



Inspecting policing  
in the public interest

# Crime inspection 2014

West Mercia Police

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# Contents

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|  |    |
|--|----|
| How effective is the force at cutting crime?                           | 4  |
| Introduction   | 6  |
| Methodology  | 7  |
| How effective is the force at reducing crime and preventing offending? | 8  |
| How effective is the force at investigating offending?                 | 14 |
| How effective is the force at tackling anti-social behaviour?          | 18 |
| What each judgment means   | 20 |

# How effective is the force at cutting crime?

## Overall summary

West Mercia Police is in a strategic alliance with Warwickshire Police and across both forces HMIC found a strong response to preventing and reducing crime. Local neighbourhood teams in West Mercia Police (called Safer Neighbourhood teams or SNTs) have a good understanding of local priorities and work with partners to effectively prevent crime, manage high risk offenders and safeguard victims, especially the most vulnerable and in particular victims of anti-social behaviour.

The force has invested resources to support victims and we found frontline staff are committed to keeping them safe. We found there was generally an emphasis on conducting high quality investigations, although in some crimes officers could not maximise evidential opportunities such as photographing of injuries, as specialist resource allocated to investigate crimes such as child and/or domestic abuse was not available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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

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

**Good**

HMIC found that the force has structures and processes in place to understand its demand and put the right resources in place to tackle this. It had an effective range of partnerships to tackle short term and long term problems in its communities.

The force uses a range of tactics to divert and disrupt offenders and to manage those who are assessed as higher risk.

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

**Good**

The force has a victim-centred approach and a strong focus on ensuring that the most vulnerable victims receive a service that is bespoke to the individual's needs and, where appropriate, they receive a joined-up service from other agencies.

HMIC found good levels of scrutiny and supervision across risk assessment, victim contact and crime investigation. There was an emphasis on conducting high quality investigations and commitment to ensure sufficient specialist resources.

HMIC has concerns about the lack of access to specialist skills to investigate child protection cases over the weekend, and the fact that force policy on not taking photographs at certain crime scenes meant evidential opportunities could be lost.

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

**Good**

The identification and response to anti-social behaviour is evident amongst safer neighbourhood teams.

There is a clear understanding of the benefits of working with partners to find suitable solutions to both short and longer term problems.

Across the alliance there was evidence of the use of restorative justice and community resolutions as appropriate outcomes.

