime is to be investigated further.

The arrangements for allocating recorded crimes for investigation were in accordance with the force policy. And in all cases the crime was allocated to the most appropriate department for further investigation.

The force usually carries out prompt and thorough investigations, and victims receive regular updates on the progress of the investigation

Police forces should investigate reported crimes quickly, proportionately and thoroughly. Victims should be kept updated about the investigation, and the force should have effective governance arrangements to make sure investigation standards are high.

Investigations were usually carried out promptly, and relevant and proportionate lines of enquiry were completed in most cases. However, some investigations lacked effective supervision. Victims were kept updated throughout investigations. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when regularly updated. A thorough investigation increases the likelihood of perpetrators being identified and a positive outcome for the victim.

Victim personal statements weren't always taken, which can deprive victims of the opportunity to describe the impact that crime has had on their lives. The force didn't always consider the use of orders designed to protect victims, such as a [domestic violence protection notice](#) or [domestic violence protection order](#).

The [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) requires police forces to conduct a needs assessment at an early stage to decide whether victims require additional support. The outcome of the assessment and the request for additional support should be recorded. The force isn't always completing the victim needs assessment, which means not all victims will get the appropriate level of service.

The force isn't always using the appropriate outcome or obtaining an auditable record of victims' wishes

The force should make sure it follows national guidance and rules for deciding the outcome of each report of crime. In deciding the outcome, the force should consider the nature of the crime, the offender and the victim. And the force should make sure the use of outcomes is appropriate.

When a suspect has been identified but evidential difficulties prevent further action, the victim should be informed of the decision to close the investigation. In most cases, the force informed victims of the decision to take no further action and finalise the crime.

When a suspect has been identified but the victim doesn't support or withdraws their support for police action, an auditable record from the victim should be held confirming their decision. This will allow the investigation to be closed. Evidence of the victim's decision was absent in most cases we reviewed. This means that victims' wishes may not always be fully represented and considered before the investigation is closed.

In some cases, when an offender has been identified, the police can decide that formal action isn't in the public interest. If this outcome type is to be correctly applied and recorded, it must be appropriate for the nature of the offence and can be applied only if certain criteria are met. In all the cases we reviewed, the circumstances of the case didn't meet the national criteria for the use of this outcome type. We discuss this further in the section '[Investigating crime](#)'.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Adequate

North Wales Police is adequate at treating people fairly and with respect.

Area for improvement

The force should ensure that, in relation to its use of force, all relevant officers and staff are recording when force is used and that there is effective supervisory oversight

- North Wales Police needs to improve how it records and reviews the use of force by its officers and staff. This was an area that was highlighted in our last inspection, and it is disappointing to see that it remains an issue.
- Not all frontline supervisors check that officers are submitting forms correctly, nor do they review them for quality or accuracy and provide feedback. The force needs to make sure that all supervisors check the submission and quality of all use of force forms.

Main findings

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

The force needs to improve how it records the use of force

The force complies with the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) national recording requirements for categories of force used. In the year ending 31 March 2021, it recorded 2,052 uses of force. Compared to the number of arrests across the same period (16,372 arrests), this suggests these incidents are under-recorded. When compared with other forces, this is also the third lowest number of recorded incidents per 1,000 population.

In May 2020, North Wales Police stopped recording the use of compliant handcuffing. This is against National Police Chiefs' Council guidelines. We understand the force has recently decided to return to recording this. Although it is likely this will mean a significant increase in the number of uses of force recorded, the force must ensure that its officers are accurately recording and submitting all uses of force.

The force is hoping to introduce an electronic system in 2023 to help improve its monitoring and recording of use of force. But the current degree of under-recording means that the force doesn't have a complete picture of how its officers and staff use force in the course of their duties. This means it can't complete an accurate analysis to see where policies, systems and practices need to be improved.

The force is good at engaging with communities and seeks their views to understand what is important to them

The force has an effective engagement strategy and the infrastructure to help it to identify and engage with all its communities. There are good links with the North Wales [independent advisory group](#) and a network of local community advisory groups. Representatives attend the police and public encounters meeting, which helps the force understand community concerns. The force also uses social media well. For example, it uses a range of platforms to send surveys to the public and uses the feedback received to set community priorities. Local policing teams also visit schools and use pop-up surgeries and mobile police stations to meet the public. However, we found that some neighbourhood teams lacked knowledge about how the force profiled its communities, and some neighbourhood staff weren't aware of all the channels used to engage with the force.

The force works with its communities to solve problems

The force has an effective citizens in policing (CIP) team that co-ordinates volunteer programmes such as the special constabulary, volunteer police cadets, police support volunteers and Neighbourhood Watch. We found that special constables and volunteers felt valued and had an important role to play within their communities.

The force has introduced North Wales Community Alert, a two-way community messaging system. This is used to keep communities and their local teams in close contact and help to address community concerns and local priorities. The force has successfully encouraged people to sign up to this initiative. The force news desk has access to this alert system and puts tailored messages out to target specific areas if needed. The communications department also use local print media and radio stations to share work with the public, including officers appearing on radio to talk about local issues.

The force publishes analysis on disproportionality, identifying individual and organisational learning from internal monitoring, and can demonstrate the improvements it is making as a result

In the year ending 31 March 2021, Black people were 2.4 times more likely than White people to be stopped and searched by North Wales Police. During the same period, stop and searches on Black people resulted in an action being taken (such as arrest, [community resolution](#) or caution) in 40 percent of cases, compared to in 21 percent of cases for stop and searches on White people.

Force data shows that in March 2022:

- Black people were three times more likely than White people to be arrested; and
- people from other ethnic minority backgrounds were four times more likely than White people to be arrested and detained.

The force produces an annual external diversity report covering policing activity. We saw the report for 2020/21, which includes data about stop and search, detentions in police custody and use of force. Appropriate analysis is carried out to provide good insight into the above areas along with actions to explain or address disproportionality where identified.

The force runs quarterly committees that review data on disproportionality. This helps it to monitor and respond to any specific trends or patterns by, for example, making improvements, such as a stop and search training package for local policing teams. The committees also allow for independent scrutiny of the use of stop and search, use of force, out of court disposals and hate crime or hate-related incidents.

