HMICFRS

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
and Fire & Rescue Services

PEEL 2021/22

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Northamptonshire Police

Contents

Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how good Northamptonshire Police is in 12 areas of policing. We make graded judgments in 10 of these 12 as follows:

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

We also inspected how well Northamptonshire Police meets its obligations under the strategic policing requirement, and how well it protects the public from armed threats. We do not make graded judgments in these areas.

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

Important changes to PEEL

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

We are moving to a more intelligence-led, continual assessment approach, rather than the annual PEEL inspections we used in previous years. For instance, we have integrated our rolling crime data integrity inspections into these PEEL assessments. Our PEEL victim service assessment will now include a crime data integrity element in at least every other assessment. We have also changed our approach to graded judgments. We now assess forces against the characteristics of good performance,

and we more clearly link our judgments to causes of concern and areas for improvement. We have also expanded our previous four-tier system of judgments to five tiers. As a result, we can state more precisely where we consider improvement is needed and highlight more effectively the best ways of doing things.

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

HM Inspector's observations

I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Northamptonshire Police in keeping people safe and reducing crime, but there are areas where the force needs to improve.

In our last inspection in 2019 we raised some concerns, and since then there has been a significant effort to review and change structures, processes, and workforce culture. This has led to improvements in the force's ability to investigate crime, identify the vulnerable and manage demand. I commend the progress made by Northamptonshire Police in improving the service it provides to the public and I have confidence in its plans for the future. These are the findings I consider most important from our assessments of the force over the last year.

The force has got better at investigating crime after changes in processes and recruitment

Northamptonshire Police has embarked on a major change programme since our last inspection and has addressed, or is addressing, most of the problems we found. By introducing new scrutiny and audit processes and recruiting more detectives, the force has made improvements in how it investigates crime. Its response when people go missing is improved, and its workforce has a good awareness of vulnerability. The workforce is better structured to meet demand, although some departments aren't yet up to strength which is creating pressures elsewhere.

Neighbourhood policing, and working with communities and partners to prevent crime, is a priority for the force

The force is investing in neighbourhood policing to improve its ability to prevent crime. By posting all new officers funded by the national uplift programme to neighbourhood policing teams, the force will be able to work more closely with communities to solve problems and to prevent and deter vulnerable people from becoming involved in crime. Policing structures have been aligned to the new local authority structures, which should make partnership working more effective.

The force needs to get better at co-ordinating its community engagement and public scrutiny work

Northamptonshire Police needs to improve the co-ordination of its community engagement activities. While it engages with the public in various ways, it doesn't know whether these efforts are effective or wide reaching and may be missing hidden harms and opportunities to identify vulnerable people. There is limited public scrutiny of its use of police powers, an area the force needs to address to make sure it acts fairly and proportionately.

The force is missing opportunities to secure meaningful outcomes for victims

Chief officers want to improve positive outcomes, and are focusing on out-of-court disposals such as conditional cautions, and performance around outcomes 15 and 16. Outcome 15 refers to cases where a named suspect has been identified but the case can't proceed due to evidential difficulties; outcome 16 refers to cases where there is a named suspect but police don't proceed because the victim doesn't support police action. While the force has analysed some outcomes, there hasn't been a comprehensive analysis of why some of the force's outcomes are worse than the national averages for England and Wales, and whether the outcomes that are being prioritised are the most appropriate for victims.

The force needs to make sure its operating practices can identify and support repeat victims

The force needs to make sure that its operating practices enable it to identify, record and appropriately support all repeat victims. It may be missing opportunities to safeguard repeat victims and to reduce future demand by preventing victimisation.

The force has implemented new structures and processes that provide the foundations on which future improvements can be built

The new structures, processes and standards implemented since our last inspection are addressing the problems we raised. The force is better able to investigate crime, identify vulnerable people and manage demand. There is good support from the workforce who have trust and confidence in senior leaders. There are clear plans for further improvements, which I will continue to monitor with interest. I commend Northamptonshire police for the progress they have made over the last two years.

Roy Wilsher

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.

I am satisfied with how the force is performing in the areas of identifying vulnerable victims and crime investigation. It has a strong focus on responding to community concerns and on offenders who pose the greatest threat, risk and harm. Its workforce model is being developed to provide the capability and capacity to do this.

Other factors contributing to the force's ability to reduce crime are:

- Staff who work in the control room are able to identify vulnerability through effective questioning and good use of THRIVE, disseminating this information to enable safeguarding interventions.
- The force is more effective at investigating crime.
- The force is investing in early intervention to prevent crime at the earliest opportunity.

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

- The force doesn't have a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which staff in local policing teams being moved onto other work is inhibiting its preventative work.
- The force doesn't understand why its domestic abuse arrest rate has been declining, nor why in so many of these cases the victim doesn't support police action.
- The force can't show a strategic understanding of repeat victims.
- The force focuses mainly on reacting to incidents and gives insufficient attention to crime prevention.

Until the force improves its arrest rates for domestic abuse and improves its ability to reduce repeat victimisation and solve problems, it won't be able to effectively reduce crime.

Performance in context

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

In the year ending 31 March 2021, 20 percent of Northamptonshire Police's domestic abuse-related crimes resulted in an arrest. This is lower than the rate across all forces in England and Wales, which was 29 percent. Northamptonshire's arrest rate has been consistently lower than the average since the 12-month period to 31 March 2020 – before this it was higher than the average.

Domestic abuse arrest rate over time for Northamptonshire Police from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2021 (for year ending in each month)
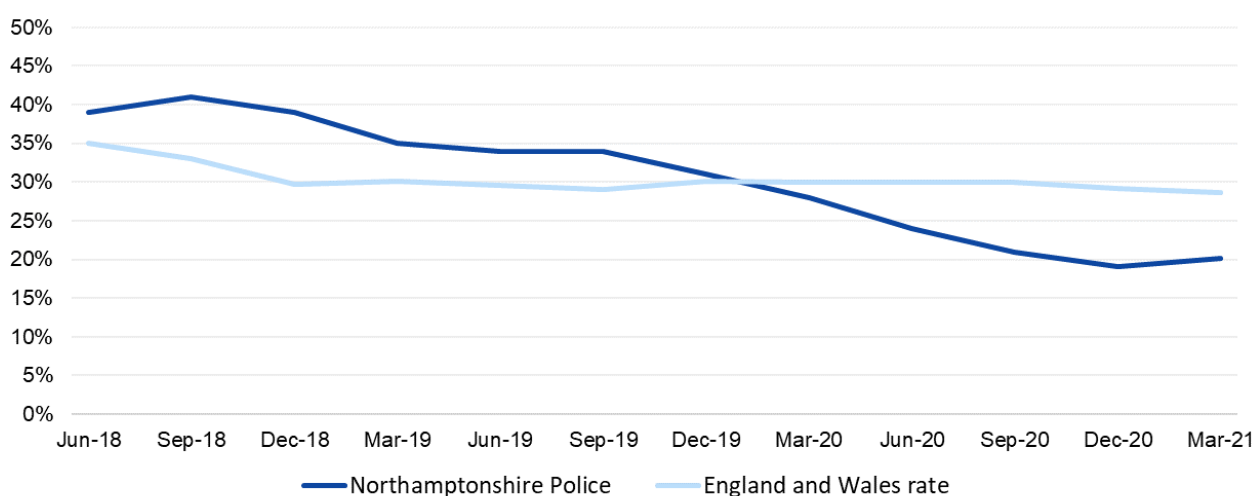
For all offences recorded by Northamptonshire Police in 2020, some 21 percent had an outcome of 'evidential difficulties: suspect identified; victim supports action' (outcome 15). This is significantly higher than the England and Wales rate which was 13 percent.

