

# PEEL 2023–25

## Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Devon and Cornwall Police

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# Overall summary

## Our judgments

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

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Preventing crime	Police powers and public treatment	Managing offenders	Investigating crime
		Protecting vulnerable people	Leadership and force management	Responding to the public
		Developing a positive workplace		

We also inspected how effective a service Devon and Cornwall Police gives to victims of crime. We don't make a graded judgment for this area.

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

We also assess the force's performance in a range of other areas and we report on these separately. We make graded judgments for some of these areas.

## Data in this report

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

## PEEL 2023–2025

In 2014, we introduced our police efficiency, effectiveness 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.

We have moved to a more [intelligence](#)-led, continual assessment approach, rather than the annual [PEEL inspections](#) we used in previous years. Forces are assessed against the characteristics of good performance, set out in the [PEEL Assessment Framework 2023–2025](#), and we more clearly link our judgments to [causes of concern](#) and [areas for improvement](#).

It isn't possible to make direct comparisons between the grades awarded in this PEEL inspection and those from the previous cycle of PEEL inspections. This is because we have increased our focus on making sure forces are achieving appropriate outcomes for the public, and in some cases we have changed the aspects of policing we inspect.

## Terminology in this report

Our reports contain references to, among other things, 'national' definitions, priorities, policies, systems, responsibilities and processes.

In some instances, 'national' means applying to England or Wales, or England and Wales. In others, it means applying to England, Wales and Scotland, or the whole of the United Kingdom.

## HM Inspector's summary

I have concerns about the performance of Devon and Cornwall Police in keeping people safe, reducing crime and providing victims with an effective service.

In particular, I have serious concerns about how it manages its investigations. In view of these findings, I have been in regular contact with the chief constable as I don't underestimate how much improvement is needed.

Since our previous inspection, the force has made significant efforts to improve in the areas we highlighted as causes of concern or areas for improvement, which is recognised. However, despite those improvements, more is required to place the force in a position where it is consistently providing a good standard of service to its local communities.

The force still isn't attending incidents resulting from calls for service as quickly as it should. This was something we found in our previous inspection in 2021/22 and, although there have been some recent improvements, it is still the case that the force isn't meeting the targets it has set to attend incidents.

Devon and Cornwall Police has made several improvements in the [force control room](#) to address these and other areas, including increasing staffing levels, improving training and slowly improving its systems. These have achieved some positive results. For example, the time taken to answer 999 calls is much improved and the number of non-emergency calls abandoned is reducing.

I am concerned that the standards of its investigations have deteriorated and this is now a cause of concern. Although aspects of crime investigation governance have improved, the force has understaffed and inexperienced teams investigating serious offences. There are delays in crime allocation and supervision, with many investigations lacking a detailed investigation plan or effective supervision. The force needs to improve in this area to achieve better outcomes for victims of crime.

In our inspection we found the force had improved how it manages its offenders and registered sex offenders. It was pleasing to see an increased focus and investment in these areas, but more work is needed. A continued focus is required to make sure the risks posed by such individuals are properly understood and managed.

The force continues to support its neighbourhood policing teams to carry out prevention and deterrence work. But neighbourhood officers are frequently being diverted to manage other demand, and this is affecting the service the force provides in this important area of policing.

I am pleased to see that the force continues to treat the public well. Its officers receive communication skills training and use [body-worn video](#) cameras when appropriate. The force needs to do more to make sure all officers are trained in how to carry out stop and search. But it is good that training on communication skills and how to use force appropriately is being improved. Internal and external monitoring of the use of these powers is making sure the public in Devon and Cornwall are treated fairly.

The force has made considerable improvements in how it treats the people who contact it, from the quality of the initial call to the services the force offers. But the force still needs to improve the time it takes to attend incidents.

The force provides good welfare and well-being support for its workforce. But it must make sure that the support it offers its officers and staff is accessible and that it understands the reasons why they are accessing the support. The force experiences high levels of demand and officers and staff are working additional hours to maintain services. This needs to be understood in more detail to support a more sustainable solution.

Finally in leadership and force management, Devon and Cornwall Police hasn't made the improvements we identified in our previous inspection and still has work to do. The force has substantial issues with recording and reporting data and isn't able to access all the information it needs. The force must make sure that its data reporting processes are accurate and timely. A restructured leadership team is now in place to help it improve in areas that still need attention. These include the visibility of leadership and understanding demand. The force is making changes to improve its operating model to support the workforce more effectively. This will provide better insight and help it to achieve a balance with the operational requirements, the geographical challenges it experiences and the working practices of its officers and staff. Its financial plans are sound.

All these observations are made while also acknowledging external factors beyond the force's control, such as its funding levels (which are within the typical range for forces in England and Wales) and levels of deprivation.

I also accept that operating as a temporary senior leadership team since June 2023 hasn't been easy. Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is one of the largest policing regions in England and Wales. The infrastructure of both Devon and Cornwall presents challenges in how the force can use resources to improve services in the areas we have identified. The number of officers it now has is the highest it has had for some time and although some of these officers will be less experienced, this presents a good opportunity for the force to make progress.

I look forward to seeing how the force continues to work to improve its performance, which I will be closely monitoring.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Cooke', is positioned above the printed name.

**Andy Cooke**

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary

## Leadership

Using the [College of Policing leadership standards](#) as a framework, in this section we set out the most important findings relating to the force's leadership at all levels.

The [chief officer](#) team at Devon and Cornwall Police has clear priorities, which are widely communicated throughout the force.

We found that leaders assessed the performance of their teams against outcomes and priorities. But elements of governance and planning processes in some essential areas of policing aren't yet effective. Leaders are sometimes making decisions that affect operational policing without the necessary scrutiny or oversight from the chief officer group. This means decisions made at executive level aren't always informed effectively, which could lead to inconsistencies in policing across the force.

Nearly all officers and staff we spoke with were proud to work for Devon and Cornwall Police and described a community feel to the force. But not all officers believed senior leaders fully understood their concerns and well-being needs. They didn't always feel that senior officers were visible and accessible.

Senior leaders are committed to developing leadership at all levels. We found there wasn't enough support in place for supervisors entering leadership for the first time, which will affect their leadership capability at more senior levels after further promotion. Some officers lacked crucial skills to manage teams and performance effectively and this was also seen at higher ranks. The lack of visibility and support was a consistent theme.

There was a consistent message from the officers and staff we spoke with of high demand, workforce pressures and a lack of investment in wider resources to support them in their roles. The difficulties in these areas are felt across the force, affecting morale and performance among officers and staff.

Senior leaders have several pressing challenges to deal with. The most significant of these are reducing how often non-emergency calls for service are abandoned, making sure incidents are attended on time and improving the quality of investigations. The force is redesigning its operating model to improve its performance. There is good investment in developing capability and capacity. In time, this will bring about the improvements needed to provide effective services to the communities of Devon and Cornwall.

The force hasn't effectively addressed areas of poor performance we identified in our 2021/22 report or other areas that have started to fail. These include personnel being unable to keep up with demand and the force failing to use its estates and fleet vehicles effectively.



## Reducing crime assessment

The reducing crime assessment sets out what Devon and Cornwall Police is doing to reduce crime and how effective this action is. This assessment doesn't include police recorded crime figures. This is because they can be affected by variations and changes in recording policy and practice, making it difficult to draw comparisons over time.

Problem-solving is a priority for the force. The effective application of problem-solving helps to reduce crime. The force is investing in early intervention to reduce and prevent crime at the earliest opportunity. It works well with other organisations, which helps to develop long-term sustainable plans to find the root cause of repeat problems and to make changes that will help make communities safer and prevent crime.

The force's neighbourhood policing teams work well with communities to understand and meet their needs. They are building the public's trust and confidence, encouraging them to share information to help prevent and detect crime.

When crimes take place, officers and staff generally take positive action to arrest offenders. But investigations need better supervision. The force still needs to do more to consistently achieve appropriate outcomes for victims.

Devon and Cornwall Police makes effective use of ancillary orders, such as [Domestic Violence Protection Notices](#) and [Domestic Violence Protection Orders](#), and the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#) to reduce risks posed to vulnerable people.

The force understands and improves the way it uses stop and search powers through analysis and monitoring at force-level meetings. Effective independent scrutiny is in place. The force can show its use of stop and search is fair and effective, helping to reduce crime.

The force should continue to improve how quickly it answers 999 calls from the public and reduce the number of times callers abandon non-emergency [101](#) calls. It also needs to respond to incidents within published timescales and update callers if there is likely to be a delay.

More detail on what Devon and Cornwall Police is doing to reduce crime is included in the main body of the report.

# Providing a service to victims of crime

## **Victim service assessment**

This section describes our assessment of the service Devon and Cornwall Police provides to victims. This is from the point of reporting a crime and throughout the investigation. As part of this assessment, we reviewed 100 case files.

When the police close a case of a reported crime, they assign it an 'outcome type'. This describes the reason for closing it.