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

North Wales Police provides a range of training, such as officer safety training, that incorporates communication skills as well as [unconscious bias](#) awareness designed to promote fairness and respect. The unconscious bias training aims to make sure the workforce can recognise their own biases and improve their communication skills with the public. We found that the workforce had a good understanding of these subjects.

We found consistent and appropriate use of [body-worn video](#), for example when force was used, arrests were made, or members of the public were stopped and searched. Body-worn video is useful not only as a form of evidence, but as it also provides a level of personal and public protection and increased transparency in policing. This in turn helps to maintain public trust and confidence in the police.

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

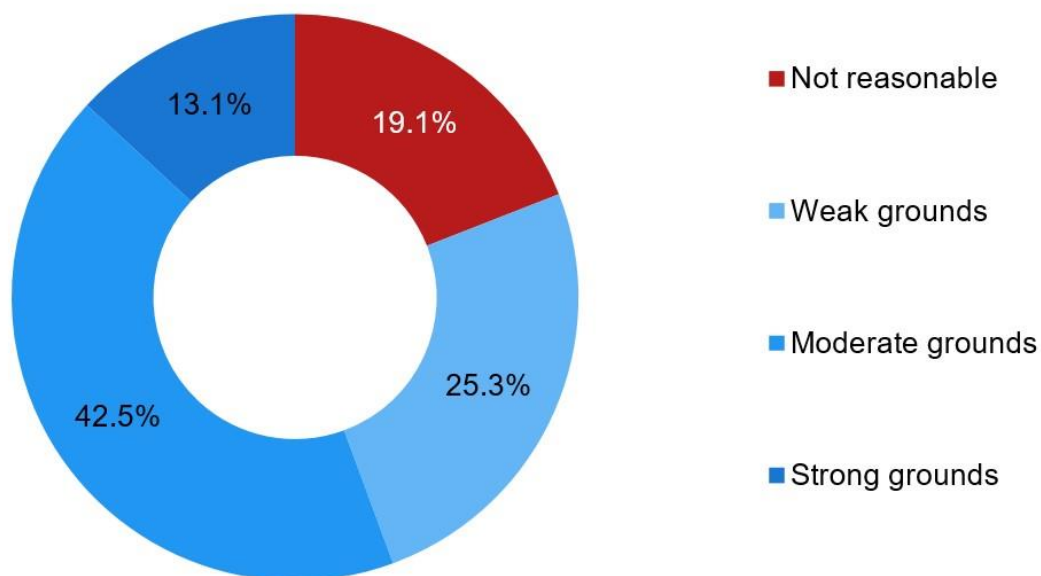
Since our last inspection, the force has made progress in this area, which was previously highlighted as an area for improvement. The force now has an [independent advisory group \(IAG\)](#), which is independently chaired, well attended and consists of a trained panel who are confident to challenge. The force could do more to improve the representation of the community on the panel in terms of ethnicity, age and gender, but we were pleased to see that progress has been made. The force welcomes independent scrutiny and acts on feedback provided. The IAG reviews body-worn video footage and the grounds that officers record when members of the public are stopped and searched. IAGs act as 'critical friends', and this is helping improve understanding, communication and confidence across the communities of North Wales.

The force is improving its fair use of stop search powers, but there is more to do

North Wales Police provides stop and search training to student officers and informs and updates officers about changes in legislation or practice. Most of the officers we contacted told us they felt well trained.

'Reasonable grounds' is an objective test that officers must meet before exercising their [stop and search powers](#). During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 320 stop and search records from 1 January to 31 December 2021. On the basis of this sample, we estimate that 80.9 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.1 percent) of all stop and searches by the force during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. Of the records we reviewed for stop and searches on people from ethnic minority backgrounds, 7 of 12 had reasonable grounds recorded. This is a statistically significant improvement compared with the findings from our previous review of records from 2019, where we found 70.0 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.9 percent) of stop and searches had reasonable grounds recorded.

Recorded grounds for use of stop and search by North Wales Police in the year ending 31 December 2021



Of the 320 records we reviewed, we assessed that:

- 19 percent didn't have reasonable grounds recorded;
- 25 percent were considered weak grounds;
- 43 percent were considered moderate grounds; and
- 13 percent were performed on strong grounds.

This is an important improvement for North Wales Police, as fair decision-making in stop and search affects how people perceive the police – not just the individual who is searched. The force needs to continue to monitor its use and recording of reasonable grounds in order to identify areas to improve. When forces have reasonable grounds recorded and can demonstrate that their use of stop and search is fair, the public have greater confidence.

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

Good

North Wales Police is good at prevention and deterrence.

Innovative practice

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

The force has used cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the benefits of problem-solving policing. The force has worked with academia and the national problem-solving crime prevention programme to develop a cost-benefit model for crime prevention.

Professor Geoff Berry worked with North Wales Police using the Stand Against Violence Initiative (SAVI) in Rhyl to develop a cost-benefit model for crime prevention. This is an evidence-based model for determining the costs and benefits of interventions designed to reduce crime and victimisation. The model provides guidance on:

- how to measure the costs of problem-oriented initiatives;
- improving organisational awareness of intangible benefits and partnership interventions; and
- increasing public confidence through informed spending decisions.

The report and model were jointly published by the [College of Policing](#) and the Problem-Solving Programme on the College's website and on the Problem-Solving and Crime Prevention Knowledge Hub page.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to prevention and deterrence.

North Wales Police prioritises and co-ordinates how it prevents crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability

The force has a clear governance structure, so leaders can oversee how well it is working to prevent, tackle and deter crime and disorder. The safer North Wales partnership board is represented at a strategic level. The neighbourhood policing strategy demonstrates the force's focus on prevention, early intervention and problem-solving, and the force has a clear prevention strategy. Preventing crime and [anti-social behaviour](#) are key objectives, meaning the workforce focuses on this in its daily activity and supports crime prevention well through problem-solving. The force has a 'prevention hub' designed to tackle those areas disproportionately impacted by crime and help reduce the number of victims and repeat victims. The hub is well established, and the force has invested in this area, with more staff due to join it soon.