# Introduction



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

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

# Methodology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

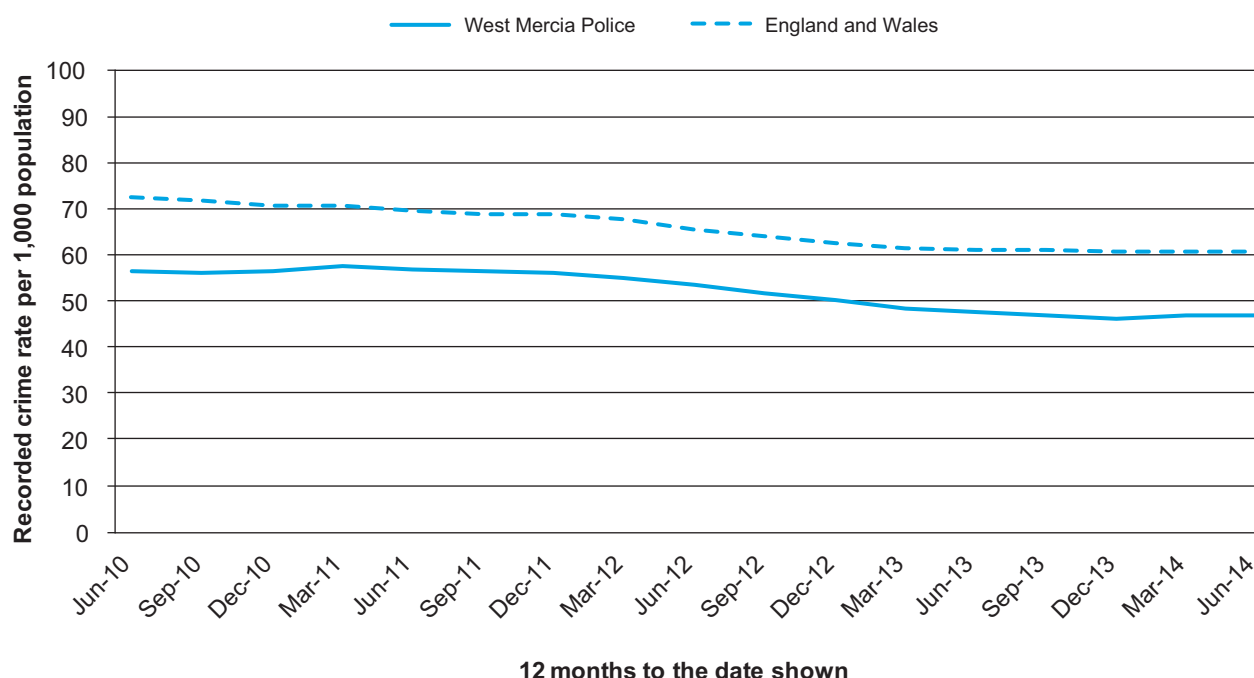
## Crime

In 2010 the Home Secretary set a clear priority for the police service to cut crime. When compared with the 12 months to June 2010, recorded crime (excluding fraud) in the 12 months to June 2014 reduced by 17 percent in West Mercia compared with a reduction of 16 percent across all forces in England and Wales.

Over this period, victim-based crime (i.e., crimes where there is a direct victim such as an individual, a group, or an organisation) decreased by 18 percent in West Mercia, compared with a reduction of 16 percent across England and Wales.

Looking at the 12 months prior to the end of June 2014; recorded crime (excluding fraud) in West Mercia reduced by 2 percent. This is compared with a 1 percent reduction across England and Wales.

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





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

| 12 months to June 2014           | West Mercia Police rate (per 1,000 population) | England and Wales total rate (per 1,000 population) |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Crime excluding fraud            | 46.7   | 60.7  |
| Victim-based crime               | 41.9   | 53.9  |
| Sexual offences                  | 1.1  | 1.2   |
| Violence with injury             | 4.9  | 5.9   |
| Burglary in a dwelling*          | 5.1  | 8.9   |
| Anti-social behaviour incidents* | 39.9   | 36.8  |

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

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

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

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

## Meeting the needs of the community

West Mercia Police has developed a structure which is aligned to its demand and has a range of processes in place to ensure that resources meet this demand, so communities can be confident that police officers and staff are where they are needed most at the right times. The force structure has safer neighbourhood teams (SNTs) who assess local community needs and provide locally responsive policing services. The force and the alliance are now undertaking a further, more sophisticated, review of their demand using data from partners, such as the fire service and local authority.

The force has a structured governance process to review the policing plan priorities and demonstrate how operational activity supports delivery against these priorities. A series of daily meetings means that there is a real time approach to raising issues and concerns or to request additional resources or specialist skills, and HMIC found these meetings to be effective and aligned to force priorities. These meetings check compliance and reassure the force with regard to the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime.

## Quality of victim contact

HMIC found there was clear evidence of a victim-centred approach with vulnerability assessed by individual staff. These assessments were made when someone first contacts the police either by calling 999 or seeking help from a uniformed patrolling officer and include a detailed assessment and recording of different types of vulnerability. For specialist or complex cases, experts in the public protection unit (PPU) complete risk management plans (sometimes with other partners) and, where necessary, these are shared with local officers to ensure a joined-up service to the victim. The force also has dedicated harm reduction co-ordinators whose role helps to reinforce the strategic aim to reduce harm across all crime types and anti-social behaviour. The quality of victim contact is reviewed by the force through monthly dip sampling to reassure itself that victim contact is appropriate and timely.