Percentage of offences recorded in 2020 with an outcome of 'evidential difficulties: suspect identified; victim supports action' (outcome 15) across all forces
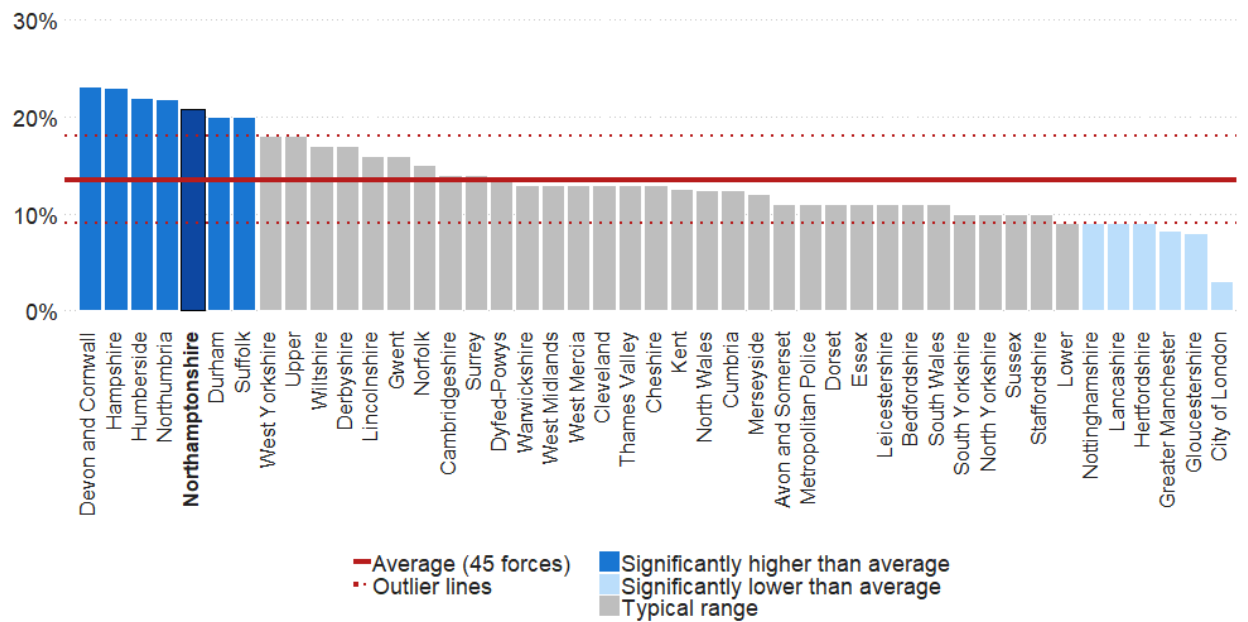
As at 31 March 2020, 4.2 percent of Northamptonshire Police's officers were Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME), lower than the BAME proportion in the local population (8.5 percent).

BAME proportion for Northamptonshire Police officers at 31 March 2020, compared to local population
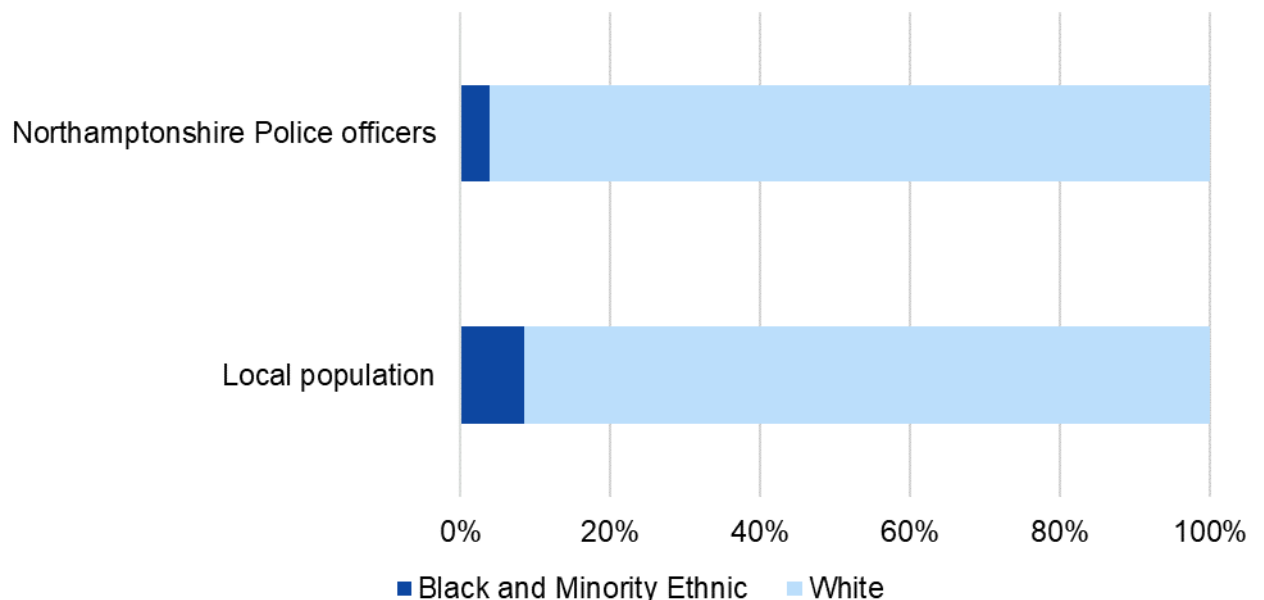
In the year ending 31 March 2020, Northamptonshire Police recorded that 46 police officers voluntarily resigned from the force. The number of officers leaving voluntarily has been increasing in recent years and was at its highest last year.

Number of police officers who voluntarily resigned from Northamptonshire Police, years ending 31 March 2011 to 31 March 2020
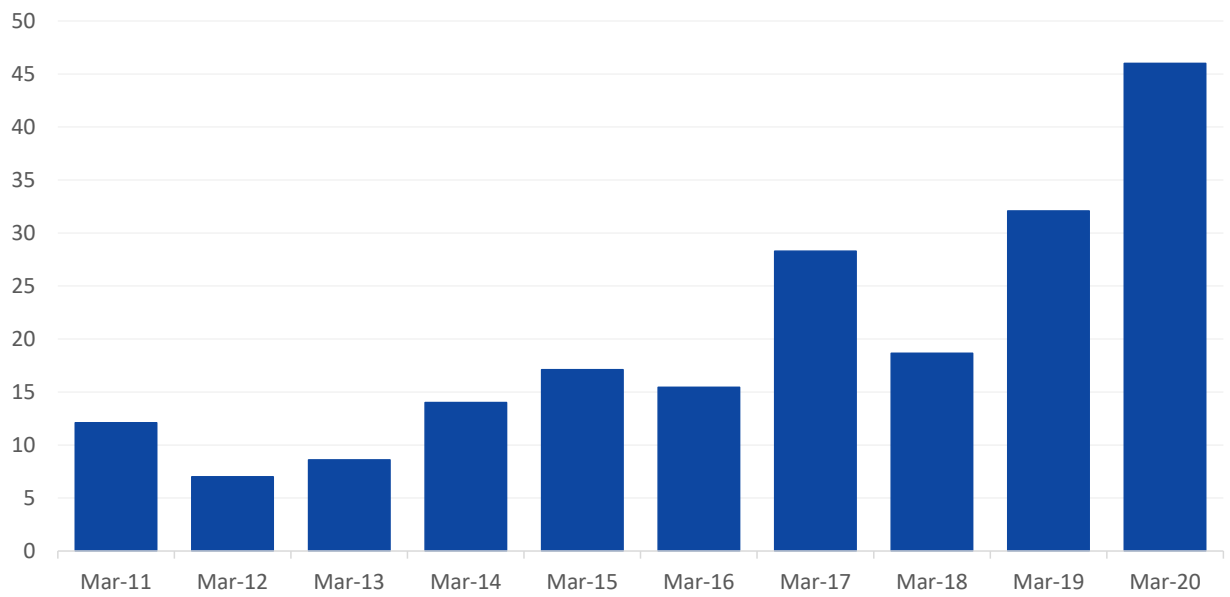
Providing a service to the victims of crime

Adequate

Northamptonshire Police is adequate at providing a service for victims of crime.

Area for improvement

The force should make sure that its crime allocation policy is consistently applied to ensure the best service for victims, especially vulnerable victims

The force has a suitable crime screening and allocation policy which it adheres to and applies in a consistent way in most cases. In our audit (October 2020) we found that crime screening decisions were generally correct, timely and in line with the force's policy, and that victims had been kept informed. The cases reviewed in October 2020 occurred during the first national lockdown when demand was greatly reduced. During our on-site visit in June 2021 we found a small number of cases that had been inappropriately allocated to response officers, primarily due to lack of capacity in the investigations department. Some of these cases involved vulnerable victims. The force needs to ensure that it provides a good level of service to victims at all times.

Main findings

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

The force manages incoming calls, assesses risk, and prioritises the police response well

Call handling is good. Calls are answered swiftly in most cases, and abandonment rates (people hanging up before their call is answered) are low. Call details are recorded correctly and crimes that are disclosed are accurately recorded. Call handlers act politely, appropriately, and ethically, using clear and unambiguous language, and give advice about safeguarding and preserving evidence. In the majority of cases THRIVE, a structured triage process, is used and clearly recorded on the incident log. Where THRIVE wasn't recorded, this was often when it was urgent to deploy a patrol. The force makes good use of structured processes such as templates for recording victim and witness contact details.