The force's community engagement strategy sets overarching aims, but local problems are solved within communities according to their needs and feedback. The force works in partnership with a wide range of other organisations in problem-solving, crime prevention and early intervention activity. And this was evident in a review of its [problem-solving profiles](#). There are force and local performance meetings through to tactical tasking and co-ordinating meetings that monitor the progress of prevention activity.

The force has six comprehensive community profile documents that are updated for each of the local authority areas. These documents are easy to read, with graphics, maps and bullet-point summaries that provide readers with a good understanding of those areas. However, the force could do more to ensure that the workforce is aware of these profiles. This would provide officers and staff with more knowledge and detail of the individual areas they police.

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

The force's prevention hub focuses effectively on problem-solving policing. Each local policing area also has dedicated problem-solving advisors for advice and local direction. There is a citizens in policing team (CIP) within neighbourhood policing which co-ordinates and plans how to use the expertise of volunteers in the community. There is also local focus and direction on current and emerging community problems, and plans are put in place to address them. The force uses the [scanning, analysis, response and assessment](#) problem-solving model across local policing. Officers understand how to use it in their work, which we saw in the problem-solving plans we examined.

We found that problem-solving plans were effective and appropriate to the risks they were seeking to address. The evaluation of problem-solving plans takes place locally at supervisor level. We found the use of problem-solving also takes place in other areas of work, including specialist departments such as Operation Amethyst (a rape investigation team). This means that the force can reduce harm and demand for its services and work with its communities to solve problems.

The force works with other organisations, such as local authorities and community groups, to address joint priorities. It does this through a variety of forums, including its community safety meetings. These co-ordinated approaches help to reduce crime and its underlying causes sustainably.

Force leaders recognise the effect of problem-solving and reward those who perform well

The force values the community and problem-solving work carried out by its local policing teams and volunteers. The force hosts various events to recognise and celebrate the work of neighbourhood teams, such as the Safer Streets event and the Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) Awards. Events like these also share good practice.

The force regularly publicises the good work of the neighbourhood teams, both internally and externally. This includes the Neighbourhood Week of Action where items were posted on social media (Twitter and Facebook) and featured in local newspapers. The chief constable also recorded a video which was published on the force's intranet pages. This helps staff to stay engaged, feel valued and understand that the work they do is appreciated by their line managers. And it means that the workforce remains committed to problem-solving and reducing the effect of crime and anti-social behaviour in its communities.

The force recognises that neighbourhood officers have been dealing with increasing demands on their time and capacity to work directly in their communities. However, during our inspection we found that some neighbourhood officers didn't feel valued and weren't aware of the force's reward and recognition initiatives. The force should ensure all teams are aware and take advantage of its reward and recognition opportunities.

The force is undertaking early intervention approaches with a focus on positive outcomes

The force Early Action Together Programme has evolved into the force Early Intervention Programme to provide a stronger focus on early intervention. All patrol and neighbourhood staff have been trained in early intervention and prevention. This helps them to identify cases suitable for early intervention referrals and to signpost to partners and other support services.

The force told us it has also developed three early intervention and prevention training modules for 1,100 frontline officers, including neighbourhood, response and CID teams, and 300 staff from partner agencies and organisations. This training is delivered in force seminars. It covers legislation and research, systems and processes, and tools and resources, including an additional one-hour e-learning module. Each year, three neighbourhood policing development days are run with local policing services response officers covering subjects such as anti-social behaviour. External partners also take part in these training days.

The force analyses its own and partnership data to establish high demand and vulnerable locations, people and suspects, including repeat victims. It uses this to help prevent crime and anti-social behaviour

Each area within North Wales Police has a demand reduction meeting. This is chaired by a local policing inspector and assesses demand, focusing on repeat locations and victims. The force toolkit intranet page includes a link to the top ten repeat demand generators in each area, ward or beat. The programme allows users to access further data and use this to inform their prevention work.

[Neighbourhood policing teams](#) have had access to local briefings and training on a Microsoft Power BI data analysis tool. They can use this to identify three-month repeat demand, including repeat offenders, victims and locations. This is an effective tool that supervisors use to brief their teams. Force analysts support local demand reduction meetings by providing access to partnership data to help the force better understand issues in its communities.

Responding to the public

Good

North Wales Police is good at responding to the public.

Area for improvement

The force needs to attend calls for service in line with its published attendance times and ensure that, when this doesn't occur, victims are fully updated

During our inspection, we found the force uses eight gradings to categorise incidents, depending on the call handler's assessment of risk. The force publishes these times. Higher priority incidents (graded as 'Immediate') should have a 20-minute response time (urban and rural). Those graded as 'Prompt' should have a 60-minute response time. As part of our victim service assessment, we found that 43 of the 57 incidents we reviewed were attended within required timescales. Where there is a delay, we would expect the victim to be updated. However, this occurred in only 5 of the 14 relevant cases we reviewed.

Failure to attend incidents in time can cause victims to lose confidence and disengage. Victims may be put at risk and evidence can potentially be lost.

Main findings

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

Control room staff accurately identify risk and vulnerability when members of the public make contact to report crime

Our victim services assessment found that the standard of call handling was high. In 67 of the 70 cases we reviewed, the [THRIVE](#) risk identification and assessment process was used. In all 55 cases we reviewed, call handlers were polite, professional and showed empathy to callers. In 24 of 25 cases reviewed, they gave advice about crime prevention. In 52 of 61 cases reviewed, we found that vulnerability was checked for and identified at the first point of contact. For all 76 cases we reviewed, incidents were allocated to an appropriate team. These results are positive, but the force should continue to ensure that all repeat victims are identified and recorded by call handlers at the first point of contact. In 11 of 57 cases reviewed, there wasn't evidence of checks to see whether there was a repeat victim.

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

The force has invested in technology to identify people who may be vulnerable, to ensure the most appropriately trained officer attends. The force collaborates effectively with other agencies to meet demand and to respond to incidents where vulnerability is identified and extra support may be required.

The force uses an appropriate range of digital contact methods. These include Single Online Home – a platform that allows police services to create an online presence – and a social media management system that brings together several different social media platforms. It demonstrates good practice by using a digital desk to co-ordinate these contact channels, providing the public with additional ways to contact the force.