We selected 100 cases to review, including at least 20 that the force hadn't finalised at the time of the audit.

Although our victim service assessment is ungraded, it influences graded judgments in the other areas we have inspected.

## **The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency and non-emergency calls**

The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls and reduce the number of non-emergency calls that are abandoned because the call isn't answered. Call handlers use a structured process that assesses the threat, harm, risk and vulnerability. The force usually identifies repeat victims, meaning that it is almost always fully aware of the victim's circumstances when considering what response should be given. We found call handlers are polite and give advice on how to preserve evidence but don't always give advice on crime prevention.

## **In many cases, the force doesn't respond promptly to calls for service**

On many occasions, the force doesn't respond to calls for service within set timescales. Victims aren't always informed of delays, meaning that victims' expectations aren't always met. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage from the process.

## **The force doesn't always carry out effective or timely investigations**

In some cases, the force doesn't carry out investigations in a timely way or complete all relevant and proportionate lines of inquiry. The force doesn't always supervise investigations well. A thorough investigation increases the likelihood of perpetrators being identified and arrested, providing a positive result for the victim.

The force also doesn't always update victims regularly. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when they receive regular updates.

When victims withdraw support for an investigation, the force doesn't always consider progressing the case without the victim's support. This can be an important method of safeguarding the victim and preventing further offences being committed. In some cases, the force doesn't record whether it considers using orders designed to protect victims, such as Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) and Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs).

The [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) requires forces to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage to determine whether victims need additional support. The force doesn't always carry out this assessment and record the request for additional support.

### **The force isn't consistently achieving appropriate outcomes for victims of crime**

The force doesn't consistently close crimes with the appropriate outcome type and there are long delays in assigning an outcome. It doesn't record a clear rationale for using a certain outcome and this isn't effectively supervised. The force doesn't always seek victims' views when deciding which outcome type to assign to a closed investigation. It isn't always able to provide an auditable record of the victim's wishes. The force also doesn't always inform victims of crime what outcome code has been assigned to the investigation.

# Police powers and treating the public fairly and respectfully

## Adequate

Devon and Cornwall Police is adequate at using police powers and treating people fairly and respectfully.

### Areas for improvement

#### **The force should give officers and supervisors more training on reasonable grounds for stop and search**

In our previous PEEL inspection in 2021/22, we issued an [area for improvement](#): “The force should train officers and supervisors more on reasonable grounds for stop and search”.

During this inspection, we found evidence of officers not being confident in using stop and search. The rates of stop and search in Devon and Cornwall are 3.4 per 1,000 population, compared to an England and Wales average of 8.6 per 1,000 population.

A lack of training could affect officers’ confidence in using the power and contribute to the lower rate of use. We found training on stop and search still needed to be given to most officers. The force told us it has trained 400 officers in key roles and the training for other officers will be carried out by September 2024.

Training is important to make sure officers use their powers legitimately and record the grounds for using them. If these grounds aren’t recorded properly, the person who was searched won’t have enough information to understand whether they have been treated lawfully and fairly.

### **The force should improve how it records its use of force and stop and search data and make sure results are published and accessible on its website**

The force was unable to supply accurate data for our use of force analysis or a full year's data for our stop and search analysis. In 2022, the force introduced a new crime recording system. But it still has other systems that are awaiting updates to allow them to integrate effectively. This means the force can't produce all the data it needs to understand how these powers are being used. The force is aware of this problem and told us it will be resolved later this year. Data for both stop and search and use of force wasn't up to date on the force's external website. Ethnicity data wasn't well recorded.

If the force can't access accurate data, it can't make sure its workforce are carrying out their roles in a legitimate manner and its training and scrutiny are effective. The public should be able to access up-to-date data that helps them understand how the force is using its powers. Without this data, the public can't find out if they are being treated fairly or if the service is using its powers effectively to deter crime.

## **Main findings**

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to police powers and treating people fairly and respectfully.

### **The force makes sure all officers understand how to use stop and search powers fairly and respectfully**

Devon and Cornwall Police scrutinises use of force and stop and search powers well. Officers know they must use body-worn video for all stop and search encounters and when they use force. The video recordings are used as part of ongoing monitoring, in both internal scrutiny and external scrutiny panels.

During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 239 stop and search records from 1 January 2022 to 15 November 2022. The force was unable to supply data for a full year. Based on this sample, we estimate that 81.6 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.8 percent) of all stop and searches carried out by the force during this period had reasonable grounds. This is broadly unchanged compared to the findings in our 2021/22 PEEL inspection, in which we found that 77.4 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 5.8 percent) of stop and searches in Devon and Cornwall had reasonable grounds. Of the records we reviewed for stop and searches on people from ethnic minorities, 9 out of 11 had reasonable grounds recorded.

But the body-worn video system is unable to identify if a supervisor has reviewed specific video footage. The force systems for monitoring both use of force and stop and search are being updated. Once this is complete, the force will have access to better data to improve the effectiveness of feedback from internal and external scrutiny panels.

### **The force supports the continuous development of independent stop and search and use of force external scrutiny panels**

The force has well-established independent scrutiny and community panels, which review stop and search and use of force. All Devon and Cornwall Police officers are issued or have access to a body-worn video device, which they are expected to use when exercising police powers. Officers' high levels of compliance with this expectation means body-worn video recordings can be reviewed at a later stage.

The force has an internal scrutiny process. This includes supervisors reviewing stop and search encounters and internal panels [dip sampling](#) stop and search and use of force incidents each month. The internal panels supply information to external panels, which are independently chaired and have members that are representative of the community. All panel members have received training in stop and search and have been offered the opportunity to go on patrol with officers. Both internal and external panels review body-worn video recordings and give feedback to officers. The effectiveness of this scrutiny could be improved by providing additional documents, such as the officer's notes made at the time and the context relating to the stop and search.

We found both internal and external panels reviewed the circumstances of each case thoroughly and offered effective challenge. They provided the force with meaningful insight to make improvements. The force uses this information to identify themes in the use of force and this contributes to the training officers receive.

### **The force learns from stop and search and use of force incidents**

Sergeants aren't expected to review every use of force incident. During our inspection, the force told us it had carried out 184 body-worn video reviews in the last year to identify any issues in the ways officers use force. Force-level governance meetings, chaired by the deputy chief constable, discuss themes and feedback, including from external scrutiny panels. Once a review has been carried out, feedback is given to the individual officer.

We found some evidence of the force sharing lessons learned from its external and internal scrutiny and from analysis of wider [organisational learning](#). This includes the force adjusting training given to officers during personal safety annual accreditation. The force plans to adopt the [College of Policing](#) recommendations to include communications training for officers during its annual personal protective equipment training, extending the training from two days to three days.

# Preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behaviour, and reducing vulnerability

Good

Devon and Cornwall Police is good at prevention and deterrence.

## Area for improvement

### **The force should make sure neighbourhood officers aren't diverted from their main duties to manage demand on response teams**

Neighbourhood policing officers are responsible for problem-solving and involving local communities in crime prevention. During our inspection, many neighbourhood officers told us they were continually diverted from their main duties in order to support other areas of the force, most commonly assisting response teams in attending incidents.

Officers in more isolated areas told us they couldn't spend enough time carrying out patrols, working with the public or doing preventative and problem-solving work because they were being diverted from their main role. The force does have a policy covering how these officers should be managed and it monitors the frequency and length of time they are diverted from their core role. But officers told us they don't always report when they are requested to cover other duties, which means senior leaders aren't always aware of the effects of the loss of this resource or the effects on local communities and officers.

Senior leaders recognise the importance of neighbourhood policing and have invested in additional capacity and training that aims to give neighbourhood officers more time and skills to carry out their core role. This is important because these officers frequently work with partners on joint initiatives to reduce crime and [antisocial behaviour](#). We will review how effective the additional investment is as part of our continuous assessment of the force's performance.

## Innovative practice

### **Devon and Cornwall Police has developed a Law Enforcement and Public Health app that helps support vulnerable people in its communities**

Law Enforcement and Public Health is an app officers can access on their mobile devices. The app links to a bespoke public health resource that police officers can use to signpost people to health and well-being services.

The force gave us an example of the use of the app. A victim giving a statement about an incident of [antisocial behaviour](#) told the officer they felt isolated and trapped in their home. The officer showed them the app and used a QR code to give the victim access to the app on their phone so they could find mental well-being services that could help them.

### **The force has a multi-agency harm assessment project**

Devon and Cornwall Police has introduced Project NOVA. This is a multi-agency harm assessment project that brings together partners and agencies to manage high-harm perpetrators of severe antisocial behaviour and criminality.

Project NOVA is new to the force. It uses three risk categories to manage offenders (peripheral risk, serious harm and highest harm). These risk categories determine what level of support, intervention or risk management is required.

The project applies to all ages. All cases are submitted for discussion at a panel assessment. The force can make a panel assessment submission through a referral form accessed by a QR code on the officer's mobile device.