An important measure of the impact of changes to service delivery for the public is how satisfied victims are with the overall service they receive when they seek police assistance. In the 12 months to the end of June 2014, West Mercia Police had a victim satisfaction rate of 84.7 percent ( $\pm 1.3$  percent) which is broadly in line with the satisfaction rate in England and Wales of 85.0 percent ( $\pm 0.2$  percent). Its current rate is broadly in line with the 85.4 percent ( $\pm 1.1$  percent) recorded for West Mercia in the previous year.

## Use of police tactics

HMIC found strong evidence of the use of a range of tactics to both prevent crime and reduce offending. The force has made full use of stop and search powers and introduced a new process that makes recording the stop and search events more efficient. The officer conducting the stop and search will now call the force control room via their personal radio and verbally records the details of the stop and search. A good example of efforts to reduce offending, particularly around assaults, was the Hereford pub watch scheme which has won a national award. It includes an alcohol diversion scheme where offenders barred from a pub or series of pubs can attend a course run by outreach workers and paid for by the offenders.

The force has a robust approach to managing dangerous individuals such as those on sexual offence prevention orders (SOPOs) and registered on the violent and sexual offender register (ViSOR). Joint visits are conducted, where required, between agencies such as probation, adult services and housing, with more frequent visits for high risk individuals. These individuals are clearly identified on the force intelligence system so all officers and staff can take responsibility for safeguarding.

Organised crime groups (OCG) are mapped by the force intelligence team and prioritised according to threat, risk and harm and, depending on the risk posed, they are allocated to lead responsible officers to manage. These can include local policing teams, where appropriate. There were a number of examples seen around how OCG mapping had been used to target child sexual exploitation. Following specific operations to tackle child sexual exploitation a review of intelligence gaps has resulted in increased coverage in this area.

## Partnership working and information sharing

HMIC found strong examples of effective partnership working at all levels. Numerous examples were given of joint working with statutory partners and the voluntary sector. Safer neighbourhood teams were at the centre of many of the joint working examples provided and it was evident that frontline staff were working with a variety of agencies to reduce crime and offending. In addition, there is a mature and well established process for working with these partners to identify and manage serious and serial offenders through their integrated offender management programme (IOM).

Partnership working supports engagement with different communities and provides specialist support for vulnerable victims with multiple requirements. The public protection team will assess certain groups such as frequent missing persons and then work with partners and convene multi-agency child sexual exploitation meetings (MACSE). These individuals are then highlighted to safer neighbourhood teams to assist in managing these risks. The force has effective joint working arrangements with the sexual offences referral centre (SARC), local domestic abuse support groups, independent sexual violence and domestic violence advisors (ISVA and IDVA), and initiated preventative policing approaches (e.g. uniformed patrols) following anonymous intelligence.

## Domestic abuse

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

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

HMIC has made an initial consideration of the action plan jointly submitted by West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Constabulary. We found the action plan only covers the HMIC force-specific recommendations, together with activity to support the force response. However, there appears to be no national action plan template for either force; the national action plan requires forces to outline activity to be taken that is in line with the agreed national priorities outlined above.

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

HMIC found evidence that West Mercia had strong relationships with local domestic abuse support groups and independent domestic violence advisors (IDVA). There are good examples of referrals to IDVA services, as well as referrals to other local support agencies. If the victim is vulnerable then they are subject to a risk management plan and updates on progress shared across the force.

## Summary

Good

- HMIC found that the force has structures and processes in place to understand its demand and put the right resources in place to tackle this. It has an effective range of partnerships to tackle short term and long term problems in its communities.
- The force uses a range of tactics to divert and disrupt offenders and to manage those who are assessed as higher risk.