The force should improve the time it takes to respond to calls for service and ensure vulnerability is continually reviewed

The force doesn't always answer calls for service within its published target times. The force told us that between 1 November 2021 and 31 January 2022, it answered 87.4 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds. This was lower than the national standard of answering 90 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds. The force also told us that, for the same time period, 11.1 percent of calls to its non-emergency [101](#) facility were abandoned. The force operates a switchboard between 8am and 10pm daily. However, the abandonment rate is higher than the national standard of 10 percent for forces with no switchboard facility at all. The force can't yet determine whether callers hang up due to wait times or because they opt to use the online reporting facility on its website. Therefore, the force can't accurately judge how effectively it enables the public to make contact.

Failure to answer calls quickly enough can lead to losing both public confidence and investigative opportunities. The force is mostly able to answer emergency calls within the target times it sets itself, and these are aligned to national standards. But we found some non-emergency calls aren't dealt with promptly. We also found that victims aren't always being updated and informed about why there are delays in attendance.

The force works in partnership with mental health services effectively, to support the vulnerable and protect them from further harm

In partnership with the Betsi Cadwaladr health board, North Wales Police offers a mental health triage service which sees mental health practitioners working with staff within the force's control room. This service operates across the force area in line with peak demand times of the day. Having practitioners working with staff who are taking calls from people who may be experiencing a mental health crisis helps them to consider how best to deal with the individual. The practitioners have access to health records to provide professional advice. During our inspection, we saw positive examples of how this expert advice and support had reduced high demands on the force. This means that people experiencing poor mental health get an appropriate service and more relevant support when they call the police.

The force has a good understanding of the well-being needs of its contact management staff and officers initially responding to emergency calls

The force provides control room supervisors with mental health training which helps them to understand and identify welfare and well-being issues within their teams. The force has a welfare team that provides regular [trauma risk management](#) to staff affected by traumatic incidents. Frontline operational officers report that supervisors are supportive, both at the incident scenes and afterwards.

However, control room staff told us that some teams are operating at or below minimum staffing levels. We found that response teams also feel that they are often operating below desired staffing levels. Abstractions from shifts also places pressure on resourcing. This happens when an officer is diverted from their core duties for an extended period, for example to support events like the Commonwealth Games or to undertake coursework for the policing education qualifications framework.

Force control room staff and supervisors are suitably trained to offer real-time advice to its first responders to ensure the early gathering of evidence at scenes

During our inspection, we found that staff and supervisors within the [control room](#) actively monitor radio transmissions and provide written advice on the command-and-control incident log that can be viewed by the attending officers. This includes ensuring forensic opportunities are maximised and means that attending officers know what action to consider when they attend incidents or crime scenes so that evidence is gathered as early and effectively as possible.

Investigating crime

Requires improvement

North Wales Police requires improvement at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The force should make sure investigations have supervisory oversight and all investigative opportunities are considered

Our victim service assessment found that in 85 of 90 cases reviewed, investigations were carried out promptly. And in 77 of 86 cases reviewed, relevant and proportionate lines of enquiry were completed. However, 13 of 62 cases we reviewed lacked effective supervision. Operational officers also reported that it could be weeks before a supervisor provides any direction or review on their allocated crimes. The force needs to ensure there is a consistent approach and a way of monitoring such supervisory oversight.

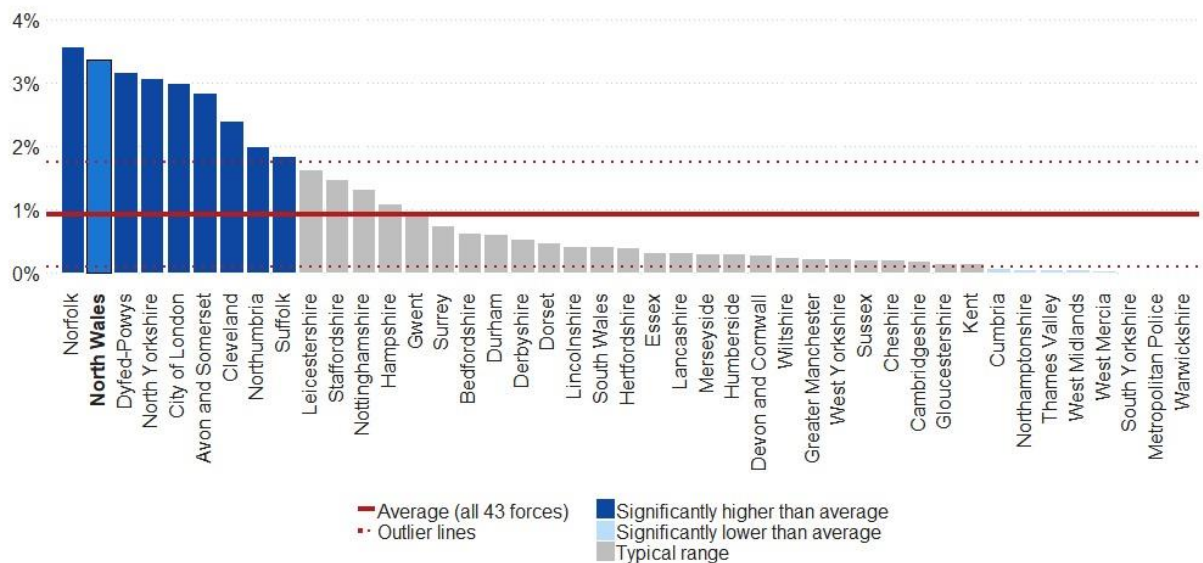
The force needs to make sure that it complies with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. This includes offering people the opportunity to make victim personal statements and completing a victim needs assessment

In 20 of 29 cases reviewed, the force didn't take a victim personal statement. This can deprive victims of the opportunity to describe the impact that a crime has had on their lives. It is important to consult and consider the views of victims to help maintain their confidence in investigations. The [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) requires a victim needs assessment to be completed at an early stage to decide whether victims require additional support. In 52 of 74 cases reviewed, the force completed the victim needs assessment. This means not all victims will get the appropriate level of service.