## Main findings

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

### **The force prioritises preventing and deterring crime, antisocial behaviour and harm and reducing vulnerability**

Devon and Cornwall Police prioritises neighbourhood policing, which is led at executive level by an assistant chief constable responsible for the force's neighbourhood policing strategy. The proportion of staff allocated to neighbourhood policing shows the priority the force gives to neighbourhood policing and makes sure its approach is sustainable. The force is investing in dedicated trainers and has specialist problem-solvers to give frontline staff access to advice on how best to resolve problems affecting their areas. The specialist problem-solvers evaluate problem-solving plans and identify good practice and areas for improvement. Their findings are used in monthly briefings to share good practice.



The force sends out monthly newsletters to each area, which had been recently introduced at the time of our inspection. These newsletters highlight priorities, good work and involvement with the local community. They are valued by the teams and help to provide direction, support and visibility.

### **The force understands and demonstrates a long-term commitment to problem-solving and evidence-based policing**

Devon and Cornwall Police uses SharePoint to make its problem-solving plans available across the force so that successful strategies and good practice can be used consistently. It is developing a bespoke portal for officers to find out what works well in problem-solving. The force has given problem-solving training to officers and staff across differing areas of policing to promote a problem-solving culture that is wider than just in neighbourhood policing teams.

The force has a good understanding of antisocial behaviour and vulnerability and works well with partner organisations to address them. In the year ending 31 March 2023, Devon and Cornwall Police recorded 25,315 incidents of antisocial behaviour. This is a rate of 14 per 1,000 population, which is within the normal range for forces across England and Wales (the average rate for forces across England and Wales is 17.4 antisocial behaviour incidents per 1,000 population). Devon and Cornwall Police has seen a reduction in antisocial behaviour incidents, from 32,878 incidents recorded in the year ending 31 March 2022 to 25,315 incidents in the year ending 31 March 2023.

Between 1 April 2022 and 30 September 2022, the force issued 13 community protection notices, 5 criminal behaviour orders and 2 civil injunctions, and used antisocial behaviour dispersal powers 42 times. (Note: the force couldn't provide more recent data on its use of antisocial behaviour orders.) When the force uses these powers, it uses them well. For example, in Liskeard, the neighbourhood policing team used a problem-solving plan to address antisocial behaviour affecting one person. A full partnership plan was put in place with clear objectives and targeted activity to address the problem, leading to a joint acceptable behaviour contract being issued. In Plymouth, a problem-solving plan was used to address antisocial behaviour in a new housing complex, which led to an acceptable behaviour contract and a community protection notice.

The force works well with partner organisations, including local councils and health and fire services. In Cornwall, it has tri-service officers working across police, fire and health. It has invested in additional officers with partners to support this effective approach. These officers support prompt and effective sharing of information across the emergency services to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour, and to reduce vulnerability.

For example, in Project Vigilant, force specialists worked with external partners to use their expertise in improving the use of CCTV to better safeguard vulnerable people. The force secured funding for CCTV, operators and enhanced training to improve

understanding of the opportunities to intervene in developing incidents. Project Vigilant was used effectively at Boardmasters, a five-day music event that attracts people of all ages from across the UK. The force told us that, working with partners at Boardmasters, it was able to intervene on ten occasions. It also said there were fewer reports of rape and sexual assault than at previous Boardmasters events.

### **The force actively seeks views and support from its communities**

Devon and Cornwall Police works well with local communities, including new communities and those who are isolated. The force supports drop-ins and coffee mornings and uses locations such as libraries and health centres to increase its contact with the public. It also uses social media to share information and have two-way discussions with the public. The force uses Devon and Cornwall Alert, a service that sends out policing information to members of the community who sign up to it. The force also sends out letters and officers visit people to gather information on what matters to the communities it is policing.

The force evaluates its interactions with communities to identify what problems are most important to them and then puts plans in place to address these problems. For example, Operation Loki is an annual neighbourhood operation to reduce antisocial behaviour. The force also has a speed watch initiative and an operation called Farm Watch. It also uses the LionHeart Challenge, a national charity, to run events with local children aged nine to ten years old. These events encourage children to work together to find solutions to challenges and then present their findings. They aim to help increase children's confidence and improve their trust in local policing. The neighbourhood team in Dartmouth has used this scheme to improve local children's confidence and trust in the police.

The force is keen to share good practice and produces monthly internal newsletters highlighting successful results. For example, the newsletters have covered its interactive learning sessions for 9- to 11-year-olds on how they can keep safe, which nearly 1,000 children attended, and the continued increase in the number of public enquiry offices to improve public contact and reporting.

Devon and Cornwall Police supports local people to volunteer in local policing activities. It has a small team of staff who look for roles that can be carried out by volunteers and then finds people to fill them. At the time of our inspection, the force told us it had 254 volunteers across 23 different roles, including a cadet scheme. The force has made sure volunteers are supported. The most recent survey of volunteers has shown that they feel valued.

The force is increasing the opportunities for special constables, which will include increased specialist training such as driving, wildlife crime and negotiation skills. Special constables receive the same degree-level training as paid officers. The force makes sure courses are tailored to meet the needs of attendees. For example, it runs courses at weekends for officers unable to attend courses on weekdays.

# Responding to the public

## Inadequate

Devon and Cornwall Police is inadequate at responding to the public.

### Cause of concern

#### **The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer non-emergency calls**

The force needs to reduce the number of non-emergency calls the caller abandons because they aren't answered.

People who need a service from the police can be left waiting for long periods of time for their call to be answered. As set out in the 2020 national contact management strategy principles and guidance, forces with a switchboard should aim to have an abandonment rate lower than 5 percent. The force told us that, in the year ending February 2024, its abandonment rate for all 101 calls was 48 percent.

Some callers to 101 are then calling 999, affecting answering times for emergency calls and making this service less efficient and effective.

The force acknowledges it needs to make substantial, sustainable improvements. Since our last inspection, it has upgraded its IT systems, introduced call back and changed its operating model. These changes improved the force's ability to answer 999 calls. But it needs to do more work to understand 101 abandonments. The force told us there had been some overall improvement in the number of calls being abandoned and it is developing a deeper understanding of the reasons for call abandonments. Data that the force provided supports this, but this performance improvement needs to continue.

## Recommendations

Within three months, Devon and Cornwall Police should:

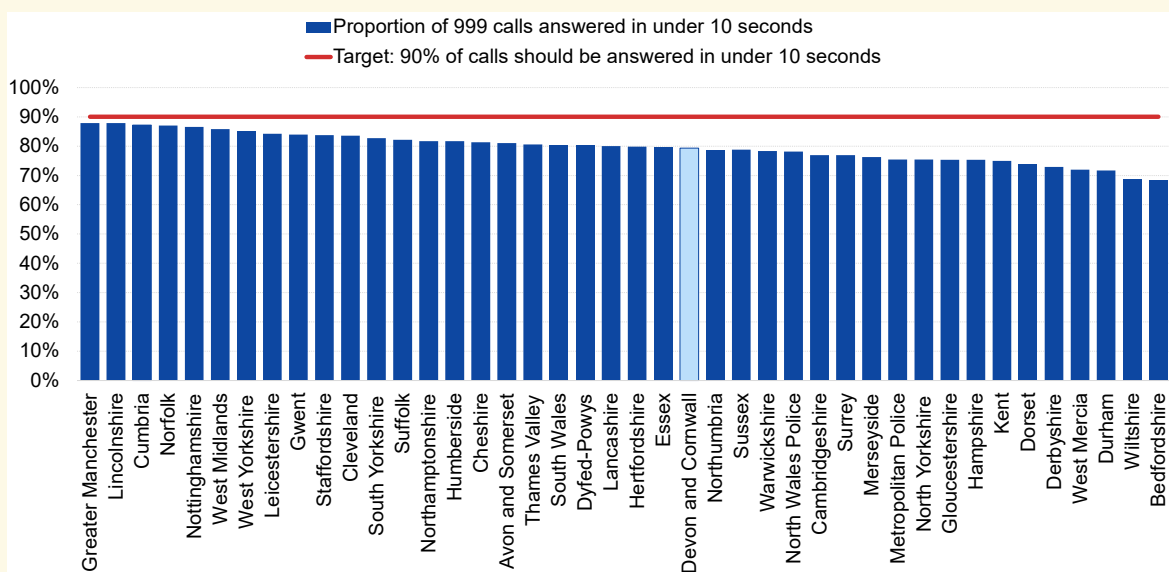
- improve its processes for answering non-emergency calls so that it answers them without unnecessary delay; and
- review its governance, oversight and data processes to understand why the rate of abandoned calls remains high.

## Areas for improvement

### The force needs to make sure it answers emergency calls quickly enough

Devon and Cornwall Police needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls for service. We have seen improvements since our previous inspection. In the year ending 31 December 2023, the force answered 79.3 percent of its 999 calls within 10 seconds. This was an improvement but still lower than the standard expected for forces in England and Wales of answering 90 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds.