# How effective is the force at investigating offending?

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

## Vulnerability, risk and victims

HMIC found clear evidence of how high risk, vulnerable victims were identified and highlighted on force computer systems. When assessing threat, harm and risk, there is an initial eight question menu completed when someone first contacts the police, which will ensure a consistent approach. In addition to this, the local safer neighbourhood teams complete a further questionnaire when assessing anti-social behaviour victims. These are then reviewed at daily management meetings to mitigate risks with specific actions allocated to safer neighbourhood teams or via specialist units. The alliance has established Harm Assessment (protecting vulnerable people (PVP)) units aligned to the local policing areas. These units provide guidance and support to local policing teams who can carry out further safeguarding activity. Risk management plans are stored electronically and accessible to all staff so anyone who has contact with a victim understands their particular case. The provisions of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime was clearly understood by staff and supported by interviews with volunteer groups who confirmed that services such as victim personal statements were in regular use. There was good evidence of victim consultation prior to outcomes such as out-of-court disposals like restorative justice and community resolutions.

## Investigation

HMIC also found good levels of supervision for crime reports with investigation plans, supervisor comments and guidance clearly recorded. There is an expectation that all crimes contain these prior to being finalised. There was a strong focus on improving the quality of investigations and in particular to target the prolific and serial offenders. All PVP staff are accredited investigators and have undertaken specific child abuse training. The force deploys specially trained officers on a 24/7 basis to improve support for victims, and maximise opportunities to secure early evidence in sexual offence cases. The specialist nature of the evidence for cases involving vulnerable people was well understood and we found some strong examples of supervisory reviews of child abuse cases with supervisors identifying where witnesses required interviewers with specialist skills.

HMIC found that there were clear and well understood processes for accessing specialist assistance for investigations, such as CCTV, house-to-house enquiry teams, through to more technical assistance and examples given of frontline staff being able to access surveillance capability when investigating offences such as burglary. There are also good links with the hi-tech crime unit (HTCU) who understand the importance of their work in securing evidence of online sexual exploitation. The assessment of sexual offence cases features as a priority within the HTCU.

HMIC identified two areas of concern. First is the force's existing practice that for common assault and actual bodily harm (ABH) injury, photographs will not be taken by a scene of crime officers (SOCO), instead the injuries would be recorded in written statements. HMIC has concerns that important evidence, particularly in cases with vulnerable victims of crimes such as domestic abuse, are not being captured.

The second is that specialist staff who deal with vulnerable people only work Monday to Friday and as a consequence any child abuse type referrals received over the weekend are dealt with by generalist investigators, who have not necessarily undertaken the relevant training with regards to these types of victims and can be inexperienced in dealing with these types of offences. The force has already acknowledged this, but the practice was still in place during the inspection.

## Tackling repeat and prolific offenders

The force targets the most prolific perpetrators of serious acquisitive crime and works in partnership to reduce and prevent further offending. Integrated offender management (IOM) teams provide offender management<sup>1</sup> within local policing areas. There is a robust process for identifying those who will be managed through IOM with strong supervision and the ability to access additional resources.

HMIC found good examples of using local policing teams, and the partnership contacts they have developed, to tackle certain crime types. An example of joint working to deter prolific offenders away from crime is the provision, for a temporary period, of accommodation in the form of five furnished flats. Offenders are supported to find and start employment, removing the barrier of not having a permanent address, with the aim of breaking the offending cycle. The SNT and IOM teams monitor the behaviour of those in the allocated accommodation providing relevant information to the agencies working with the offenders to ensure compliance with the conditions of this arrangement.

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



## Learning from experience

Organisational learning is an area that could be improved. HMIC found an inconsistent picture with regards to learning from experience. The force has set up a strategic organisational learning group (OLG). They are in the process of agreeing its terms of reference and this meeting is developing to make best use of learning opportunities both internally and through external sources. HMIC found there were good examples of local learning, but this was generally peer to peer and through local relationships. There was a lack of knowledge among frontline staff of the existence of the OLG and although HMIC acknowledge that the force have recognised this, it is an area in which they can improve. The group's actions are not yet consistently influencing activities at a local level with gaps in capturing what works and then allowing this to be promulgated to others and to inform policy and procedural change. With the establishment of the OLG they have the mechanisms to achieve this.