The force needs to implement appropriate governance and monitoring processes to make sure that the use of outcomes is appropriate and that it complies with force and national policies

- During our inspection we reviewed a number of cases that had been finalised as ‘outcome 10’ (not in the public interest – police decision). We also found that these outcomes had been used incorrectly on several occasions. Evidence of the victims’ decisions to withdraw their support for police action wasn’t always present. The force should make sure that when a victim withdraws support the reasons for the decision are recorded in an auditable record.
- In the year ending 30 September 2021, 3.4 percent of North Wales Police’s outcomes for all crime (excluding fraud) were ‘outcome 10’. This is the second highest rate compared to all other forces in England and Wales and is statistically significantly higher than the average of 0.9 percent across all forces. The force should ensure that the use of ‘outcome 10’ is appropriate and that it has a system where it can review and monitor its use in all cases.

Proportion of offences recorded in the year ending 30 September 2021 with an outcome of ‘not in public interest – police decision’ (outcome 10) across forces



Main findings

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

North Wales Police conducts thorough and effective investigations on behalf of the public

Our victim service assessment found in 80 of 90 cases reviewed, staff had completed an effective investigation. In 77 of 86 cases reviewed, investigations were concluded after reasonable opportunities to gather evidence were taken, and 73 of 74 cases were allocated to appropriately skilled investigators.

In 77 of 83 cases reviewed, the victim received an appropriate level of service. We found delays in 5 out of 90 cases. Any delay may have a detrimental effect for the victim and some of these delays were lengthy and unacceptable. In all five cases where there was a delay, we found a lack of effective supervision.

In 40 of 43 cases reviewed, the force made good use of investigation plans. And in all 17 relevant cases reviewed, arrests were made in an appropriate time frame.

North Wales Police makes sure that serious crime is investigated by appropriately skilled staff, although some teams have heavy workloads

The force has established a strategic and tactical performance framework for investigating crime. The investigative standards group reviews standards and performance, but the approach across all [basic command units](#) requires more consistency and greater communication between each area. The force has been working on a central repository for investigative standards guidance. However, at the time of our inspection we found that staff weren't aware of this resource and, as it is a new product, we weren't able to assess its effectiveness.

North Wales Police has strong detective capability and capacity, which is better than we usually see. As of 31 March 2022, all 260 PIP2 ([professionalising investigations programme](#)) investigator posts were filled with an accredited investigator. We have identified good practice with the force's crime academy, which is set up to enable the force to understand how many of its staff are PIP2 accredited and to identify critical gaps within investigative teams. This helps the force understand growth needs for detective vacancies. At the time of our inspection there were no detective vacancies, which has put the force in a good position in terms of maintaining its investigative capability and capacity.

However, rape investigation (Operation Amethyst) and [child](#) abuse teams reported heavy caseloads. This has increased demands on staff, who told us that they need to work on their rest days to ensure tasks are completed. Some staff we spoke to expressed a lack of confidence in how well the force understands its investigative demand.

Well-being is a priority in investigations teams, but more could be done to ensure effective management of workloads and understanding of crime demand

Most of the staff we spoke to told us supervisors are supportive, take their welfare seriously and review workload commitments. Some staff told us that workloads are appropriate but some officers in specialist roles have higher numbers of cases. While these staff felt supported by leaders, some told us that their workloads were unmanageable and that this was affecting their well-being. Staff reported that high workloads and long working hours affects their work-life balance. We found that investigators are committed to supporting victims, but we also found that teams felt unable to accept more cases because they had exceeded their capacity to investigate their current caseload.

The force provides good digital and forensic investigative capacity and capability, with limited delays

The scientific support department houses the force's [digital forensics](#) team which meets International Organization Standardization accreditation. Digital forensics is a branch of forensic science. The main purpose is to examine, extract and process data from digital devices. There is a local service agreement in place to ensure submission times are met. At the time of our inspection, the force told us there was little or no backlog. When there is a backlog, this is outsourced to avoid delay in progressing investigations. The force has invested in additional staff within the department by creating two additional posts. The digital forensic team's capacity to attend scenes is good and provides advice and support to officers. Laptops are taking longer to digitally examine, but there is the option to use a fast-track system if required.

Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

North Wales Police is adequate at [protecting vulnerable people](#).

Areas for improvement

Within six months the force should demonstrate that it has sufficient capacity within the central referral unit, and that this has resulted in timely [risk assessments](#) being consistently completed and staff able to attend multi-agency meetings

The function of the central referral unit is to triage, risk assess and allocate safeguarding work for [domestic abuse](#), child and adult protection referrals. We found backlogs in the unit of over 250 cases which were 4 days old at the time of our inspection. To manage demand, staff had stopped triaging domestic abuse related cases that had been assessed as low risk by attending officers. However, such cases awaiting triage may present a higher risk than initial assessments indicate, and the force wasn't confident that it could identify these cases from the backlog. Supervisors were dealing with the triage cases and reducing the backlog, but this prevented them from attending multi-agency strategy meetings designed to help safeguard vulnerable adults and children.

The central referral unit staff work overtime to help meet demand, and supervisors told us that they worked long hours. The force should ensure there are sufficient resources within the central referral unit so that vulnerable people receive prompt and appropriate safeguarding.

The force should be more proactive in promoting multi-agency working to ensure that vulnerable people are safeguarded effectively

The force works well with partner agencies and there is evidence of joint working and data sharing arrangements with all six local authorities. However, there has been a historic absence of a force-wide [multi-agency safeguarding hub \(MASH\)](#) and we recommended in our last inspection that the force should establish these arrangements. The force has progressed a pilot MASH arrangement in Conwy and, since our inspection, told us that another pilot would be introduced in Wrexham in September 2022.

A MASH would produce the best results by bringing together staff from different agencies to work under one roof, but there has been disappointing progress since 2018/19.

Main findings

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

Governance of the protection of vulnerable people is effective

The force's [protecting vulnerable people \(PVP\) board](#) provides governance, and this approach is supported by a nominated [chief officer](#) lead for vulnerability. The force uses action plans and monthly PVP performance meetings to evaluate its progress and to make improvements. This framework includes domestic abuse, child protection, and violence against women and girls, and it extends outside specialist teams to local policing services. This means that priorities and direction are adequately set, and they are understood as widely as possible across the force.