**Figure 1: Proportion of 999 calls answered within 10 seconds by forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 December 2023**



Source: [999 call answering times](#) from BT

Note: Call answering time is the time taken for a call to be transferred from BT to a force and the time taken by that force to answer the call.

We recognise that the force has made improvements in this area. The force has changed some processes. It has also introduced new IT and a new approach to managing demand. There is good oversight and governance of the [force control room](#).

Force data indicates that in February 2024 it met the national standard for answering 90 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds. The force should make sure this improvement is sustained, particularly when demand is increased during the busy summer period.

### **The force should make sure ongoing risk is assessed when calls are placed in a queue**

We reviewed the queues of incidents awaiting police officer attendance and were disappointed to find that many of the incidents related to vulnerable victims, including those subject to [domestic abuse](#).

Apart from emergency and priority calls, supervisors didn't have an effective overview of risk or deployment decisions. This meant incidents that had been risk assessed at point of call as suitable for a delayed response weren't always subject to a review of the risk after they had been placed in a queue and had awaited attendance for some time.

This could mean that people are left unsupported and may be exposed to further risk. It also means people's expectations aren't met and they are more likely to lose confidence and disengage from police support.

### **The force needs to attend calls for service in line with its published target attendance times**

We found Devon and Cornwall Police correctly prioritises calls based on risk, but several factors affect how promptly units are able to attend. These include the number of calls against the number of officers available, the availability of serviceable vehicles and trained drivers, and the large rural area the force covers, which means officers sometimes must travel a long distance to attend calls. We found that out of 82 incidents reviewed, only 47 were attended within the force's target attendance times.

At the time of our inspection, the force had recently introduced additional measures to make sure calls are assigned to frontline officers more quickly. It is also increasing capacity in crime investigation teams, where crimes and incidents can be promptly resolved or directed to neighbourhood or teams. This should reduce demand on frontline officers and so improve overall attendance times.

## Main findings

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

### **The force has effective oversight of its response to public contact**

Devon and Cornwall Police has a management structure that provides governance and oversight of the force control room, but it hasn't yet improved standards across all services.

Since our last PEEL inspection, the force has changed the management structure in the force control room. The control room is led by an assistant chief constable and is now supported by a management team that includes an experienced business lead. This management team reports regularly to the senior leaders on efforts to improve performance. Senior leaders take an active interest in the control room in terms of understanding performance and the support needed to promote improvement.

The force sought support from several forces, which has helped to inform a comprehensive plan to improve its work with the public. This plan includes staffing, training, performance measurement and IT systems. The force uses resource and incident management officers to actively manage demand and available resources.

### **The force should improve how it manages crime scenes and early evidence opportunities**

We found that supervisors, including response sergeants, were unable to support their officers as effectively as they would like. High levels of demand can mean that supervisors aren't always able to attend scenes to provide advice or support. And we also found '[golden hour](#)' tasks (those vital early investigative steps such as seizing items for forensic examination or recovering CCTV footage) often weren't completed. The reasons for this were varied and included the demand on smaller response teams, a lack of experience in officers in response teams and a lack of effective supervision.

We found response officers were carrying high workloads and supervisors were struggling to keep up with the day-to-day requirements of their role. These included workloads reviews, one-to-one conversations and performance conversations.

The force is introducing new measures to improve monitoring and to support its officers. These include new crime management investigation teams and internal auditing, where inspectors regularly dip sample their teams' cases. These measures should increase capacity and improve the quality of service.

The force should make sure the new measures bring about the improvements needed so that all incidents are managed effectively and work is properly supervised.

## **The force is failing to carry out secondary risk assessments effectively**

In our victim service assessment we found that the force effectively carries out initial risk assessments in the control room. We found a structured approach and consideration of the needs of the victim/caller in 70 out of 80 calls and an accurate account of the call in 65 out of 70 calls.

While this is positive, we found that if immediate attendance wasn't required or necessary, incidents were passed to other departments, including investigation teams, response teams and neighbourhood policing teams. These incidents could then await allocation or be placed in a diary system. We found these incidents were often delayed and, due to the demand experienced by officers, supervisors and wider teams, they were often left without being viewed, addressed or actioned. This meant the initial assessment wasn't reviewed and any new information wasn't considered. We also found that officers were carrying out secondary risk assessments overnight, which meant that they weren't always able to contact the victim. This may result in new or developing risks being missed. It is essential that a secondary assessment is carried out as soon as is practicable.

Devon and Cornwall Police has recognised the challenge this represents. At the time of our inspection, it told us it planned to introduce crime management investigation units by April 2024 to provide additional support in this reassessment process.

Despite this, we were pleased to see that call handlers identify vulnerability at the first point of contact and provide appropriate advice politely.

## **The force provides various ways for members of the public to contact it and is making efforts to increase the options available**

Devon and Cornwall Police is increasing the ways members of the public can make contact. It has a well-developed website and makes use of social media to promote the ways people can contact the force in non-emergency cases and as an alternative to the telephone, such as the single online home. The force is also increasing the number of public enquiry offices.

Within the control room, the force has made improvements to IT systems so that calls to the non-emergency number can be diverted to other numbers. Callers can also choose to be called back rather than wait in a queue. These measures are beginning to improve rates of non-emergency call abandonment.

The force is currently exploring the use of artificial intelligence, or 'bots', to automate crime identification and allocation. This is creating efficiencies in the control room. But further work is required to address the type of incidents being passed directly to sergeants and teams.

# Investigating crime

## Inadequate

Devon and Cornwall Police is inadequate at investigating crime.

### Cause of concern

#### **The force needs to make sure it carries out effective investigations that lead to satisfactory results for victims**

We found the force hasn't made enough progress in improving the standard of its investigations since our previous PEEL inspection. As a result, not enough offenders are being brought to justice. We acknowledge that the force does a good job of investigating many of the most serious crimes. But in our review, we found only 47 out of 66 investigations had an investigation plan. Investigation plans, outlined in the [College of Policing's authorised professional practice](#), support investigators to make sure they make the most of all available opportunities to gather evidence.

We found cases where there were significant failings and victims had been let down. Our victim service assessment found evidence of effective supervision in only 45 out of 85 cases. During our inspection, supervisors told us they didn't have time to complete all the supervisory tasks that they should. They also told us they had large crime caseloads because there weren't enough skilled investigators. They had to work extra hours, including rest days, to get work completed.

As a result, the force isn't always achieving acceptable outcomes for victims of crime. The number of crimes that are solved following investigations is low.

The correct outcome was applied in only 38 of 55 cases and supervision of the outcome took place in 44 out of 67 cases.



Devon and Cornwall Police is also failing to support victims. We found evidence the victim was consulted before a specific outcome was applied in only 35 of 47 cases we reviewed. A victim needs assessment was completed in only 71 out of 89 cases. Victim contracts were considered in only 37 out of 70 cases. Victims received an appropriate level of service in only 59 out of 100 cases.

Although the force does have governance arrangements and processes in place, we found crime investigations weren't managed as effectively as they could be. We found that some processes were missing or ineffective, or weren't clearly defined.

### **Recommendations**

Within six months, Devon and Cornwall Police should:

- make sure investigation plans are appropriate and that supervisors can make sure all appropriate investigative opportunities are taken (an area for improvement from our previous PEEL inspection that hasn't been met);
- make sure investigations are carried out without unnecessary delays;
- implement appropriate governance and monitoring processes to make sure that the outcomes used are appropriate and comply with force and national policies (an area for improvement from our previous PEEL inspection that hasn't been met); and
- make sure a victim contract is completed and a victim needs assessment is carried out where appropriate.