## Recommendations

- West Mercia Police should immediately review the out-of-office hours and weekend provision of nationally accredited officers to investigate child protection offences and support victims. By January 2015, the force should have implemented a plan to ensure the right resources are available.
- Within three months, West Mercia Police should review its practice of not securing photographic evidence in relation to common assault and assaults occasioning actual bodily harm (ABH), even in cases of domestic assault. By March 2015, if relevant following the outcome of the review, the force should implement a process to ensure best evidence, including photographic (if available), is secured.
- Within six months, West Mercia Police should ensure that there are methods in place to:
  - (a) systematically review and evaluate the benefits from both current tactics and new crime fighting and anti-social behaviour initiatives;
  - (b) systematically capture learning and good practice in relation to crime prevention and local problem solving; and
  - (c) share learning and good practice across the force.



## Summary



Good

- The force has a victim-centred approach and a strong focus on ensuring that the most vulnerable victims receive a service that is bespoke to the individual's needs and where appropriate, they receive a joined-up service from other agencies.
- HMIC found good levels of scrutiny and supervision across risk assessment, victim contact and crime investigation. There was an emphasis on conducting high quality investigations and commitment to ensure sufficient specialist resources.
- HMIC has concerns about the lack of access to specialist skills to investigate child protection cases over the weekend, and the fact that force policy on not taking photographs at certain crime scenes meant evidential opportunities could be lost.

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

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

## Community contact and victim care

HMIC found that the force had a range of community forums to understand local priorities. The safer neighbourhood teams (SNT) provide an identifiable and dedicated policing presence with regular monthly meetings in place with a number of well established groups, such as police and communities together (PACT) and local surgeries. In addition, SNT staff are encouraged to identify other existing groups (youth clubs, mother and toddler groups, faith groups) and to attend those and find out what issues or areas for concern they have. These issues will form part of the setting of local priorities for the next three months. The force has an anti-social behaviour strategy focusing on victims and offenders and providing guidance on risk assessing the problems and working with local authorities and other partners to resolve issues which also supports one of the specific police and crime commissioner's priorities. HMIC acknowledge the alliance's recognition that both this and Warwickshire's anti-social behaviour strategy need to be aligned to ensure a consistent approach.

## Partnership working

The force works well with partners and HMIC found some good examples of this work. The Hereford Pubwatch scheme introduced an alcohol diversion scheme where offenders were either barred from licensed premises or attend a course for which they must pay, which helps them understand how their behaviour affects other people. Full compliance on the course results in the bar from licensed premises being removed.

Operation Castlemaine prevents anti-social behaviour and supports those vulnerable people identified as the local street drinkers. It has successfully deterred some of them from criminal behaviour.

The force has placed staff in each of the harm reduction hubs, where staff from different agencies work together to reduce anti-social behaviour and support victims. The hub staff monitor all anti-social behaviour calls that are received in the area. Plans are agreed and managed in the hubs involving the SNTs using both police and local authority legislation to improve the quality of life within the community.

## Improving services to the public

The force has a clear commitment to tackling anti-social behaviour and working in partnership to reduce these incidents. In the 12 months to March 2014, West Mercia Police recorded 49,245 incidents of anti-social behaviour. This is a reduction of 10 percent against the previous 12 months. HMIC found strong examples of the use of restorative justice and community resolutions, which officers see as a positive initiative which can both reduce incidents while also helping divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. The decisions to use restorative justice are taken seriously and in consultation with the victim.

Officers are working with partners to identify hard-to-reach groups with regular partnership meetings seeking to engage with individuals, groups and communities who may be at risk of becoming victims of crime or anti-social behaviour or are offenders. These partnership meetings are monthly and involve discussing anti-social behaviour hotspots, victims and plans to manage problems. HMIC found that although some training in the new anti-social behaviour legislation had been delivered to frontline staff, this had not extended to all. The force had recognised this and further training is being planned and will include partner organisations.

### Summary



Good

- The identification and response to anti-social behaviour is evident amongst safer neighbourhood teams.
- The force has a clear understanding of the benefits of working with partners to find suitable solutions to both short and longer term problems.
- Across the alliance, there was evidence of the use of restorative justice and community resolutions as appropriate outcomes.

# What each judgment means

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

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

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

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