The force doesn't train all staff involved in protecting vulnerable people

The force provides training in 'DA Matters' and adverse childhood experience for all officers within North Wales Police. All officers and staff have access to a shared site on the force intranet that provides advice and guidance for issues that relate to vulnerability. However, we found staff didn't feel they had received appropriate specialist training to provide an enhanced level of safeguarding for victims of domestic abuse. In the past, the force has used external training providers to deliver [specialist child abuse investigation development programme](#) training. But lack of availability of these courses prompted the force to run internal specialist child abuse investigation development programme courses. Some of the PVP supervisors we spoke to highlighted what they considered was a lack of training provision. However, North Wales Police has implemented a plan over the past 18 months, and we would encourage the force to continue ensuring all those working in specialist posts protecting vulnerable people have received the training required to undertake their roles effectively.

The force works with other organisations to keep vulnerable people safe

[Multi-agency risk assessment conferences](#) are convened to help those victims of domestic abuse most at risk. During our inspection, many of these meetings were held using video-conferencing technology and this was effective. We observed these virtual meetings and were impressed to see that a wide range of participants from other organisations were present. Information was shared effectively and constructive discussions led to steps being taken to help keep victims safe.

The force has worked constructively with other safeguarding organisations to implement [Operation Encompass](#) nationally recognised professional standards whereby police officers notify schools about domestic abuse related incidents affecting children. The scheme has been well received and widely adopted throughout North Wales. The force has an established early intervention hub. The hub helps to provide more timely and appropriate intervention and supports families with evidence of greater levels of need.

The force seeks to understand and act on victim feedback to improve the service it provides, but this isn't widely appreciated among its workforce

North Wales Police uses data from victim satisfaction surveys and its quality of service board to assess areas where the force can improve. In January 2022, the force implemented an initiative called 'Victims Journey'. This aims to provide the force with high quality information about victims' experiences of crime. This is shared with staff to help them improve the standard of service they give to victims.

The force holds other victim feedback groups, such as the domestic abuse survivors advising service, and since our inspection it has told us that a new forum for sexual violence survivors has been established. However, staff and officers we spoke to weren't aware of any formal process to collate victim feedback. The force needs to do more to make sure the wider workforce is aware of these initiatives.

The force is clear that many PVP roles pose a high risk to well-being and provides an enhanced well-being service to the people in these roles

We found several initiatives and arrangements that support the workforce. This includes trauma risk management for addressing care after traumatic incidents. The force understands that many roles dealing with vulnerability pose a higher risk to workforce well-being, and it provides relevant staff with an enhanced well-being service. Staff we spoke to in these roles had routine psychological assessments to understand the effect their role has on their health, and this included access to occupational health support where needed. However, some child abuse investigators reported a lack of confidence in the psychological screening process.

The force collates welfare data within PVP. This is good practice and helps the force to identify trends and issues that affect people in these roles. Although we didn't see the impact of this data within the PVP at the time of our inspection, this has the potential to help the force tailor and improve its well-being service. This in turn could help staff feel more confident in the screening process.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

North Wales Police is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Areas for improvement

The force should review its digital capability within online child abuse investigation teams and management of sexual or violent offenders

The force should improve the software used to monitor the activities of registered sex offenders to ensure opportunities to identify further offending are maximised. The force also needs to consider its current and future investment in digital triaging tools to effectively target online child abuse and enforce court orders given to registered sex offenders. Such early triage of devices at scenes provides an early indication of potential offending and safeguarding issues to address.

The force should review its sex offender management practice

The force should ensure that there is well documented and timely supervisory oversight of work, including an active risk management system, risk management plans and updates from home visits with registered sex offenders.

At the time of our inspection the force had 929 overdue supervisory reviews in its management of sexual or violent offenders team. Responding to feedback about this, the force reduced this number to 286.

The supervisory oversight had been limited due to capacity within the team. The force has allocated additional staff into the unit, but the force needs to ensure such changes are sustainable.

Main findings

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

The force effectively pursues high-risk offenders and manages outstanding suspects, but more could be done to manage those assessed as medium and low risk

There is effective governance and oversight of high-risk suspects and wanted people. There is oversight of high-risk outstanding offenders at the force's daily management meeting. The operational support services are present during the daily management meeting and can help local policing teams with arrests and outstanding suspects.

However, we found that there is no process for officers to know how or when to deal with pursuing medium and low-risk suspects. Frontline officers and supervisors understood the importance of arresting high-risk suspects, but there was a lack of clarity and consistency about medium and low-risk individuals.

North Wales Police has assurance measures for released under investigation decisions

Our inspection showed us that the force uses [released under investigation \(RUI\)](#) or [voluntary attendance](#) in appropriate cases. Their use is monitored for both risk and timeliness, and there is clear accountability for making sure this happens. RUI is managed through force systems that automatically prompt staff about what action is required within the relevant timeframes. Staff are alerted that they may have had suspects RUI for excessive periods and are asked to provide detailed updates. This happens at regular intervals, and supervisors are held to account in terms of the progress since the last review.

Pre-charge bail is managed effectively and has oversight and governance

During our inspection we found there is an effective [bail](#) management process appropriately overseen by an inspector. A centrally managed custody diary system notifies officers when bail dates are approaching. This helps officers to carry out investigations as quickly as possible and to safeguard victims. It also means there is less risk of the bail dates passing without further action being taken. If dates do lapse, the risk is that the suspect may need to be released under investigation instead.

The data from this process is shared with the force's investigation standards meeting to help it understand any emerging themes or trends that need further analysis or improvement.

Supervisory management was evident. Where there is a change from bail to RUI, we found a clear rationale recorded, as well as an assessment of risk to support the decision.

The force's IOM arrangements are effective

The force's IOM team is located within the force's prevention hub, which enables a co-ordinated approach to prevention activity. The force follows the latest national IOM operational guidance and related neighbourhood crime integrated offender management strategy, following the fixed, flex and free structure. The force correctly uses crime severity scores and offender gravity risk scores to select individuals for each IOM cohort so that they are effectively managed.