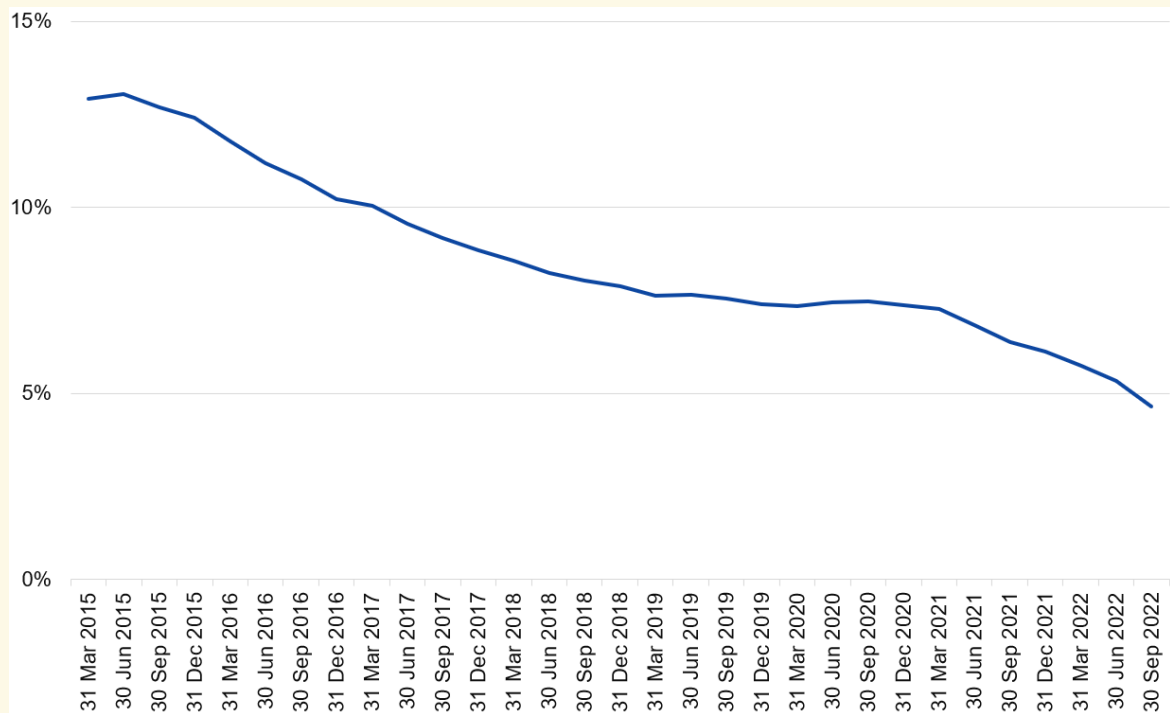
## **Area for improvement**

### **The force doesn't consistently achieve appropriate outcomes for victims**

Devon and Cornwall Police isn't always achieving acceptable outcomes for victims of crime. It has low numbers of crimes that are solved following investigations. It needs to understand the issue and work to achieve better outcomes for victims.

In the year ending 30 September 2022, Devon and Cornwall Police recorded 88,515 victim-based crimes. Of these recorded offences, 7.8 percent were assigned an 'offences brought to justice' outcome. This was within the normal range compared to other forces in England and Wales. More specifically, 4.7 percent were assigned a 'charged/summonsed' outcome, which is significantly lower than the average across all forces in England and Wales of 6.1 percent.

**Figure 2: Proportion of victim-based crimes assigned a ‘charged/summonsed’ outcome (outcome 1) by Devon and Cornwall Police between the year ending 31 March 2015 and the year ending 30 September 2022**



**Source:** [Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables](#) from the Home Office

Note: Presented data comes from the January 2024 data release and may have been revised since. Victim-based crimes are defined as all police-recorded crimes where there is a direct victim, such as an individual, an organisation or a corporate body.

Between the year ending 30 September 2021 and the year ending 30 September 2022, the proportion of victim-based crimes assigned Outcome 14: Evidential difficulties (suspect not identified; victim does not support action) decreased from 1.4 percent to 0.7 percent. This value was low compared to the 6.0 percent average for forces across England and Wales.

Between the year ending 30 September 2021 and the year ending 30 September 2022, the proportion of victim-based crimes assigned Outcome 16: Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim does not support or withdraws support) decreased from 22.1 percent to 11.7 percent. This value was lower than the average for forces across England and Wales, which was 23.6 percent.

The force is responding to the challenges we identified. During our inspection, the force told us dedicated teams are working on reducing backlogs. It is also implementing a new operating model for its investigations, Project Synergy. Investigations are now managed centrally rather than by four separate [basic command units](#) and the force plans to move its detectives into larger hubs to improve effectiveness. The project began in July 2023 and the first hub is operational. The project is scheduled for full implementation in 2024/25.

Devon and Cornwall Police has also reviewed its operating model for investigation of domestic abuse cases. It has introduced new teams in each of its four basic command units. These teams are responsible for domestic abuse crime investigations that would previously have been allocated to response officers, freeing up response officer capacity.

These changes should make how crimes are allocated and investigated consistent across the force, which should lead to improved outcomes.

## Main findings

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

### **The force is improving its governance arrangements to make sure it has effective oversight of investigations**

We found that senior leaders have begun work to improve investigative standards and crime outcomes. A new management structure, led by the deputy chief constable, oversees this work. The force has also completed initial work to change its operating model to improve investigations, Project Synergy. This is supported by a detailed performance data set that provides insight into the effectiveness of investigations. The new operating model will mean detectives work in hubs. The first hub has been introduced in Exeter. This will be a more sustainable model for investigating crime. It also means more complex investigations can be led by detective sergeants and experienced detectives.

The force is progressing its crime management investigations teams, which will manage high-volume crimes. This will reduce the demand placed on response officers and supervisors so that they can improve the quality of 'golden hour' enquiries, support supervisory review and develop more detailed investigation plans. The force told us this will give specialist investigators more capacity to handle serious cases. It also anticipates that this will help less experienced officers to develop their skills in investigating crime.

## **High caseloads and investigative delays are affecting outcomes for victims**

Officers we spoke with describe a pride in working for Devon and Cornwall Police. We observed that officers were committed to their duties and wanted to serve their community. But we also found that workloads were high. Often officers failed to build on initial enquiries, which meant cases weren't dealt with for several months. We also found statutory time limits were missed in some cases as well as delays in [digital forensics](#) analysis and reports of up to ten months.

The force is below capacity in its [professionalising investigations programme 2](#) trained officers. The force has a resilience plan and work is ongoing to encourage staff to consider investigative roles. But the force doesn't have a detailed understanding of where its resources are located and what the capacity of those resources are to deal with the levels of demand experienced. The force has introduced a workforce plan, which will improve this understanding and help it plan more effectively.

We did find that if investigation plans were created, they were followed. But far too often there was no investigation plan and without a clear plan investigative opportunities were missed. The force is improving scrutiny through regular dip sampling. It has also introduced a new template to support the reviews of investigation plans, which is audited to monitor compliance.

## **The force is failing to secure justice for victims and isn't providing a good service to victims of crime**

During our inspection, we looked at the standards of initial investigations and communication with victims. We found the force is failing to take all investigative opportunities. The force missed opportunities in 29 out of 94 cases we reviewed. We also found unnecessary delays in 25 out of 100 cases. Our conversations with investigators reflected that high workloads, a lack of investigation plans and a lack of victim updates were common.

The force has recognised the need to improve and we saw it is focusing on making changes to improve performance.

Investigative quality is an area where the force is focusing on improvements. The force carried out an audit of 477 cases to find out if investigation plans were present, if supervision was effective and if victims were being supported. The force gives training to officers and staff that includes file quality and golden hour principles. Supervisors are receiving enhanced training to improve standards across the force. The internal audit is now a regular performance measure reported to the force's performance board.

## **Outcomes data isn't detailed enough to help the force understand if it is achieving positive results for victims**

The force has struggled to provide accurate data on its investigation outcomes. This means it can't be sure outcomes are being applied effectively. It is also unable to identify what is required to improve performance and to support victims of crime.

In March 2022, we reported that Devon and Cornwall Police was failing to assign outcomes to crimes. During this inspection, we found this hadn't been resolved.

We found the force had significant backlogs in its crime standards unit. At the time of our inspection, the force reported a backlog of 86,480 reported incidents and 37,962 required tasks in its crime management systems. The force has placed additional people in this area to reduce the backlogs, including using agency staff, which helps to address some of the risk. This has reduced backlogs by 40 percent since November 2023. But backlogs in force systems affect the quality of service people receive, for example, leading to delayed outcomes. Staff assigned to managing backlogs could be used elsewhere during periods of high demand. Also, backlogs mean the force doesn't have a full picture of the data held in its systems, for example what the outcomes are or are likely to be.

The force has responded well to both issues with improved governance. But it needs to make sure processes and systems are sustainable to maintain performance.

# Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

Devon and Cornwall Police is adequate at protecting vulnerable people.

## Areas for improvement

**The force should make sure it applies consistent domestic abuse secondary risk assessment gradings and provides full information about vulnerable children and adults in referrals to social care partners**

The force isn't consistent in how it shares information about vulnerable adults and children with partner agencies. We found officers didn't have enough knowledge and training on carrying out risk assessments of vulnerability. [Public protection notices](#) weren't of consistent quality. Public protection notices are documents that record safeguarding concerns about an adult or [child](#) and are shared with partner agencies to inform a multi-agency response. We found examples of referrals to children's social care that didn't include all police information, meaning social care partners may make decisions on service needs without knowing the full risk to the child or adult.

Officers attending domestic abuse related incidents complete a risk assessment called a [DASH \(domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence\)](#) checklist, which grades the level of risk to the victim from the perpetrator. It also informs the immediate protection required by police and referral pathways for support. During our inspection, we found standard risk public protection notices which should have been medium or high risk because officers hadn't considered previous offender and victim histories. The force has a secondary risk assessment process at the central referral units that checks the quality of the public protection notice. These don't reassess the wider risk history if this hasn't been added by the officer. This means the force may not be sharing the full risk picture with partners when making a referral.

When considering repeat victims, understanding cumulative risk is important. This means not just viewing the most recent crime or incident in isolation, but also the full outline of what has happened before. This helps the force and partners to understand if there has been an increase in risk to the victim or in the frequency of offences.