At the time of our audit we found ten cases where there was no evidence of a victim's needs assessment having been completed. Following our feedback, the force has rectified this and there is now a consistent process for identifying, recording, and addressing the needs of victims.

In most cases the force deploys its resources to respond to victims and incidents in an appropriate manner

The force responds to calls for service within its target timeframes based on the prioritisation given to the call and doesn't inappropriately change the prioritisation of calls. The force's policy for response times gives clearly defined timeframes for all incident grades and includes guidelines for when it is appropriate to make a scheduled appointment rather than responding immediately. The prioritisation of incidents by control room staff accurately reflects the nature of the incident, and any downgrades are in line with force policy and appropriate to the circumstances. The use of the appointment system was in accordance with the needs and requirements of the victims, and victims were given updates when required.

Police attendance was within the target time in only 65 of the 88 relevant incidents reviewed. In some cases, the call was graded as 'prompt' when a more appropriate grading might have been 'scheduled appointment'. Grading cases incorrectly may have a detrimental effect on the service's timeliness in responding to more urgent cases. The force should work to ensure its call handlers are confident in making the correct grading decisions, to assist the force in providing the correct response and to help it manage demand in the most effective way.

The force adheres to the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#). However, more still needs to be done to ensure that victims' views are considered regarding outcomes

We found good evidence that the requirements of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (known as the Victims' Code) were completed in all cases, and that agreed levels of contact with the victim were met. In the majority of cases (67 out of 70) we found evidence of appropriate victim care and engagement. There are effective systems in place to provide ongoing support to victims through [Voice](#), and good results were recorded in satisfaction surveys.

Chief officers are looking to improve positive outcomes, and are focusing on making better use of out of court disposals (for example, conditional cautions), as well on improving performance around outcomes 15 and 16. (Outcome 15 refers to cases where a named suspect has been identified but the case cannot proceed due to evidential difficulties; outcome 16 refers to cases where there is a named suspect but the case doesn't proceed because the victim doesn't support police action.) While the force has undertaken some analysis of outcomes, there has not been a comprehensive analysis of why some of the force's outcomes are worse than the national averages for England and Wales, and whether the outcomes that are being prioritised are the most appropriate for victims. And more needs to be done to make sure there are auditable records of why victims no longer wish to support prosecutions. This would be helped by focused surveys of victims to better understand investigations from the victim's perspective.

The force should ensure that it makes an auditable record of the decision of the victim and their reasons for withdrawing support

When making an outcome decision, the force's systems and processes ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the nature of the crime, the offender, and the victim. However, not enough records are kept on the wishes of a victim to support the use of certain outcomes:

- For outcome 16, we found an auditable record (e.g. a statement or pocket notebook entry) endorsed by the victim stating the reasons they withdrew support in only 6 of 20 cases.

- In cases where cautions and community resolutions were used, while the choice of disposal method was appropriate and had supervisory oversight in all cases, the victim had only been fully consulted in 12 of 25 cases.

- We also noted that none of the cautions contained an auditable record endorsed by the victim. This was evident in 7 of 20 community resolution outcomes.

The force should improve its processes for recording the decisions of the victim, to make sure that their reasons for withdrawal of support are documented and auditable. This will allow effective supervisory oversight and auditing to take place. It will also ensure that these outcomes are only used in appropriate circumstances and in accord with national policy and will enable the force to be better informed as to why victims withdraw or won't support police action.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect

Requires improvement

Northamptonshire Police requires improvement at treating people fairly and with respect.

Areas for improvement

The force should develop a cohesive strategy to integrate its community engagement activities, to make sure the needs of all communities, both geographic and demographic, are identified and addressed

Northamptonshire police engages with communities in a number of ways and for a variety of reasons; and while some of this activity is effective, it lacks co-ordination. It has a reasonable understanding of communities and their needs in the county, but it has some gaps – in particular around Eastern European communities, young people, those with protected characteristics (for example LGBTQ), and those with disabilities.

Neighbourhood teams carry out meaningful engagement activities including surveys, leaflet drops, social media, meetings, and patrols, and are supported by two dedicated engagement officers. This could be further enhanced if it was co-ordinated with the work of the positive action officers, those involved in public scrutiny, or with partners' engagement activities. The force's online engagement relies heavily on Twitter and Facebook.

There has been no analysis of who is being reached by the force's engagement activities, either online or face-to-face, in terms of current demographic information. And it carries out limited evaluation of how effective these are. This means that the force doesn't know whether it is successfully engaging with communities and may be missing hidden harms and opportunities to identify vulnerable people.

The force should make sure officers are trained and confident in how to use stop and search fairly and appropriately, and that this knowledge continues to be applied during encounters

Northamptonshire Police provides training on stop and search to new recruits but doesn't provide refresher training to longer serving officers. Refresher training should cover operational use, and recent legislative and procedural changes. This is important to maintain standards and make sure this power can be used effectively to tackle problems without negatively affecting community relations. Some officers still seem reluctant to use stop and search powers. While the force's reasonable grounds panel has been broadly effective in driving up recording standards and is designed to be a supportive and learning process, unfortunately it isn't perceived as such.

Despite this, our inspection found that when they do use stop and search, they understand how to do so appropriately and that supervisory oversight is good, with body worn video camera footage being reviewed in some cases. Body-worn video cameras are used in most stop search encounters and the force plans to make it compulsory. The force continues to record the grounds for stop and search well. In our most recent audit (June 2021), we found that 94 percent of grounds recorded were reasonable, one of the highest rates in the country.

The force should improve its external scrutiny processes for its use of force to ensure that it is being used fairly and appropriately

The force has external scrutiny arrangements for stop and search in the form of a community co-chair for the stop search working group, along with representatives from many communities; this group also reviews the use of force on a quarterly basis. The force should make sure that attendees of external scrutiny groups fully represent all communities and are provided with relevant data, and training on how to understand the data, to help ensure the effectiveness of these groups in driving improvements in policing, transparency and legitimacy.

Main findings

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

The force has plans to better involve local people in local policing activity

The public are able to influence prioritisation because Northamptonshire Police seeks their views. This is done through regular surveys, 'beat surgeries' and attending public meetings to identify problems and gather views. The force provides feedback to communities, including any action taken.

There is currently no strategic approach on how and when to use volunteers. The force's plans to develop its use of volunteers was put on hold during the pandemic but is now developing a new Citizens in Policing strategy. The force told us there are currently 168 Special Constables, 50 Police Service Volunteers, 11 Street Watch volunteers, and 41 police volunteers on horseback, and there is a volunteer

police and emergency services cadet scheme. The new strategy is intended to increase the involvement of local people in supporting policing and problem solving.

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour

Adequate

Northamptonshire Police is adequate at prevention and deterrence.

Area for improvement

Northamptonshire Police should make sure its problem-solving fully involves its partner organisations, and is regularly audited, assessed and, where successful, formally acknowledged and recognised

The force needs to work closely with its partners to align their efforts and avoid duplication of plans. This is essential to ensure tactical work is effective. The force needs to find a way to share information effectively and securely with its partners, and to develop plans, record actions taken, and support organisational learning. Problem-solving plans should be audited and evaluated so that the force understands the impact it is having. Good problem-solving practice should be recorded and shared for future reference, and achievements in problem-solving by officers and staff should be recognised.

Main findings

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

The force is prioritising prevention activity to tackle crime, anti-social behaviour, and vulnerability

The force's neighbourhood policing structure complies with the College of Policing's guidelines. This includes having police officers and staff accessible and accountable to – and responsible for – communities. There is a focus on prevention in performance and tasking meetings. Analytical support is available to staff taking part in problem-solving policing activities. Police community support officers (PCSOs) demonstrate a good level of problem-solving and work closely with locally based intelligence teams to better understand problems. Local problem-solving is supported by and co-ordinated through meetings of police, local authorities and others, which help the force and its partner agencies work well together on a tactical level.

Neighbourhood officers are regularly required to support colleagues in response policing

At the time of our inspection, neighbourhood officers were regularly being transferred from their core role to support response policing. This is a temporary problem arising from the number of new recruits who have been posted to response teams but haven't yet acquired the necessary skills and experience. The force should keep records of each time neighbourhood officers are required to fill skills gaps in response policing so it can review the frequency and impact.

Northamptonshire Police has improved its approach to prevention and deterrence and has clear plans for further improvements

Northamptonshire Police has relaunched its neighbourhood policing strategy 'Policing with Purpose' and is making investments to improve its service. The force told us there are currently 50 police officers and 92 PCSOs dedicated to neighbourhood policing in the county. By September 2022 there will be double the number of police officers, and all new recruits from the national uplift programme will be assigned to increase capacity in neighbourhoods. The strategy aims to provide a renewed focus on the needs of communities. Neighbourhood teams are now aligned to ward boundaries. This helps partnership working with the two new unitary authorities, which were formed in April 2021. Neighbourhood teams' activities will be based on effective community engagement and consultation, will focus on the most vulnerable, and will work with partners in problem-solving. We have reviewed the force's plans and will monitor progress with interest.

