



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Crime inspection 2014

Bedfordshire Police

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Contents

How effective is the force at cutting crime?	4
Introduction	7
Methodology	8
How effective is the force at reducing crime and preventing offending?	9
How effective is the force at investigating offending?	16
How effective is the force at tackling anti-social behaviour?	22
What each judgment means	25

How effective is the force at cutting crime?

Overall summary

Bedfordshire Police is a small, very low cost force. It faces some complex policing challenges, with unusually high levels of serious threats and criminality that are not normally dealt with by a force of its size.

Over the last two years, and in response to required budget reductions, police officer numbers have been cut to such a low level that the ability of the force to provide an effective policing service to the public has been put at risk. The new chief constable has recognised this; she is grasping the issue, taking steps to increase officer numbers and to reorganise the force so it is better placed to meet the policing challenges in Bedfordshire. This all takes time; the changes have yet to take effect.

Currently, HMIC has serious concerns about the force's ability to reduce crime, investigate offending and provide an effective service to victims.

The lack of effective systems and the right number of appropriately trained police officers and staff in important areas of policing have resulted in fundamental weaknesses in the way the force responds to victims of crime, especially those who are the most vulnerable. Force priorities are not clearly understood by frontline officers. Priorities have a tendency to change when new threats or areas of risk are identified, only compounding the problem. The force's ability to do preventive work in neighbourhoods is limited; officers and staff are often too stretched to do so – their time is spent reacting to emergencies.

HMIC has had consistent and serious concerns about the service to victims of domestic abuse, and has returned to the force to assess progress a number of times over the last year. The most recent inspection in October 2014 identified very early signs of an improved approach, but these changes need to translate rapidly into an improved service to victims.

Despite all of this, there are a number of positives. The force works well with partners, such as local councils, to identify and support victims of anti-social behaviour. Its strong partnership working also enables the force to tackle those offenders that cause the most crime and disruption to communities well. Generally the force is effective in preventing crimes that cause high levels of harm such as gang and gun-related crime, prostitution and other organised criminality. There has been an improvement in victim satisfaction over the last year and the force has invested in a new victim focused approach known as CARE, which sets clear expectations on how staff should engage with victims.

HMIC will re-visit Bedfordshire Police by April 2015 to undertake a full diagnostic inspection. This will draw on external expertise, with the aim of identifying any further measures to assist the senior leadership of Bedfordshire Police to improve the service it provides to the public.

This year, HMIC undertook an inspection into the crime data integrity of all 43 police forces, to determine the extent to which police-recorded crime information can be trusted at a national level. HMIC has concerns about Bedfordshire Police's approach to crime recording, which is not as accurate as it should be. Individual force reports are available at

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

Requires improvement

Bedfordshire Police faces some complex policing challenges, with unusually high levels of serious threats and criminality that are not normally dealt with by a force of its size.

There are serious weaknesses in the service Bedfordshire Police provides to its public. Crime rates have fallen at a slower rate in Bedfordshire Police than across England and Wales over the past four years.

Victims are less satisfied with the police service in Bedfordshire than across England and Wales as a whole, although satisfaction levels have improved in the last 12 months..

How effective is the force at investigating offending?

Requires improvement

There are fundamental weaknesses in the way the force identifies risks to victims, from the moment the victim first contacts the police. The force does not identify if a victim of crime is vulnerable, or at especially high risk from harm consistently. It is therefore unable to provide the additional support that a victim may need to keep them safe.

There are serious weaknesses in the force's approach to managing crime investigations. Uniformed officers have not been properly trained; investigations are not consistently well planned; opportunities to gather the best evidence are missed and supervision is ineffective. The force recognises this and has invested in training for officers over the last 12 months.

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

Good

People living in the Bedfordshire Police force area are less likely to suffer from anti-social behaviour than in England and Wales as a whole. There has been a large reduction in the number of anti-social behaviour incidents in the last year.

Staff who take calls about anti-social behaviour have information on previous incidents and are able to identify if the victim is vulnerable. However, there can be unacceptable delays in neighbourhood teams taking action.

PCSOs deal with anti-social behaviour. They have excellent local knowledge and strong commitment to improving the service to victims. However, they have a heavy workload and sometimes struggle to provide the level of support that a victim needs.

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

Requires improvement

Bedfordshire Police's priorities are not clearly understood by the workforce and are prone to frequent change as new threats and risks emerge. This lack of clarity means that it is difficult to develop sustainable plans to cut crime.

Partnership working is a real strength in Bedfordshire and there are excellent examples such as how the most prolific offenders are managed to reduce crime, as is the force's work with volunteers.

Over the last year HMIC has had consistent concerns about the service to victims of domestic abuse, and has returned to the force to assess progress a number of times. The most recent inspection in October 2014 identified very early signs of an improved approach, but these changes need to rapidly translate into an improved service to victims.

How effective is the force at investigating offending?

Requires improvement

The majority of investigations are managed by units that are understaffed and not all officers have the necessary skills. This severely limits the quality of both the investigation and the support to the victim.

The force works well with partners to prevent re-offending.

It is able to identify organised criminal groups operating in the area but there is room for improvement in ensuring that local policing units are involved in disrupting their activities.