These are significant issues that affect the ability of Devon and Cornwall Police and its partners to protect vulnerable adults and children.

### **The force should make sure its management and oversight of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme means disclosures are made within statutory time frames**

The [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme \(DVDS\)](#), also known as Clare's Law, allows police forces to disclose information about previous violent or abusive offending by an individual in order to protect partners or ex-partners of that individual. We found a lack of consistency in how Devon and Cornwall Police manages the scheme. Force data suggests all disclosures are made within statutory time frames, but some local teams suggested that delays exist that mean these time frames are exceeded. We found the force didn't have a current DVDS dashboard to give an oversight of performance, but this is in development.

At the time of our inspection, we found staff using locally stored spreadsheets, with decision-makers varying across geographical areas. In some areas, officers had introduced local solutions that didn't inform senior leaders effectively. There were also different processes in place for completing a DVDS application, and some of these didn't comply with force policy. For example, the wording added to the DVDS application should be completed or signed off by an inspector or equivalent, but we found this task was often delegated to sergeants or even constables.

The force should make sure it uses and oversees the DVDS consistently and in line with national statutory guidance.

## **Main findings**

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

## **The force has effective governance arrangements to protect vulnerable people**

The force has a chief officer lead for safeguarding. Governance of safeguarding and vulnerability is overseen by the protecting vulnerable persons' board. It also has a strategic safeguarding improvement hub, with effective governance and structure. The hub provides a high level of detail in relation to panels, forums and meetings, covering modern slavery, domestic abuse investigations and rape and serious sexual offences. There are additional working groups covering stalking and harassment.

The force has a vulnerability plan that is supported by tactical action plans managed by its strategic safeguarding improvement hub. The performance and analysis team is responsible for the vulnerability plan. Action plans are reviewed every three months to monitor how they are being carried out and this has good oversight. The vulnerability plan is effective. The force gave us examples of where review and oversight led to learning being shared. For example, the force reviewed public protection notices concerning neglect and identified that mandatory vulnerability training was needed to cover gaps in knowledge and experience.

The force runs reflective learning and scrutiny panels. These review cases that have been assigned as no further action, examine themes that involve more than one service and assess individual officers' performance to enhance learning and improve performance and awareness.

## **The force provides safeguarding support for vulnerable people**

Devon and Cornwall Police has a lead officer for each of the 13 areas of vulnerability designated by the College of Policing. Each area of vulnerability is supported by relevant action plans and oversight.

The force supports preventative activity. An example of this is Project Vigilant, in which the force works with partners to prevent sexual offences by identifying predatory behaviour, approaching individuals and recording the interaction using their body-worn video.

## **The force has dedicated support for the use of protective orders**

We found Devon and Cornwall Police makes effective use of DVPNs and DVPOs, as well as other protective orders that enhance safeguarding for victims. For example, in the year ending 31 March 2023, Devon and Cornwall Police made DVPO applications in 4.6 percent of recorded domestic abuse related crimes. This was one of the highest rates across forces in England and Wales. The average rate across all forces in England and Wales for the same period was 1.3 percent of recorded domestic abuse related crimes.



The force has a team of legal advisers who give advice about and obtain civil preventative orders, including sexual harm prevention orders, sexual risk orders, stalking protection orders, DVPNs, DVPOs, closure orders and civil injunctions. This work supports the force's priority of protecting the vulnerable and providing victims with a positive outcome. It also closely aligns with the force's work to address violence against women and girls.

The number of DVPOs the force applies for has continued to increase. The force told us that, in the period from 1 January 2023 to 28 February 2024, it has applied for 669 DVPOs. The investment in a team of legal advisers has increased officers' and staff awareness of these orders. Officers and staff we spoke with understood the importance of these protective measures and appreciated the support they received from the legal advisers to increase the chance of successful applications.

### **The force has responded well in improving awareness of vulnerability**

Devon and Cornwall Police gives vulnerability training on neglect and other types of vulnerability to all its officers. The training covers police powers, types of vulnerability and process, and legislative updates. It also includes training from national leads and other forces and organisations. The modules cover missed opportunities, child safeguarding practice, domestic abuse, the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and the quality of public protection notices.

This is a positive step in increasing awareness and knowledge and will support the force in making improvements to safeguard its communities.

### **The force has multi-agency safeguarding hubs but there is a lack of clarity about working practices**

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are in place across Devon and Cornwall Police. We found officers and staff work in partnership with other agencies and saw evidence of positive working relationships and information-sharing.

But we found a lack of clarity about working practices within the [multi-agency safeguarding hubs](#). Demand in some areas meant officers and staff were moved to support other teams. The ability to view demand across Devon and Cornwall Police and to take action by moving officers and staff is positive. But at times officers and staff weren't always aware of different working practices in each multi-agency safeguarding hub. Each area has different approaches and officers and staff involved in multi-agency working arrangements don't always have the necessary training or skills to carry out their role. The force needs to make sure training for these officers and staff is consistent, because skills and experience varied across the multi-agency safeguarding hubs.

# Managing offenders and suspects

Requires  
improvement

Devon and Cornwall Police requires improvement at managing offenders and suspects.

## Areas for improvement

### **The force should improve its governance and approach to managing suspects and wanted persons**

During our inspection, officers showed they understood the requirements of the new [bail](#) legislation under the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#).

But we found the force was inconsistent in its approach to managing bail and suspects [released under investigation \(RUI\)](#). We found examples of bail being converted to RUI without proper justification and without considering appropriate safeguarding arrangements. Sometimes bail is being converted to RUI to manage delays in the receipt of digital forensics or because the relevant officer wasn't available on the day a suspect returned on bail. We also heard that suspects wanted on warrant were sometimes invited to the station on a voluntary basis.

The force is developing its performance data to monitor bail and RUI. It is also introducing a bail portal. These are positive steps and should improve the force's ability to oversee and understand how bail and RUI are used.

**The force should make sure it shares safeguarding information with local authorities at the earliest possible opportunity, before enforcement action, to effectively safeguard children from serious harm**

Devon and Cornwall Police doesn't routinely share important safeguarding information with local authorities as soon as it could. For example, we found the [management of sexual offenders and violent offenders](#) team and [police online investigation team](#) had set a standard to notify partner agencies about children at risk 48 hours after the allocation of a crime. But this meant the force wasn't sharing the information as soon as it could and this introduced unnecessary delays in consulting with social services to start safeguarding children. The force has now introduced a directive that the [public protection notice](#) must be submitted as soon as is practicable once it has been allocated.

The force should assure itself that this directive is followed and referrals to social services are completed at the earliest possible opportunity when it believes a suspect has access to children. This would allow information-sharing to begin between the two services to help build an accurate picture of any risk the suspect poses. Unless the force shares information at an early stage, there may be a delay in safeguarding children.

**The force should make sure it addresses internal delays, adheres to time frames and shares intelligence effectively**

The force isn't adhering to all time frames and isn't addressing delays introduced by internal services such as the digital forensics unit or the criminal justice unit. It isn't taking effective action against offenders who access indecent images of children, in line with [Kent internet risk assessment tool](#) time periods.

The digital forensics unit is responsible for examining digital devices. The police online investigation team gives seized devices to the digital forensics unit for examination and there is an agreement in place for these to be expedited. But we found delays in the examination of devices and these exceeded the agreed internal time frames.

The force is also failing to refresh intelligence when delays occur, which means they don't know if the risk has changed, potentially leaving children at risk.

## Main findings

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

### **Risk assessments are of a good standard, but processes need to be improved**

The force uses nationally recognised risk assessment tools to risk-assess registered sex offenders. These are the [active risk management system](#) and the Risk Matrix 2000. Its risk assessments are in line with the College of Policing's authorised professional practice and we found them to be timely.

This area has improved since our previous inspection. We also found that the officers and staff who assess risk were properly trained in the use of the assessment tools. We saw that decisions by supervisors were well recorded and that [multi-agency public protection arrangements](#) were in line with national guidance. But officers weren't always effectively using the action tab on the [Violent and Sex Offender Register](#), the case management system used to record actions taken regarding registered offenders. This means actions were difficult to follow and the force may miss actions set, which affects its ability to manage offenders effectively.

We found Devon and Cornwall Police doesn't use the [Police National Database](#) effectively to gain a full intelligence picture as part of the risk assessment and to inform the subsequent risk management plan. Without proactively using the Police National Database, the force may not have the full intelligence profile on the offender. In addition, we found that visits to registered sex offenders weren't always unannounced. The force's approaches to using the Police National Database and carrying out visits to registered sex offenders don't comply with recommended good practice. The force should make sure it introduces better governance in these areas.

### **The force is effective at arresting and managing suspects**

The force effectively oversees activity to arrest wanted persons and manage suspects.

Chief officers scrutinise activity relating to high-risk outstanding offenders at the force daily management meeting. During these meetings, the force discusses offenders who haven't yet been arrested and puts in place appropriate interventions and actions.