A new prevention and intervention command will take a structured approach to identifying and supporting those at risk of involvement in crime

The new command will bring together several existing units and will build on the work of the early intervention initiatives. The force is working hard to secure the support of its partners to improve data-sharing and joint problem-solving. The addition of five years of youth offending service data into Qlik (the force's business intelligence tool) is a positive development. This data needs to be shared with partners to develop a better understanding of vulnerability in Northamptonshire. The new command will aim to ensure that those at risk of becoming involved in crime will receive early help and should reduce demand for public services in the future.

The force is investing in bespoke training for its neighbourhood officers and staff

All neighbourhood officers and staff have attended a two-day training course delivered by an internationally renowned problem-solving expert. Training for senior leaders on problem-solving is also planned.

Neighbourhood teams are receiving training on anti-social behaviour, which is one of the force's four 'matters of priority'. The training will incorporate best practice use of anti-social behaviour legislation. The University of Northampton has agreed to accredit those who have completed the problem-solving and community engagement training (planned for Spring 2022). This training will initially be taken by 36 neighbourhood staff, which will mean that there are accredited staff across all 34 local policing areas.

Responding to the public

Requires improvement

Northamptonshire Police requires improvement at responding to the public.

Area for improvement

The force should improve its workforce's wellbeing by ensuring demand is equitably distributed and managed

While minimum staffing levels in response teams are often met, some teams have high vacancy levels due to sickness, maternity leave or student officer duties. One team we met had 24 officers assigned to it, but only 12 on duty. Currently, 63.6 percent of response officers have less than two years in service and 88.7 percent have less than five years' service. The workforce profile in Northamptonshire is reflected across the country with a high proportion of new officers having been recruited as part of the national uplift programme. New officers receive comprehensive training whilst more experienced officers are concentrated in specialist roles.

The current shift pattern was designed around a demand analysis from 2019 and is now being refreshed. At the time of our inspection the response teams didn't have enough suitably trained drivers. We were told that this gap will be closed by April 2022. In the meantime, qualified drivers from neighbourhood teams regularly support response officers; this impacts on neighbourhood officers other core responsibilities of community engagement and crime prevention. As well as providing emergency response, response teams are responsible for investigating an average of 10–15 crimes each, deal with prisoners, and manage crime scenes. We heard from a range of employees, both in response and in other departments, who were concerned about some of their colleagues' wellbeing and described feeling overwhelmed and close to burn-out. While there is support available to officers and staff, better management of workloads would have a positive impact on the workforce's wellbeing.

Main findings

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

The force identifies and understands risk at first contact

Officers and staff in the control room conduct structured risk assessments which are recorded, along with their rationale, on IT systems. Where necessary, cases are appropriately re-assessed. Call handlers give the necessary 'golden hour' crime prevention and forensic advice to victims. Control room staff manage callers' expectations well about what initial response will be taken and call them back if there are delays. When officers are dispatched, they are fully informed of any flags to aid their decision-making and have access to force systems via mobile devices.

Response targets are not currently being achieved

While attendance performance is improving, the force is still not consistently meeting its target response times. For grade one emergency calls, the force told us that in urban locations 67.7 percent were attended within the target time of 15 minutes, and in rural locations 70.6 percent were within the target time of 20 minutes. Our victim service audit found that the force routinely grades incidents at a higher level than appropriate, for example grading a call as 'prompt' rather than scheduling an appointment, even when the caller requests an appointment. This means that response teams are being given additional urgent work that could be better managed in slower time.

The force is starting to make plans for how to manage predicted increases in demand

The force has improved its approach to performance and demand management and has made a large amount of business intelligence available through its Qlik system. This means that supervisors and senior leaders can monitor demand and productivity. The force has very few methods of contact by the public beyond 999 and 101, offering only limited routes through Single Online Home. The force has developed plans to change this and is implementing some new processes for online reporting. It is considering a broader range of services, which would allow for queries to be diverted to more appropriate channels, including other agencies. This would help to better manage demand. Overall crime demand in Northamptonshire is predicted to increase by around 5.5 percent a year, which equates to around 300 extra crimes a week. A high proportion of these cases have a digital component, meaning the force will need to develop the skills of its workforce.

Investigating crime

Adequate

Northamptonshire Police is adequate at investigating crime.

Area for improvement

The force should develop an effective digital strategy to make sure it can retrieve evidence from mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices quickly enough to avoid delaying investigations

Backlogs in the high-tech crime unit (HTCU) are still too high, although extra resources and technology, together with better oversight and triage, have brought improvements. The police online investigations team (POLIT) is now co-located with the HTCU which has improved access to examination equipment, triage equipment and the sharing of good practice. The force plans to increase the number of officers who can use the 'kiosks' (computers which allow for quick triage and downloading content from digital devices) which will improve the situation further. The force needs to make sure that specialist staff investigating online child abuse have access to equipment to monitor devices possessed by registered sex offenders as well as digital triage equipment. The force recognises the need to expand the capacity and capability of those able to carry out digitally enabled crime investigations. It has developed a five-year digital plan to help meet the rapid growth in this area, although it lacks detail as to how this will be achieved. We will monitor the force's progress.

Main findings

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

Crime investigation standards have improved significantly since our last inspection

In our last inspection we found a wide range of problems with the way crimes were allocated, investigated, and supervised. The force has dealt with each of these problems and crime investigation standards have greatly improved. In our 2018 audit of crimes, only 37 out of 60 cases reviewed were assessed as being of a suitable standard. In our recent audit, this standard was met in 67 out of 70 cases. The force has introduced scrutiny, including governance and oversight by leaders. Audits by senior officers now provide rigour and focus and make clear the expectations on supervisors to closely monitor the work of their staff.

Front-line supervisors review all crimes within 24 hours of reporting. While the high level of scrutiny has been necessary to drive up improvements, the force should consider the sustainability and necessity of this approach for all. Providing some discretion and taking a more targeted approach will increase capacity and focus attention on the areas of greatest need.

Crimes are allocated to the most appropriate teams in most cases, but the force should consider appointing an independent arbiter

The force has a suitable crime screening and allocation policy which it adheres to and applies in a consistent way in most cases. ('Screening' is the process to determine whether a case should be investigated further). Northamptonshire Police has a crime allocation policy that aims to resolve a crime at the first point of contact, with the fewest number of handovers to other teams, and to make sure the most appropriate person is investigating the offence. The force also assesses how likely it is that a case will be solved, and whether the resources needed for an investigation would be proportionate to the harm caused, to determine whether a case should be allocated for investigation or just filed.

In our audit we found that crime screening decisions were generally correct, made promptly, and in line with force policy, and that victims were kept informed. At the time of our latest audit (October 2020) there was a consistent approach to allocating incidents, although it is worth noting that the cases we reviewed happened during periods of national lockdown when demand was significantly reduced. During onsite activities in June 2021, we found several cases that had been inappropriately allocated, primarily due to lack of capacity in the investigations department. Some of these cases involved vulnerable victims. These included cases of high-risk domestic abuse, grievous bodily harm, sexual grooming, and high-value frauds that had been allocated to response officers, who had to deal with them on top of their usual role of responding to calls for service. The force is reviewing its crime allocation policy and should consider introducing an independent arbiter to make some allocation decisions.

The force has developed its investigative capacity and capability including the introduction of direct-entry detectives. Workforce wellbeing within investigations has improved

The recruitment of four cohorts of direct-entry detectives is an innovative approach to increasing the resilience of PIP2 level (serious and complex investigations) resources. This initiative will start to have a positive impact on detective capability and capacity. As at 31 March 2021, the force had 242 PIP2-trained investigators in post, which is 65 percent of its target of 371. Investigators we spoke to were content with their workloads and spoke very positively about the direction given by chief officers. While workloads and demand are now manageable within investigations departments, this is not the case for those in response policing.

The force is missing opportunities to secure meaningful outcomes for victims

The force's arrest rate for domestic abuse has dropped in recent years and stands at 20.1 percent for the year ending 31 March 2021, compared with the England and Wales average of 29.2 percent. Due to the current lack of suitably trained detectives in the investigations department, some high-risk domestic abuse cases are being investigated by response officers. The force is also dealing with more domestic abuse cases by scheduled appointment than other forces – 23.0 percent in Northamptonshire compared with the England and Wales average of 13.0 percent. This means that opportunities to secure evidence and safeguard victims may be being missed.