We found multi-agency IOM partnership meetings and arrangements to be effective and well attended by partner agencies. An IOM performance analyst provides performance reports based on data from both probation and police systems. These performance reports include data on reductions in reoffending as well as estimates of how much those reductions have saved society financially. Having partnership data is important as it can identify early risk and improve joint decision-making.

Local policing teams are aware of registered sex offenders in their area

The force uses a mapping system that allows local policing and neighbourhood officers to see where registered sex offenders live. During our inspection we spoke to neighbourhood officers who were aware of some of the registered sex offenders in their policing area. The force also produces a bulletin informing officers about registered sex offenders who live in their area. Making sure that officers are aware of where registered sex offenders live is positive and helps officers to identify risky behaviour or record intelligence about those individuals. We spoke to the workforce during our fieldwork and found they know where to find the information they need.

The online child abuse investigation team ensures enforcement activity and makes effective use of sexual harm prevention orders

During our inspection we found that the online child abuse investigation team makes effective use of [sexual harm prevention orders](#). In the year ending 30 September 2021, North Wales Police issued 121 sexual harm prevention orders. These are heard at court to allow ongoing offender risk management after they have been convicted of a crime. The caseloads within the online child abuse investigation team were manageable, with very few backlogs. The team liaises with social services at an early stage during the intelligence gathering process, which provides opportunities to identify any children who may be at risk and time to plan an arrest within appropriate timescales. The force uses warrants as the preferred course of enforcement. This maximises opportunities for evidence to be secured.

Disrupting serious organised crime

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

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

Through our new inspections we seek to understand how well forces and ROCUs work in partnership. As a result, we now inspect ROCUs and their forces together and report on regional performance. Forces and ROCUs are now graded and reported on in regional SOC reports.

Our SOC inspection of North Wales Police hasn't yet been completed. We will update our website with our findings (including the force's grade) and a link to the regional report once the inspection is complete.

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Good

North Wales Police is good at building and developing its workforce.

Main findings

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

The force has an ethical culture with clear and supportive leadership

The force is working to promote an inclusive and ethical culture and effectively communicates the standards expected by senior leaders. Staff are encouraged to provide feedback through the established senior leadership forum and the 'My voice' and 'Get it sorted' platforms on the intranet.

Staff groups and unions told us they felt listened to and connected to the senior leadership team.

Most of the workforce we spoke to said they felt supported, valued and included by the force, and that senior leaders are approachable. However, in rural parts of the force, some staff reported a lack of visibility of [senior officers](#). The force needs to make sure that staff across the whole force area have an opportunity to engage with senior leaders.

The force is investing in leadership and the development of the workforce to be fit for the future

At the time of our inspection, the force told us that it has created a leadership course for first and second-line managers to develop leadership and operational skills. This is due to start in January 2023. While promising, it isn't yet possible to judge its impact on the quality and effectiveness of leadership.

Staff told us they had confidence in promotion processes. Annual appraisals are used to help staff work towards career aspirations and to develop skills and experience. Staff also said that line managers understand development needs and support their continued professional development.

The force encourages a learning culture and uses reflective practice

The force encourages learning and there is an increasing focus on feedback and development of the workforce, rather than blame. Staff spoke positively and gave several examples of how supervisors use reflective practice to promote learning following less serious lapses in standards of behaviour. Examples of more serious resolved misconduct cases are published internally by the [professional standards department](#) to reinforce the standards of behaviour expected by the force. Officers told us that they felt comfortable sharing information about themselves with their line managers and reporting inappropriate behaviour.

The force has an established and independently chaired [ethics committee](#), but more could be done to promote the awareness of this. We found some officers knew about its existence but didn't understand what it does or how to raise an ethical dilemma. Unless the workforce understands the purpose of, and how to contribute to, the work of the ethics committee, it may not be fully effective at improving how ethically and fairly the force operates.

The force is working to make sure it better reflects the communities it serves and that all staff have fair opportunities to develop

The force uses information about the diverse backgrounds of its existing workforce to plan how to become more representative of the communities it serves. The equality, diversity and inclusion board is led by a chief officer and monitors the progress of force and local work to attract and retain a diverse workforce.

The workforce representation team works on community engagement, such as visiting places of worship to promote recruitment from communities who might not see policing as an attractive career. The team also promotes support for and mentoring of staff from ethnic minority and multi-faith backgrounds, as well as women and Welsh speakers, to encourage them to stay and progress within the force.

However, as of 31 March 2021, 1.0 percent of North Wales Police's workforce was from an ethnic minority background compared to an estimated 2.5 percent of the local population.

Candidates for recruitment, trainees and established staff are offered reasonable adjustments for a range of diverse needs. For example, promotion candidates with autism or dyslexia are allowed extra time during exams. Promotion processes also include diverse community stakeholder panels as part of the assessment of candidates' suitability to be leaders.

Our inspection found that the force has implemented both the police constable degree apprenticeship, degree holder entry and detective degree holder entry programmes. There is good strategic governance and planning. The force has been commended on its bilingual programme considerations, meaning that new officers are likely to be able to engage effectively with the communities they serve.

North Wales Police provides a good range of support to help staff remain well at work, but some teams are experiencing stress due to high demand

The force is focused on the health of its workforce as part of its strategic priorities. Senior leaders encourage supervisors and staff to take part in a variety of health and well-being initiatives. The well-being page on the force intranet is easy to find, and activities such as mindfulness courses, yoga classes and massages are advertised regularly, with some more popular options being oversubscribed.

North Wales Police has a strong focus on preventing staff, including special constables, becoming unwell or experiencing hardship, and aims to provide early intervention. The force provides access to flexible working and supports staff through significant life events, such as adoption processes. For officers and staff suffering financial hardship, the force is introducing the option of staff drawing their salary at flexible intervals. Staff spoke positively about the effectiveness of formal debriefs following traumatic incidents, and some officers spoke about receiving excellent support following a diagnosis of serious illness.

Most staff we spoke to felt that their line managers cared and offered support and understanding to their teams, and they felt confident in raising concerns if needed.