The force has a suspect contact management plan. This means officers keep in contact with the suspect while they are on bail. This is particularly important given the time it takes to get a case to court.

### **Most neighbourhood policing teams are aware of registered sex offenders in their area**

The officers we spoke with in the management of sexual offenders and violent offenders (MOSOVO) team were positive about the role neighbourhood policing teams can play in managing risk from sex offenders. But some MOSOVO officers expressed mixed opinions about the value a neighbourhood officer can add during visits. They said the process to identify a neighbourhood officer to support visits was time-consuming and wasn't always effective given the distance officers had to travel.

The force requires neighbourhood officers to support joint visits. When we spoke with neighbourhood policing teams, most but not all were aware of sex offenders living in their area. Neighbourhood officers support joint visits when requested to do so by the MOSOVO team. This was creating greater awareness of the risks registered sex offenders might pose. It was clear that a process to assign work was in place and officers were being used frequently.

### **The MOSOVO team and police online investigation team are well resourced and supported with good data**

Devon and Cornwall Police has invested in extra officers and staff to manage its sexual and violent offenders and we found improvements in performance since our previous inspection. At the time of this inspection, the ratio of offender managers to registered sex offenders was 1 manager to 38 offenders, which is positive. The force has committed to further growth over the next two years to make sure it manages the forecast increased demand and maintains performance improvements.

The force has developed performance data to understand how effectively it manages registered sex offenders and offenders who access indecent images of children. We found that this data is detailed and well informed, and is helping to improve the force's understanding. This is supporting improved performance. The force uses the [active risk management](#) system for managing the risk posed by dangerous offenders. We found that, despite some delays in completing them, the content and quality of the risk management plans were good.

Officers and staff we spoke with reported manageable workloads. They had received training and guidance to support them in their roles.

# Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

## Adequate

Devon and Cornwall Police is adequate at building, supporting and protecting the workforce.

### Areas for improvement

#### **The force must effectively balance operational needs with supporting the welfare of its officers and staff**

During our inspection, officers and staff across Devon and Cornwall Police told us they were managing high demand. They said they needed to work from home on rest days to keep on top of the work. Overtime was also frequently used to manage high workloads and incoming demand. Time off in lieu was being accrued regularly. But sometimes leave requests were refused. The force also relied on the goodwill of its workforce to cover resource gaps.

The force and officers told us the force 'buys back' time off in lieu every three months if it exceeds 30 hours, so officers don't build up hours in lieu that can't reasonably be taken. And that overtime was used to meet demand because it was cheaper than investing in more full-time equivalent staff.

Although the force was adequately compensating its officers by taking this approach, it was clear that managing high demand in this way could negatively affect officers' welfare and well-being. The force has a good range of well-being provision. But some officers told us they couldn't access this well-being assistance because high demand meant they couldn't take time off to do so.

The force should make sure it fully understands this complex picture. It needs to prioritise staff having appropriate respite from work pressures and being able to have a healthy work–life balance.

## **The force must make sure officers have effective support from their supervisors to support their well-being, welfare and development**

Devon and Cornwall Police has a healthy ratio of supervisors to officers. Despite this, some staff told us they didn't see their supervisors very often. In some instances, officers were assigned supervisors who were on different shift patterns. Some officers told us they hadn't seen their line managers for up to six months.

We found this varied depending on the location of officers in the force. It was less of a problem in the busier, main hubs of the force. But too often in other locations we found there was a lack of communication and a lack of visibility of supervisors. In more rural areas, officers were left without direct supervision for significant periods and were carrying high workloads that weren't reviewed. They were often allocated additional work due to the locations they worked in and were expected to continue working on jobs after providing cover for others. Opportunities to spread the workload more fairly weren't taken.

The force should make sure it is able to fully understand the provision of supervisors and maximise the ability of officers to access supervisory support.

## **Main findings**

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

### **The force provides comprehensive well-being support to officers and staff but could improve its oversight of how this is used**

The workforce is aware of, and able to access, a good range of preventative and supportive measures to improve their physical and mental well-being. The force has well-being leads. And it provides information on various topics, including menopause, mental health, alcohol and drugs. Most officers and staff we spoke with felt they knew how to access what support was available. But in our PEEL workforce survey we found that only 63.6 percent of all respondents (1,032 of 1,621 respondents) agreed they had time to access the well-being support they need.

The force has a positive approach to supporting officers and staff who have been assaulted. It adheres to the nationally recognised [Operation Hampshire](#) protocols. It reviews every assault at chief officers' meetings to make sure officers and staff receive appropriate support.

But officers told us well-being services are 'headquarters-centric'. They aren't always given the time to travel to headquarters or to take up the additional well-being options the force has put in place. For example, high work demand meant many officers missed the opportunity to use a well-being wagon that toured the force, where officers

could discuss their well-being and be assessed in relation to a healthy lifestyle. Officers also said they couldn't attend a wellness day organised by the force because of high work demand.

### **The force effectively supports its new recruits to progress and remain within Devon and Cornwall Police, but this could be improved**

All new recruits are assigned a tutor. The force introduced resilience tutors who work with new recruits for the first 8 to 12 weeks. A resilience tutor is an officer who isn't fully accredited but is capable of carrying out the initial phases of tutoring. This supports the force in deploying and using fully trained tutors and maintains support for new recruits on a one-to-one basis. Fully trained tutors are assigned during the first 8 to 12 weeks if they are available. The force said this approach is supported by the College of Policing. When the initial period of 8 to 12 weeks is complete, the final tutorship phase is carried out by a fully qualified tutor.

The force keeps a student record. This is a chronological record that covers the student's individual requirements and early conversations about these requirements. This record continues through the tutor phase, which means that students continue to be supported when posted to their new teams. The force has also introduced a passport for new recruits, in which they can disclose information relevant to their learning and development and their specific needs. This information is only shared with the permission of the student officer. The passport means officers don't need to make repeated disclosures of personal information throughout their career.

The force also involves new recruits in community practical training, which is supported by a three-day community placement in a range of 200 host organisations, with a focus on underrepresented groups. The recruits share their experiences with their peers so all officers benefit from the learning. Placements can also be with the force's [independent advisory group](#).

Devon and Cornwall Police uses a range of data and information to identify retention patterns and trends. It uses this specifically to understand the challenges for new recruits from underrepresented groups. The force has a good understanding of workforce attrition and retention rates, which helps it to identify why people are leaving and what changes may be needed.

But while the force examines the reasons leavers give for resigning, it only collects this information using a survey when individuals are leaving or after they have left the force. This process could be more insightful if supported by exit interviews. The force told us it now has a retention group and plans to introduce exit and stay interviews in 2024.



## **The force creates opportunities for officers and staff from under-represented groups to develop and progress**

Devon and Cornwall Police offers support for police officers and staff from underrepresented groups to develop and progress. This includes support with promotion processes, applications and training. For example, the positive action process increased the time given to applicants to prepare for promotion. The force has reported success, particularly with female officers. The force told us it has seen a 46 percent increase in female officers being promoted to sergeant between March 2020 and September 2023, compared with an 8 percent increase for male officers being promoted over the same period. As of September 2023, the force had 172 female sergeants.

The force is also carrying out a three-day inclusivity programme, for inspectors and above and police staff equivalents. It told us it has already given the training to 850 first-line managers, with all others due to receive it in 2024.

The force has 11 staff networks. The chief officer team meets with the relevant chairs on a regular basis. As a result of feedback, the force has developed a programme for coaching and mentoring for those seeking promotion. The force told us it has achieved a 75 percent success rate for those involved in this initiative.

## **The force gives extra support to officers and staff in high-risk roles and those experiencing potentially traumatic incidents**

The force has a comprehensive process to screen officers and staff working in roles at higher risk of trauma and make sure they are aware of the risks and issues that may be unique to their role. Members of the workforce in high-risk roles told us they felt well supported and described regular one-to-one meetings, stress, trauma and risk assessments and regular psychological screening. These support measures are mandatory in areas such as the police online investigation team and have been extended to include MOSOVO teams. [Trauma risk management](#) is used well to support officers and staff in the control room, response and roads policing. Officers and staff commented positively on the intervention and support that was on offer after they had dealt with difficult calls or incidents.

# Leadership and force management

Requires  
improvement

Devon and Cornwall Police's leadership and management requires improvement.

## Areas for improvement

### **The force should make sure leaders at all levels are visible so officers and staff are appropriately supported**

Chief officers in Devon and Cornwall are committed to attending all police stations in the force on a regular basis. This is supported by force briefings that are shared at various levels in the force, which provide information on decisions and priorities. But we found many officers and staff, especially those operating in the more remote parts of the force, didn't regularly see managers. Some specialist officers and senior leaders were also less available in the remote parts of the force.

The force should make sure officers and staff have regular access to managers to help it achieve its aims to improve and change through effective supervision. This will provide more informed feedback for the force and will support a better understanding of demand and whether its resourcing placement is effective.