A victim personal statement (VPS) is a statement given to the police or any other organisation assigned to take the statement on the police's behalf. In our audit of 70 cases, we found that where the option of providing a VPS was appropriate, it was refused by the victim in 32 cases and hadn't been taken in a further 12 cases. We only found one case where VPS had been taken. The VPS is important as it gives victims a voice in the criminal justice process, helping others to understand how the crime has affected them. The force should take steps to ensure that victims are being provided this opportunity, and that staff are aware of their responsibilities, know why VPSs are important, and have confidence in them.

In the 15 cases where the victim did not support or withdrew support for a prosecution, we found five cases where officers tried to progress the case without the support of the victim, which was appropriate due to the nature of the incidents. This is good practice.

The force has high rates of cases ending in outcome 15 (where the victim supports further police action, but it doesn't go ahead due to evidential difficulties) and outcome 16 (where the victim doesn't support further police action). These rates are increasing. For all offences recorded in the year ending 31 December 2020, Northamptonshire Police had the following outcomes:

- Outcome 15: 21 percent. This is significantly higher than the England and Wales average of 13 percent.
- Outcome 16: 22 percent. This is in line with the England and Wales average of 23 percent.

For domestic abuse offences recorded in the year ending 31 March 2020, Northamptonshire Police had the following outcomes:

- Outcome 15: 20 percent. This is slightly lower than the England and Wales average of 22 percent.

- Outcome 16: 61 percent. This is higher than the England and Wales average of 55 percent.

Chief officers are looking to improve positive outcomes. (See the section above, 'Providing a service for victims of crime', for a full discussion of outcomes.)

Protecting vulnerable people

Requires improvement

Northamptonshire Police requires improvement at protecting vulnerable people.

Area for improvement

The force should maximise its opportunities to engage with and obtain feedback from victims to drive service improvements

The force carries out telephone surveys of victims. This is only done with a small proportion of victims and is not comprehensive. The force carries out both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the satisfaction survey results, and these are fed into relevant working groups to improve services to victims. The force should consider all opportunities to get feedback from victims, particularly vulnerable victims, including through partner organisations.

The force should make sure that its operating practices enable all repeat and vulnerable victims to be identified, recorded and appropriately supported

The force may be missing opportunities to safeguard repeat and vulnerable victims and reduce future demand by preventing victimisation. While vulnerability is consistently identified at first point of contact, this is not always recorded:

- Only 4 percent of calls to Northamptonshire Police's control room are flagged as involving vulnerable people, compared with the England and Wales average of 6 percent.
- The force is unable to supply repeat domestic abuse incident data.
- The force's rate of repeat caller incidents is the highest in England and Wales (for those forces that could provide data) – 127.7 per 1,000 population for the year ending 31 March 2021.

During our inspection, our case file audit found that in the 21 cases where the victim was identified as a repeat victim, this was only recorded by a call handler in 16 cases. This means that callers who are repeat victims of crime may not receive an appropriate response, and the force may not always take the available opportunities to reduce the likelihood of future victimisation. While the Vulnerabilities and Repeat Officer in the control room identifies many high demand callers, the value of this role could be increased through stronger co-ordination with other departments, to support and develop more problem-solving opportunities.

Main findings

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

The force's vulnerability strategy doesn't translate into effective operational practice as well as it could, and the force needs clear plans so that its capacity will be able to meet future demand

The force's vulnerability strategy is overseen by a chief officer and underpins the force's four 'matters of priority' – domestic abuse, knife crime, anti-social behaviour, and serious and organised crime. There is good understanding in the workforce that vulnerability is everyone's business, and the force has individual crime problem profiles and accompanying strategies. However, opportunities to recognise links between crime types and emerging trends are not always made as effectively as they could be. For example, the force's knife crime problem profile identifies that one fifth of offences relate to domestic abuse; however, this was not cross-referenced in the domestic abuse or knife crime strategies. While this has recently been rectified, other cross-cutting problems area remain, such as county lines, missing people, organised crime, and modern-day slavery, that could benefit from a clearer joined-up approach to problem-solving, in order to reduce vulnerability.

The force has limited capability to tackle these problems proactively, and while the force management statement acknowledges the increase in population leading to increases in crime, the vulnerability strategy does not clearly articulate plans to support reduction of vulnerability in these areas. The force needs to ensure that demand does not outstrip its capacity to respond.

While resourcing challenges remain, we are pleased to see that following our last inspection there has been an increase in resource and supervision in high-risk areas of vulnerability, including child protection, management of sexual offenders and violent offenders (MOSOVO), domestic abuse investigations, and the police online investigations team (POLIT).

The force has improved its understanding of vulnerability and offers a range of support services to victims and witnesses. However, it should consider whether more can be done to safeguard victims during investigations

The force recognises the link between childhood vulnerability and the likelihood of exploitation or future offending behaviour. It has worked with a range of partners, including local authorities, health, education and social care, to develop a profile based on those factors that are most likely to indicate vulnerability. Using this profile, the force is able to identify not only individuals at risk, but also early intervention strategies and possible intelligence that can enable it to better protect children.

The force refers victims and witnesses directly to the 'Voice' service, which is contracted through the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to deliver a range of services. Voice aims to:

- provide emotional and practical support to anyone affected by crime;
- link with partner agencies to ensure the right specialist support is available for everyone;
- offer help and guidance to anyone who has to attend court proceedings; and
- promote involvement in the criminal justice system by informing people about their rights.

The service is also open to people who have not reported the matter to the police and is accessible to people for whom English is not their first language.

While support is available, a victim's needs may change during the course of an investigation and this isn't consistently considered by the force. In our audit of crime files, in cases where risk assessments should have been reconsidered and reviewed during the course of the investigation, we found that this had occurred in 35 out of 40 cases. This means that on some occasions, including domestic abuse and stalking cases, there was no recorded review of the risk assessments and changes in risk, particularly escalation, may have been overlooked. This means that opportunities to effectively safeguard and support victims of crime to cope, recover, and remain engaged with the criminal justice process may be being missed.

Existing multi-agency safeguarding practices are broadly effective. But improvements could be made in both the scope and consideration of police powers to support ongoing safeguarding

The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) arrangements are broadly effective at managing threat, harm and risk, and include good representation from partners. There is however currently no MASH for adults. This limits the effectiveness of the collaborative response to the increasing number of public protection notices being submitted. The force is looking to address this through new partnership arrangements which will build on the positive partnership initiative seen in the multi-agency daily risk assessment meeting (MADRA). This process enables a regular dynamic review of high-risk domestic abuse cases involving children. This approach will be expanded to consider adult safeguarding concerns.

The numbers of cases discussed at MARAC is high compared with the level recommended by SafeLives. The reason for this is unknown, as is the reason behind the proportion of cases assessed by the force as 'high' (23.9 percent in Northamptonshire, compared to the England and Wales average of 12.4 percent). The force uses ancillary orders such as DVPNs and DVPOs alongside stalking and harassment orders where appropriate. It is not clear whether police powers are routinely considered in all multi-agency discussions.

Managing offenders and suspects

Requires improvement

Northamptonshire Police requires improvement at managing offenders and suspects.

Area for improvement

To reduce victimisation and future demand, the force should speed up its plans for integrated offender management. This should include lifetime offender management for serious and organised criminals

While the force's focus on the management of suspects and offenders has increased since our last inspection, there is still work to do. The new prevention and intervention command will bring together existing units to improve offender management and identify those at risk of becoming involved in crime. The force is starting from a low base, particularly around integrated offender management, and it is not yet possible to assess its effectiveness. The force needs to secure the buy-in of strategic partners for its approach and continue to develop its data observatory. The observatory will enable analysts and researchers to view police and partner data, more easily identify those who are vulnerable, and identify opportunities for problem-solving. Other forces have already taken this approach to offender management, and Northamptonshire Police has yet to realise the benefits.

While we saw positive progress in the force's approach to the lifetime offender management of serious and organised criminals, this needs to be co-ordinated and integrated with the other offender management initiatives to become fully effective.

The force should review its current and future investment in digital capabilities for the [management of sexual offenders and violent offenders (MOSOVO)](#) and its POLIT to reduce the risk of harm to the public from sexual offenders

The force has not invested enough in its digital capabilities. This is reducing the capacity of its staff to proactively identify victims and suspects, and to effectively manage registered sex offenders. In investigations relating to indecent images, it can take as long as two years for some devices to be reviewed. This issue not only impacts POLIT staff but all investigations where digital triage is required. This leads to unnecessary delays in bringing offenders to justice and preventing further serious harm to children. Equipment that is available is not being used to its best effect, and the training provided to staff is not revisited regularly enough to ensure staff remain skilled.