However, staff in some specialist roles, such as child abuse teams and Operation Amethyst, told us that they were suffering stress due to high workloads. Response supervisors reported that often their teams were short staffed due to student officers following the police education qualifications framework programme being required to take study leave.

North Wales Police understands its recruitment needs and is addressing them

The force remains on track to achieve its recruitment targets as part of the Police Uplift Programme. As of 31 March 2022, the force had increased its headcount by 164 officers. This was 40 more officers than the force's allocated target of 124 officers for years 1 and 2 of the programme (ending on 31 March 2022). Funding has been allocated for planned future recruitment campaigns. The force is also encouraging applications from re-joiners to the police service and transferees. The force hopes this will increase the proportion of experienced officers. At the time of our inspection, the force was planning to recruit an extra 38 police community support officers to support neighbourhood policing.

To help predict its likely recruitment needs, the force tracks the rate at which staff leave and their reasons for doing so. However, it could make better use of exit interviews to identify factors which may influence staff to have longer careers. The force told us that in the year ending 30 June 2022, 16 exit interviews had been completed from a total of 185 staff who had left.

Vetting and counter corruption

We now inspect how forces deal with vetting and counter corruption differently. This is so we can be more effective and efficient in how we inspect this high-risk area of police business.

Corruption in forces is tackled by specialist units, designed to proactively target corruption threats. Police corruption is corrosive and poses a significant risk to public trust and confidence. There is a national expectation of standards and how they should use specialist resources and assets to target and arrest those that pose the highest threat.

Through our new inspections, we seek to understand how well forces apply these standards. As a result, we now inspect forces and report on national risks and performance in this area. We now grade and report on forces' performance separately.

North Wales Police's vetting and counter corruption inspection hasn't yet been completed. We will update our website with our findings and the separate report once the inspection is complete.

Strategic planning, organisational management and value for money

Adequate

North Wales Police is adequate at operating efficiently.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to fully understand its capability and capacity to ensure it uses resources more efficiently to provide better services to its communities

- The force has completed some work on mapping its workforce's skills, and some of this work has been carried out in collaboration with Bangor University. However, the force still doesn't have a complete picture of the capacity and capability of its workforce across all areas. Specific work will need to be completed in relation to the force's non-operational roles.
- We found that the staffing levels on shifts didn't always match demand. In addition, the force lacked an awareness of officers' and staff workloads, which was causing some pressure when the force moved its resource to meet demand.

The force needs to improve how it communicates its financial plans and the challenges it faces in delivering its services

The force's [medium-term financial plan](#) is based on realistic assumptions about future costs. It has healthy levels of financial reserves and presents a balanced budget for the next three years. It has also identified savings which it will reinvest in priority areas. The force is improving its awareness of finance and financial management through developing its leaders. It is actively participating in the Achieving Financial Excellence in Policing national programme with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants.

The force told us that for the period 2021/22 it had an anticipated underspend of £6m, and that this has risen to £9m. The underspend was documented through several meetings and boards. However, we found a lack of commentary in the force's financial plans about both the underspend and whether the rationale for it had been communicated more widely.

While financial management is evident, the force should review how it reports on its finances, specifically potential underspends. And it should make sure that it has effective processes in place to communicate how it spends its money for public benefit.

Main findings

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

The force needs to manage its current demand more effectively

The force's demand and performance meetings are responsible for making sure each area understands its priorities and that these are mapped against demand and resources available. However, we found that daily resource management relies on a manual process. This is inefficient and quickly becomes outdated. It also isn't linked well enough with other workforce planning and management processes. For example, staff told us that some shift patterns didn't take sufficient account of the training commitments of police education qualifications framework officers. The force needs to improve its understanding of demand and how it uses its resources most effectively. It also needs to develop its analytical capability, which will improve its ability to match resource to demand.

The force is investing in its ability to understand future demand

The force lacks a comprehensive understanding of its future demands. This means it can't be confident that it can meet the challenges ahead or that it has the right resources in place to do so. The force has undertaken an analysis of demand over recent years, but it hasn't yet developed tools or systematic approaches to forecasting future demand. There is a good level of investment in data tools, such as Power BI, and additional resource in its business intelligence team. But at the time of our inspection this wasn't complete. To improve its ability to forecast future demand, the force should make sure that the investment in systems and people is aligned to an understanding of its resource and demand. This will support its understanding of what is required to meet its future challenges.

The force has an extensive planning and performance framework to ensure that it tackles what is important locally and nationally, although this would benefit from further review

The force has a comprehensive understanding of the needs and expectations of its communities. It has completed a detailed review of its governance structure to support effective service delivery. This review led to changes in some areas of governance, but the force needs to make sure that the actions taken are sustained.

We were told that the number of boards and meetings creates a duplication of effort and leads to some senior managers being selective about which meetings they attend. This means that they aren't fully aware of the impact of strategic decisions and how they are implemented. The force also identified this issue in its review. To maintain the good work it is doing in this area, the force should further consider how its governance is working in practice and ensure it engages its workforce in the changes.

North Wales Police has an ambitious IT strategy which should help the force improve its effectiveness, but more needs to be done to use new technology to help its staff become more efficient

We found that the force has a clear IT strategy, but that knowledge of it among the wider workforce was limited. Staff we spoke to were frustrated that the systems they are using are out of date. By communicating the strategy more effectively, staff will have a better understanding of the intended improvements.

A programme management office manages the force's projects and programmes. However, IT teams don't have the capacity to deliver some aspects of change, and the force needs to make sure the appropriate resource is in place to support its plans effectively. While the force has invested in laptops and some new systems, both aimed at improving productivity, it still relies on some manual processes and hasn't always kept abreast of new technology that is available to forces.

The force is committed to improving services through collaboration

The force is an active partner in several well-established collaborations in Wales and north-west England. Collaborative strategic resource planning arrangements are supported by good governance, such as how the force works with Gwent Police and South Wales Police on the Police Uplift Programme. This arrangement is enabled by comprehensive data and management information. This approach helps the force to improve the service it provides to its communities by making sure it is aware of opportunities to increase resilience and produce cost savings.

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