### **The force should do more to understand demand in all areas of the force and how to support the workforce effectively**

The workforce repeatedly highlighted the high demand they were experiencing. We saw that officers had excessive workloads across all departments. But in those areas where supervision was effective and systems were used or understood better, officers were under less pressure and had manageable workloads.

We found some working practices across the force were inconsistent and a lack of awareness across all areas as to how different local policing areas operated. Good practice in some areas wasn't shared across the force. There was clear resistance locally to moving officers to different areas to meet demand, which restricted the force's ability to manage demand effectively.

The force is committed to managing local demand and supporting local communities. But this sometimes meant opportunities were missed to support the wider force during times of high demand.

The force is increasing its use of data. It is developing apps for officers, staff and supervisors to help them access and record data to understand demand in more detail. These processes will support local leaders in understanding their teams and the pressures that demand creates.

### **The force should make sure its investment in systems and processes improves productivity**

Devon and Cornwall Police has invested in laptops, apps and new information systems such as its crime recording system, [NICHE](#). But we found a lack of analysis and understanding about how well these are used across the force. Despite having mobile devices, officers were still returning to the station to complete enquiries. Not all officers had been issued with the new equipment.

NICHE was introduced in autumn 2022, but officers were still struggling to use the system because of poor implementation and a lack of awareness about how it works. There were some exceptions. For example, the neighbourhood teams used NICHE effectively for problem-solving and assigning work. But since NICHE was introduced, the force has also been unable to extract data and regularly report on its operations. For example, the force hasn't been able to provide information on the outcomes assigned to its recorded crimes.

The force also isn't able to track the benefits of new equipment, systems and processes. Some work is being carried out by the strategic planning lead. But we saw limited examples of how the force understands investment and productivity, such as whether the changes being made are improving services and reducing cost. This needs wider support and understanding.

## **The force needs to improve its governance of overtime and time-off-in-lieu spending**

Devon and Cornwall Police has overspent on overtime for the last five years. While this has reduced for the last financial period, the force is still using overtime to cover shortfalls in officers or to meet high demand. This is accepted by senior leaders as being cost effective and cheaper than employing additional officers. The force also buys back time off in lieu if it exceeds 30 hours. This is an additional financial liability. Time off in lieu differs from overtime in that it allows officers to take time off later. But the force has to hold time off in lieu as a financial liability (equivalent cost to the total time off in lieu bill) in case it needs to pay for this time instead. Officers and staff who leave the force are entitled to be paid for time owed. Also, officers who hold time off in lieu can use it to avoid working a period of notice if they decide to leave the force, which can have a negative effect on how the force can manage its workforce. But officers continuously working excessive hours isn't good for their welfare.

Overtime is recorded centrally and there is an app that details overtime use. But it wasn't clear that the force understood time off in lieu in detail or whether this was information was included in the app.

We recognise that overtime is important to manage demand, particularly when the force has significant incidents, such as the major incident in February 2024 when an unexploded Second World War bomb was found in Plymouth. But the continued spend indicates that the force needs to better understand its resourcing model. Overtime and use of time off in lieu may mask wider pressures being experienced by the workforce. This needs to be understood in more detail.

## **Main findings**

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to leadership and management.

### **The force has an effective performance framework, making sure it tackles what is important locally and nationally at a strategic level**

During our inspection, we assessed how the force scrutinises the performance of its workforce to make sure it meets its priorities. Leaders are held to account for their areas of responsibility by the deputy chief constable at a strategic monthly performance meeting. Data is used to evaluate performance and make improvements. The force is adjusting other parts of its governance framework to make sure lines of accountability are clear across all areas.

We found the force was making effective use of its tasking and co-ordination and daily management meetings to monitor emerging issues and to direct officers to tackle these issues. We also found the force made good use of its [force management statement](#). The force is using this document as an integral part of its planning processes.

The force has good links with its communities, supported by its neighbourhood teams and effective partnerships. The force consults many community forums and includes this consultation in elements of its decision-making, alongside similar and complementary work by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

But we found that, overall, the force isn't managing demand effectively. Demand is managed inconsistently across the force. Leaders need support to develop the skills required to manage demand more effectively and to decide what issues need to be escalated for strategic oversight at a force level.

Devon and Cornwall Police is investing in its estate and has opened public enquiry offices to support its communities. But the force needs to make sure it has allocated enough officers and staff to each of its departments and local policing areas so that each area has the capacity and capability it needs to provide effective and efficient local policing services in a sustainable way. This must be supported by reliable data.

### **Force leaders need to be more visible and work more closely with officers and staff**

We found force leaders and other senior staff were passionate about supporting their teams and making positive changes across the force.

However, at a lower level there is a disconnect between leadership, officers and staff. We found different working practices across the four basic command units. The lack of consistency affects messaging and performance. Strategic decisions that aim to improve performance aren't always clear to frontline officers.

This issue has been made worse by the issues we have described about the allocation and availability of supervisors. We found many officers and staff didn't regularly see senior leaders in some areas of the force.

Devon and Cornwall Police has told us it now has more structure in its governance arrangements. This makes sure board meetings are well attended by the right senior individuals who are better held to account on performance matters. Though relatively new, we saw this during the meetings we attended.

### **The force is developing its workforce plan but this needs to be supported by a skills matrix and an understanding of capacity and capability**

At the time of our inspection, the force showed us a draft workforce plan that was due to be presented to the senior executive. A detailed workforce plan is an essential requirement that should provide the force with information on how its workforce can be used to meet its demand effectively. It wasn't clear that the force understood the demands placed on individuals or teams, workloads or the numbers of officers needed on a team to allow a more even distribution of work. Implementing the workforce plan should help improve the force's understanding. We will monitor its implementation and whether it leads to improvements.

Some of Devon and Cornwall Police's systems that contain skills and workforce details are old and aren't integrated. This means the force doesn't have a detailed skills matrix to refer to. The force is unable to balance its teams according to skills and capabilities. For example, new recruits aren't all response trained, so officers who are response trained need to be diverted from other departments. When more experienced officers move to different areas, this results in a lack of support for new recruits and new supervisors. This causes an imbalance across the force and challenges the effective management of demand in some areas, leading to service failure.

### **The force collaborates well with other local forces, but lack of co-ordination in its policies, processes and procedures across the force means its understanding of productivity is inconsistent**

Devon and Cornwall Police has shown it is forward thinking in its collaborations and business partnerships, both in terms of value for money and a good return on investment. The force has a good working relationship with Dorset Police. At the time of our inspection, it had recently stopped some collaborative work that hasn't given the return on investment it wanted. The force is using BT for its IT services, which provides value for money. This planning and businesslike approach by the force is positive.

Despite the investment in IT, some officers and staff across the force still lack understanding about how IT should be used. For example, officers are still returning to the station to complete enquiries, despite having mobile devices. The force is implementing apps and robotic process automation. It should make sure these are used to improve effectiveness. There have been significant challenges in implementing NICHE, the crime recording system. Officers are still struggling to use it because they don't fully understand how it works. The force should make sure lessons are learned from its experience of implementing NICHE before introducing new technology in the future.

The force hasn't been able to show that it is using its workforce in a productive and effective way. Officers and staff aren't being assigned to work in particular locations in a way that is managing demand effectively across the force. This is difficult given the geographical area the force covers. But we found the allocation of work and distribution of resources, including supervisors, didn't help to support the workforce and more importantly the communities in more rural areas.

Crime outcomes, case handovers, crime investigations, partnership referrals and workloads were inconsistent in their number, quality and timeliness across the force. Crime allocation policies were also inconsistent across the four command areas. This inconsistency is causing service failure. The force's work needs to be better co-ordinated.

### **The force's finances are supported by clear plans and are sustainable**

The force needs to understand its use of overtime and time off in lieu to meet demand, which it has been using this way for the last five years. The force is using officers in support roles to make savings, which isn't unusual. But it needs to have a better understanding of the cost of overtime and if officers are in the right place at the right times to reduce demand. The force needs to understand the consistent use of overtime will affect the welfare of its officers. The force buys back time off in lieu when it exceeds 30 hours, but it needs to make sure officers are able to take time off in lieu and be away from the workplace.

For the financial year 2023/24, the force received a total of £384m in funding, increased in line with year two of the three-year settlement presented in the 2021 spending review. For the financial year 2023/24, 43 percent of Devon and Cornwall Police's total funding came from the council tax precept, which includes a 6 percent increase in council tax.

The force can demonstrate effective financial management of the funds it has available to provide police services. There is a clear link between this financial management, the constabulary's priorities and the plans of the police and crime commissioner.

There is an effective reserves strategy for 2023/24 to 2026/27. The force has a current total reserve balance of 11 percent of the 2023/24 reserve budget and a general reserve balance of 4 percent of the 2023/24 revenue budget, which is prudent. The current expected use of earmarked reserves shows a reduction in the balance available by the end of 2023/24. The strategy shows that reserves will reduce over the four-year period but will remain within the overall limits set within it.

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