Main findings

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

The force has increased capacity in the teams responsible for identifying and managing sex offenders

To support resilience in identifying and managing sex offenders, the force has increased officer numbers and supervision in the MOSOVO team and POLIT. MOSOVO staff have also been trained to grade indecent images to help support POLIT during periods of high demand. But this training took place around 18 months ago and MOSOVO staff haven't been called on to support POLIT regularly. This training should be incorporated into MOSOVO staff's continuous professional development so that these staff remain competent to perform this function when needed. While current resources may be enough to manage existing demand, there doesn't appear to be enough planning to make sure that future demand can be managed safely without risk of harm to the public or staff wellbeing.

There is greater focus on apprehending and managing suspects and offenders

Chief officers have increased their focus on the management of suspects and offenders. People who are wanted and/or circulated on the [Police National Computer](#) are subject to close scrutiny and monitoring by senior leaders and local supervisors. The force has invested in extra resources and supervision to manage foreign national offenders and make [ACRO](#) checks. There is also chief officer oversight to make sure [bail](#) and [released under investigation (RUI)](#) are being used appropriately. This is an improvement on our last inspection when we found that bail was rarely used.

The force is more effectively managing registered sex offenders, but it could improve

Risk assessments are conducted using nationally recognised best practice tools such as the active risk management system (ARMS) and Risk Matrix 2000. While there are some backlogs in assessments, these are within acceptable limits. The force's approach is broadly in line with Authorised Professional Practice (APP), and there is good awareness of registered sex offenders (RSOs) in local policing teams. In March 2021 we found evidence of officers going alone to visit RSOs, which is against national best practice and may place officers at risk. However, when we visited in June 2021, we were pleased to find that this had stopped. The force should make sure backlogs are kept to a minimum but must ensure that demand management doesn't result in increased risk to either staff or the public.

Ancillary orders are considered routinely by some teams, but this isn't yet universal

Sexual harm prevention orders and sexual risk orders are considered by the POLIT and MOSOVO teams, but not routinely by the teams who investigate rapes. This should be reviewed, and if necessary, training should be provided. The lack of digital capability is hampering the management of these orders.

The force's MOSOVO policy should be reviewed to make sure its purpose is clear and robust

The force doesn't follow APP in relation to managing RSOs. While this is appropriate if a local policy is underwritten by a chief officer, the policy should be based on the management of risk, and the consideration of risks should be clearly articulated. The policy should make clear to staff what is expected of them. The current policy was last reviewed in 2020, and there is a separate policy regarding reactive management of RSOs. Policies don't reflect the most up-to-date national best practice, including that the change of lead agency is a significant event which should prompt a new risk management plan within 15 days. The force's reactive management policy allows for offenders to be placed on reactive management while subject to a civil order, from the point at which they are deemed to be low risk. National best practice stipulates that reactive management should only be considered for those who aren't subject to a civil order, and who have been successfully managed at low risk in the community for three years. Also, the policy doesn't make clear how often offenders should have the risk they pose reviewed, for example by reviewing local and national police databases.

During our inspection we found that staff weren't clear on the process for when an RSO reoffends, for recording technical breaches, or for voluntary viewing of devices when there is no order for this in place. This indicates that the policy lacks clarity, which may result in inconsistency of approach, and risk to staff and the public.

Disrupting serious organised crime

Adequate

Northamptonshire Police is adequate at managing serious and organised crime.

Area for improvement

The force should improve its response to serious and organised crime by providing lead responsible officers with the skills, training, and support they need to perform their role effectively

Lead responsible officers (LROs) have been appointed to manage organised crime groups (OCG) and account for their actions at the relevant tasking meetings. But there is no specific process to support LROs in formulating plans, and the force needs to ensure that all of the '4Ps' are considered (prevent, pursue, protect and prepare). OCG management plans provide details on investigative and intelligence tactics, but prevention activities are less comprehensively considered. An LRO should formulate a tactical 4P plan, generally with advice from specialists, and should be able to allocate work from the plan for others to deliver. The LRO should then be able to take a step back from the investigation and ensure that the 4P approach is being managed. LROs would benefit from others being involved at the planning stage – for example, other law enforcement partners, covert advisors, the Government Agency Intelligence Network, and local partners. This would improve the range of resources and tactics aimed at tackling OCGs.

The force should make full use the expertise of financial investigators to identify and disrupt offenders engaged in organised crime

The force needs to make better use of financial experts to identify and disrupt people who facilitate organised crime. Financial investigators are not routinely tasked to support lead LROs or senior investigating officers (SIOs) to tackle organised crime.

There is a lack of awareness around how the Economic Crime Unit can support the tackling of serious and organised crime. The unit plans to host an awareness event for LROs and SIOs to address this. Increased use of financial experts in the fight against serious and organised crime will present more opportunities to target and seize money that has been obtained criminally.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force manages serious and organised crime.

Serious and organised crime is one of the force's priorities and there is clear leadership from chief officers to tackle it

The force uses the National Intelligence Model to direct intelligence collection and tasking. The force has developed a serious crime matrix which scans force IT systems for new crimes and intelligence that may relate to serious and organised crime or criminals. These include firearms, knives, noxious substances, modern slavery, human trafficking, child exploitation, cuckooing, drugs, serious sexual offences, public protection notices, and threats between criminal groups. While the matrix is well established and effective, there are gaps in the identification of some county lines and local drug suppliers. The force's OCG management process makes use of MoRiLE 2020 to inform its assessments. The force has mapped 25 OCGs that are active within the county. There are also 14 gangs that operate county lines, but three of the force's areas currently have no mapped activity despite having established OCGs. Work is underway to explore this.

The workforce has a clear understanding of their role in tackling SOC. Officers are kept informed about their responsibilities for tackling it through daily briefings, blogs, and newsletters. The force has been running a campaign called 'Look Closer' for over a year, which encourages officers to report vulnerability within communities and is part of the force's vulnerability strategy.

The force is driving efforts to improve the ways it works with partners, with the ultimate goal of re-establishing a strategic SOC partnership board

The SOC community profile and trigger plan have been shared with partners. The two unitary authorities are now producing community safety plans. These partner arrangements are developing, but there is a need to share more granular data. The new Community One meetings are helping tactical tasking and co-ordination with partners. The force needs to work closely with its partners to align their efforts and avoid duplicating plans. This is essential to ensure that tactical work is as effective as it can be.

The force has limited capacity and capability to respond to actionable intelligence or to tackle lower-level offenders who exploit the vulnerable

The force is investing in its covert capabilities, but its current covert capability is minimal, and relies on support from the regional organised crime unit (ROCU). The force doesn't have enough detectives with a good understanding of how to tackle SOC who can provide the necessary investigative support. Potentially linked offences aren't consistently allocated to appropriately capable detectives, which means that investigations are being dealt with in isolation. An example is when large-scale cannabis factories are identified. They are investigated as individual cases, and little work to identify those responsible for organising the criminality takes place.

In the future, neighbourhood teams will become increasingly involved in tackling SOC, akin to the work of the Priority Action Team in central Northampton, but there are currently gaps in many parts of the force. The exception to this is Operation Revive, which has been set up in response to increased gang tensions and firearms discharges in Wellingborough.

The force is able to work closely with partners on complex operations to tackle SOC and protect the vulnerable

Operation Poetry is an investigation into county lines involving gangs from the London and West Midlands regions. It involved covert tactics and required a strong liaison with the ROCU. It also required a covert link with the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) to ensure that safeguarding concerns were dealt with without disclosing the covert operation.

There are some partnership processes to identify and engage with individuals who are vulnerable to SOC. The cuckooing case management meetings and vulnerable adolescent panels actively identify those that are vulnerable to SOC and consider which actions should be taken to divert and prevent. The Heroin and Cocaine Area Action Panel has a similar role in support of the #Citadel pilot in Kettering. #Citadel takes a whole-system health approach to tackling drug use and associated criminality.

Meeting the strategic policing requirement

We don't grade forces on this question.

Area for improvement

The force should work with the local resilience forum to ensure that non-crime strategic policing threats are identified and have clear governance, and should plan exercises to test preparedness

Public order and contingency planning are not routinely assessed in the force's planning cycles. The last published community risk register was from 2017, and it doesn't accurately reflect the risks faced in Northamptonshire. The Joint Operational Learning Forum (JOLF) was established to review findings from public inquiries, testing and exercising, while responsibility for Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) is led by the fire service. Consideration should be given to streamlining these arrangements. There is currently no calendar for training or exercises in 2021, which the force should address, although in November 2021 there will be an Operation Plato exercise, planned and co-ordinated by East Midlands Counter Terrorism Unit. An annual calendar of training and exercises with partners would help ensure not only preparedness in the county, but also the availability of resources to support such events. We are aware that imminent changes are planned to chief officer responsibilities to bring a more streamlined approach to oversight and co-ordination around SPR risks, for which the local resilience forum has a key role to play.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force meets the strategic policing requirement (SPR).

The force's understanding of the SPR threats is incomplete

The SPR sets out six threats that need to be tackled nationally: terrorism; civil emergencies; organised crime; threats to public order; a large-scale cyber incident; and child sexual exploitation linked to organised crime. We found reference to some of these in the force's strategic plans, but there were some omissions. Threats to public order in the county weren't considered in the force's strategic assessment, force management statement or the police and crime plan. This may mean that the likelihood of these occurring, and their possible scale, impact, and consequences for communities, aren't fully understood.

The force's capacity to deal with public order has increased

The force is increasing the number of officers trained to deal with public order to make sure it has enough resilience to maintain its SPR requirements, and because it has seen an increase in mutual aid requests. Its preparedness was tested during the pandemic by an immediate call-out request instigated by the chief constable. The force has recognised that it has the opportunity to increase capacity by reviewing requests for public order commanders at events and making sure they only support those events that require their skills and expertise. While debriefing about events takes place for major events like the British Grand Prix at Silverstone, the review also provides an opportunity to assess whether any other changes might be required to the debriefing process to make sure learning is captured and shared.

Northamptonshire Police is enhancing its drone capability

The force has secured funding to increase the number of drones and trained pilots it has to provide round-the-clock capability, particularly to deal with searches for high-risk missing people. This should reduce how often the force calls out a National Police Air Service (NPAS) helicopter. Reduced helicopter use will not eliminate the costs of using the helicopter service, something the force is fully sighted on and has considered in its financial plans.

Protecting the public against armed threats

We don't grade forces on this question.

Area for improvement

Northamptonshire Police should develop its own armed policing strategic threat and risk assessment (APSTRA) in line with national directions

The force has an overview of armed threats but needs to make sure the APSTRA fully complies with national guidance. For example, it doesn't include a forecast of demand over the following four years, or data on the use and deployment of conducted energy devices (CEDs), commonly referred to as Tasers. Without this data, the force cannot accurately determine the resources it needs to protect the public effectively.

The force's understanding of armed threats would also improve if it developed its own APSTRA separately from the current regional assessment. It would help the force build its armed capacity in line with local threats.

The force needs to clarify the accreditation standards for firearms commanders

There is some confusion about who is responsible for certifying the competence of firearms commanders and the minimum standards required for accreditation. Both how many and what type of operation firearms commanders are expected to take charge of in a given period of time was unclear to us.

Firearms commanders were also uncertain who was responsible for the governance of accreditation standards. Some thought that responsibility lay with an assistant chief constable in Northamptonshire Police, while others thought it lay with a chief officer with a regional remit. The force needs to resolve this anomaly and make sure that accreditation standards are properly understood.

Main findings

In this section, we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force protects communities from armed threats.

Northamptonshire Police's armed response capabilities are provided by its own officers, although it is dependent on specialist regional support

In our last inspection we established that the force was going to end its joint operational working with Leicestershire Police and Lincolnshire Police. Northamptonshire Police still works closely with these forces so they have consistent standards, but the training of its armed officers and operational armed response is now provided in-force. Most armed incidents in the county are resolved by armed response vehicle (ARV) officers. If matters escalate and specialist capabilities are needed, the force draws on the support of counter-terrorist specialist firearms officers (CTSFOs) based at the regional counter-terrorism hub.

The force has enough capacity to respond to incidents requiring armed officers

Northamptonshire Police is well prepared to respond to armed threats in the county. It sets a minimum level of ARV coverage, and its patrol areas are defined in accordance with known and emerging threats – for example, increased activity from organised crime groups in certain parts of the county.

Northamptonshire Police should clarify the role of ARV officers

ARV officers told us that they have responsibilities in relation to roads policing in addition to responding to armed incidents. We heard that ARV officers are sometimes utilised as the fast roads response when the interceptors are not on duty, sometimes leading to armed response officers not being readily available for deployment when an incident requiring an armed response comes in. This needs to be clarified by the force as it may affect the availability of ARVs to protect Northamptonshire communities from armed threats.

The force supports national approval procedures for the acquisition of weapons and specialist munitions

The force has effective procedures in place for if they need new weapons or specialist munitions. We established that the force has replaced its carbines in strict compliance with the national approval process. This was done to find a replacement weapon with handling characteristics more suited to women and the broader range of officers interested in firearms careers.

The force could do more to ensure that firearms commanders are familiar with the use of specialist munitions

As part of firearms operations, firearms commanders are responsible for the authorisation and tactical deployment of specialist munitions. Firearms commanders are generally confident in the use of specialist munitions. However, opportunities to attend practical demonstrations of such devices are rarely taken. The force should address this. Other forces make attendance at such events compulsory to ensure that commanders see at first hand the benefits, risks, and physical effects that these devices have on individuals.

Northamptonshire Police has plans in place to address foreseeable threats

The force has detailed plans to protect sites that might be vulnerable to a terrorist attack. The force tests its security plans in a programme of structured exercises. These have tested joint working between Northamptonshire Police, neighbouring forces, CTSFOs, the army, NHS ambulance trusts, and fire and rescue services. The training also tests the abilities of the control room staff.

Guidance on the role of unarmed officers in terrorist attacks is provided by the National Counter Terrorism Police Headquarters. It sets out their main responsibilities, recognising they are likely to be the first to respond to incidents of this nature. Training sessions have begun but the force couldn't tell us how many frontline officers have attended them. The force needs to develop auditable training records and make sure that everyone benefits from this guidance who needs to.

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Requires improvement

Northamptonshire Police requires improvement at building and developing its workforce.

Area for improvement

The force should improve recruitment and retention through targeted activity to make sure the workforce is representative of its local community

Although gender representation has improved, the force still isn't representative of the community it serves across all ranks. The proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic officers is 4.2 percent, which is below both the local population (8.5 percent) and the average for England and Wales (7.3 percent). To increase representation, positive action officers are working with communities, but their work needs to be more closely aligned to wider community engagement activities to maximise the benefit and reduce duplication of effort. The force can identify the point in the recruitment process at which an applicant fails, but needs to better understand why some groups fail more than others. This will give better direction for future positive action initiatives.

As well as taking positive action to increase representation from under-represented communities, the force should consider internal targeted talent identification and support to increase representation from within the workforce. In the last year, a high number of officers have left, 42 percent of which left voluntarily before their expected retirement date, compared with the England and Wales average of 28.3 percent. This has been steadily increasing over recent years. While there are several hypotheses as to why this is happening, there has been no systematic analysis of the causes, and no detailed analysis of exit interviews. The risk of attrition is increased by the lack of career pathways available for police staff.

The force should make sure that the needs and skills of all its workforce are comprehensively identified, understood, and maintained

We found a range of problems relating to the force's approach to training:

- Shift patterns for response, neighbourhood teams and the force control room allow little time for learning and development.

- Training for officers in neighbourhood and response policing is co-ordinated locally, based on perceived local need without reference to or co-ordination with the Learning and Development team. Learning objectives aren't always defined and attendance is inconsistently recorded.

- There is some confusion and feelings of unfairness relating to access to courses available to response and neighbourhood officers.

- When more structured training is needed, it takes considerable planning through the duty management system, requiring re-rostered rest days to bring officers together.

The force has improved its understanding of the workforce's skills, in particular operational skills, but doesn't yet have a complete understanding. Nor does it have a comprehensive workforce planning strategy, although one is being developed. The new HR system, which will replace the multi-force shared service HR system (MFSS), is designed to address these problems but is not yet live. The force should review its approach to learning and development to make sure it is fit for purpose.

Main findings

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

Ethical standards are clearly promoted throughout the force

There is strong support for the chief officer team and its communications through regular use of vlogs, particularly from the chief constable. Officers and staff feel valued, included and part of the force. They feel it is now in a better place than it has been for several years and morale is increasing. The ethics committee is a useful forum for discussing challenging ethical issues, and its findings are published. 'Challenging behaviours' meetings have been introduced to improve perceptions of fairness and transparency. Both of these indicate a developing learning culture supported by the professional standards department.

The force doesn't have a comprehensive understanding of workforce wellbeing

There is a clear commitment from the chief officer team to improve wellbeing. But the force's ability to gain a thorough and comprehensive understanding of threats and risks to its workforce's wellbeing is inhibited by the continuing challenges associated with MFSS. The force still doesn't know the exact position regarding staff who need reasonable adjustments, a problem that was first identified in 2017. This lack of knowledge causes problems for the resource management unit when making resourcing decisions, as the information on the duty management system is not accurate. And while there is a record of health risks associated with some posts, there isn't a comprehensive record for all posts. The force is working through these problems, and its new HR system has been developed so that workforce wellbeing information is better managed.

The force's understanding of wellbeing is further limited by a lack of understanding of the workload challenges faced by its staff, particularly those working in response. We found evidence of officers regularly working unpaid overtime and taking work home to keep on top of it. There is a lack of pro-active welfare support in the control room, and limited understanding of occupational health provision to support officers and staff. Return-to-work interviews after periods of sickness don't consistently take place for control room staff. A lack of knowledge or understanding of such issues at a senior level may lead to an inaccurate assessment of demand.

There is greater stability in supervisory ranks, which means there is continuity of supervision for the workforce

The number of sergeants and inspectors in temporary roles is still significant but reducing. The force has introduced a selection process for these roles, and a streamlined promotion process using professional discussion. We are pleased to see that the force has undertaken some succession planning for critical posts and has an improving knowledge of individual capabilities. The workforce generally feels well supported by their immediate managers, which is an improvement on our last inspection.

The force is making good progress in adopting the policing qualifications and engagement framework, but it doesn't have enough tutors to support new recruits

Northamptonshire Police has adopted two of the three entry routes identified by the College of Policing (Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship and Degree Holder Entry Programme) and is collaborating with the University of Northampton. To support the success of these programmes, the force needs enough motivated tutors. The force is recruiting many more officers than it would normally due to the national uplift programme. At present most student officers are based in response teams and are tutored by colleagues. Response officers at present have heavy workloads and not enough of them are happy to take on the additional responsibility of tutoring. In the future new recruits will be assigned to neighbourhood teams where colleagues should have time to tutor them. The force needs to find ways to motivate officers to become tutors. It should make sure that its current model of tutoring is effective in providing a strong foundation on which new officers can build their career, and that it addresses the increasing attrition rate.

The force manages the vetting of its workforce effectively

The force is generally good at managing the vetting of its workforce. However, we found the force's data to be incorrect in several areas. And we tested the vetting activities against the Authorised Professional Practice (APP) and found areas that need further work before we can say the force is fully compliant. The vetting management system doesn't link to other force systems such as HR or estates and facilities. The processes are bureaucratic, and the same data often has to be entered multiple times. The accuracy of the data relies on manual updates from information provided by other systems or emails. Despite the anomalies in the data, we found that the management of information within the force vetting unit (FVU) was effective. We are confident that the vast majority of the force have the correct level of vetting required for their role and the processes are well managed. Three months before someone's vetting expires, they are contacted for it to be renewed. This is good practice.

The force is aware of what level of vetting is required for each established role. Before anyone is moved into these posts, their vetting is confirmed. We were assured that staff aren't moved until the correct level of vetting is in place.

We found that the workload of the vetting unit was manageable, and sufficient staff were in place. The force notifies the FVU of any recruitment campaigns, allowing them to plan for the upsurge in their workload.

The force is trying to improve the workforce's understanding and compliance with notification relating to a change in circumstances. There is an opportunity to do this through the newly implemented performance and development review process. The head of FVU is also raising awareness among the workforce through monthly presentations.

One area where the force doesn't comply with the APP is the annual health check for certain groups, although we were told the force has started work to rectify this. The other area where the force doesn't comply is in monitoring protected characteristics in decision-making around vetting for fairness and transparency. This was an area for improvement for the force in our last inspection report. Since then, progress has been made, but not enough to meet the standard required. Between 1 March and 31 August 2020, the force received 390 vetting applications; 15 of which were rejected, 4 percent of the total number received. The force records applicants' ethnicity but doesn't record information about other protected characteristics. This means that it can't understand whether there is disproportionality in decision-making.

Strategic planning, organisational management and value for money

Requires improvement

Northamptonshire Police requires improvement at operating efficiently.

Area for improvement

The force should improve its change management practices by:

- identifying criteria for evaluation and business benefits from the outset;

- accurately identifying and managing interdependencies;

- regularly assessing progress, including the impact on workforce wellbeing;

- tracking benefits and making sure they are realised; and

- conducting post-implementation reviews.

While the force has introduced new structures and processes, and the service provided to the public is improving, there has been no comprehensive review of recent change initiatives to assess their impact. Aspects of the latest major change programme (FP25) are now being managed as 'business as usual' by corporate services without the costs and benefits having been analysed. Several other units are now under review, but it is unclear how the interdependencies are being managed. Several high-value business cases were made outside of the annual planning cycle in 2020/21, and the benefits of these changes haven't been fully tracked or reviewed. We have been briefed about the new strategic planning processes, which will be essential to making sure business cases for change are made as part of the annual process and the benefits are tracked. By following good change management practices, the force will know whether investments or changes to business practices have been beneficial, which can inform future decisions.

Main findings

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

Resource levels do not meet current demand

During our fieldwork we identified factors which indicate that the force's resource levels are not able to meet its current demand levels:

- There aren't enough capable and available officers on response teams, which leads to neighbourhood officers needing to regularly support response officers.

- Many response officers are haven't been in the job for very long, require close tutoring, and are frequently abstracted to training duties. Across the country, a high proportion of response officers started operational duties during periods of lockdown and are inexperienced in dealing with the full range of policing demands, such as policing the night-time economy.

- Response shift patterns don't match demand and are based on out of date analysis.

- In June 2021, 19 officers were temporarily posted from various departments to support the crime and justice command which had a high number of vacancies at the time.

We are pleased to learn that the force is reviewing resource levels in the operating model to ensure it is fit for purpose both now and in the future when demand is expected to increase.

The force is going through a period of substantial change, with some of the planned improvements embedded but others yet to yield tangible benefits

Since our last inspection the force has been through considerable change, with more planned. This has led to improvements in the service the force provides, and it now has a sustainable operating model in place, which it can further improve. The force measures progress against its priorities, and there is good awareness of these among the workforce. The approach to performance management has improved, and a large amount of business intelligence is available through a data analytics tool (Qlik). This means that supervisors and senior leaders are able to monitor demand and productivity.

The force has a comprehensive knowledge of internal sources of demand but makes limited use of partner data to analyse demand

The force has a good understanding of the information it holds and carries out meaningful analysis to understand current demand. Chief officers and lead analysts recognise the need to share more information with partners and the force is looking to develop a 'data observatory' to address this. This will enable analysts and researchers to view police and partner data, more readily identify vulnerable people, and identify opportunities for problem-solving. This will in turn lead to opportunities to reduce future demand.

Financial plans are sound but there is a considerable funding gap in the medium term which the force is developing plans to address

The force's financial plans are based on realistic and conservative assumptions. Senior leaders are involved in developing the mid-term financial plan through outcome-based budgeting exercises and by setting efficiency targets. The force carries out some financial benchmarking against other forces, but this is inconsistent. The force currently has one of the lowest spends on front-line services and is one of the highest spenders on enabling services. It doesn't carry out enough analysis of its spending on overtime. Significant savings will be needed from 2023 onwards and there are some plans for how this will be achieved. Investments in neighbourhoods and in the new prevention and intervention command are expected to reduce future demand, but both solutions are in their infancy.

Northamptonshire Police is reviewing its policing collaborations but is working closely with the local fire and rescue service

The force is reviewing its policing collaborations in the region, although it is not the only force to do so. The rationale for some of these decisions is not clear and benefits have not been tracked since collaboration agreements were signed. Regional forensics, occupational health and criminal justice collaborations are also currently under review. The force has opted to stop using the multi-force shared service (MFSS) HR system, following many years of problems with it. Replacement systems are being developed and will all go live by April 2022. The force is developing its collaborative arrangements with Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) – the police and crime commissioner has also governed the FRS since January 2019. An assistant chief officer has been appointed across both police and FRS for enabling services, which covers human resources, finance, technology, fleet and estates. The ambition is for new systems and services to be developed to meet the needs of both organisations, providing better value for money.

The force makes good use of technology to support front-line policing

Northamptonshire Police engages with national technology programmes, such as Single Online Home and the emergency services mobile communication programme. The necessary investments have been built into financial plans and workforce feedback on technology is very positive. The force has invested in new technologies, namely Qlik (for business intelligence), pronto (which enables access to force systems on mobile devices), new body worn video cameras and digital evidence management systems, an expansion of automatic numberplate recognition, Microsoft Office 365, and vehicle telematics. We are pleased to learn that the business benefits of these are being tracked.