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

Good

Introduction

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

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

Methodology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

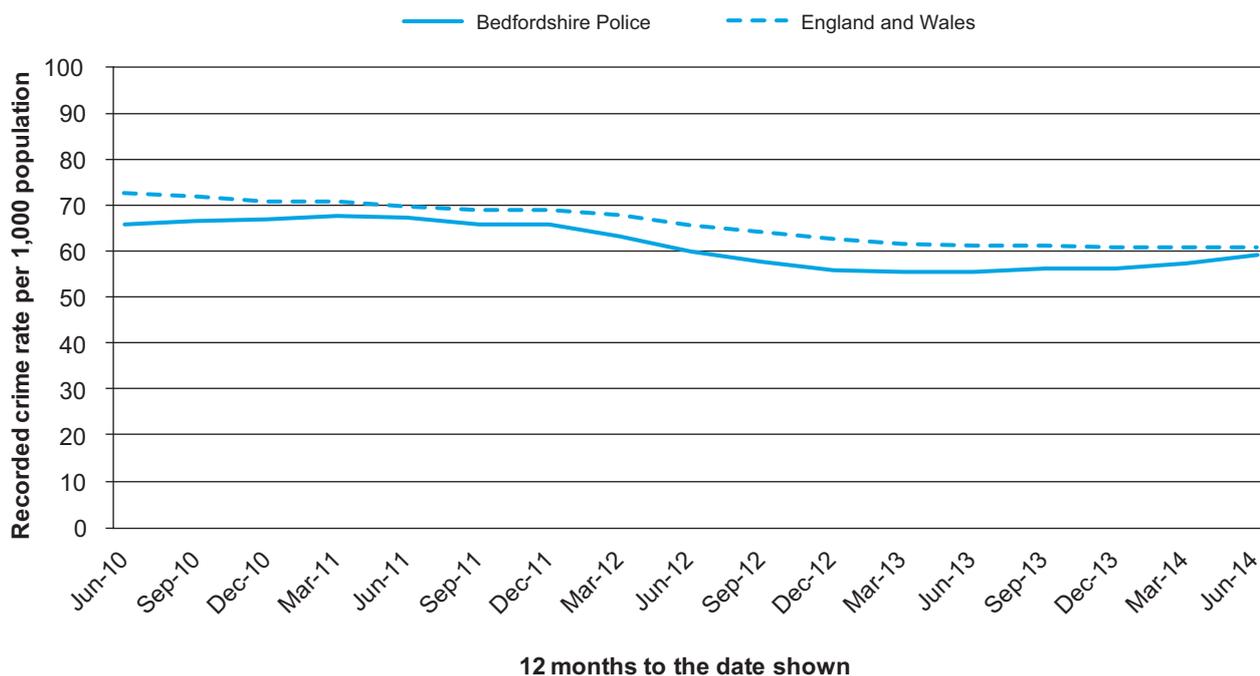
Crime

In 2010 the Home Secretary set a clear priority for the police service to cut crime. Compared with the 12 months to June 2010, recorded crime (excluding fraud) in the 12 months to June 2014 reduced by 10 percent in Bedfordshire, compared with a reduction of 16 percent across all forces in England and Wales.

Over this period, victim-based crime (i.e., crimes where there is a direct victim such as an individual, a group, or an organisation) decreased by 11 percent in Bedfordshire, compared with a reduction of 16 percent across England and Wales.

During the 12 months prior to the end of June 2014, recorded crime (excluding fraud) in Bedfordshire increased by 6 percent, compared with a 1 percent reduction across England and Wales.

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



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

12 months to June 2014	Bedfordshire Police rate (per 1,000 population)	England and Wales total rate (per 1,000 population)
Crime excluding fraud	59.1	60.7
Victim-based crime	53.2	53.9
Sexual offences	1.0	1.2
Violence with injury	6.1	5.9
Burglary in a dwelling*	11.5	8.9
Anti-social behaviour incidents*	31.0	36.8

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

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

Bedfordshire’s detection rate (for crimes excluding fraud) for the 12 months to the end of March 2014 was 24 percent, which was lower than the 26 percent for England and Wales.

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

Meeting the needs of the community

Bedfordshire Police is a small force in terms of its resources; it faces some complex policing challenges with unusually high levels of serious threats and criminality not normally dealt with by a force of its size. Its communities' needs are complex and diverse, ranging from the sparsely populated areas of Bedfordshire affected by rural crime issues to the densely urban area of Luton with similar crime concerns faced by much larger metropolitan forces.

Although Bedfordshire Police has done a considerable amount of work to develop plans for how it will provide policing services in the future, it has not been able to provide a clear set of manageable operational priorities for frontline staff. The force is responding to emerging issues as they arise, but not as part of a planned and prioritised approach. This means that current priorities are prone to change on a frequent basis, taking staff away from their core duties at very short notice to respond to the latest initiative. As a consequence, staff are not clear on what the police priorities are and their ability to plan, and to deliver effective day-to-day policing that responds to local community needs and concerns is reduced by the continual change. HMIC was concerned to hear officers expressing the view that they had no capacity to prevent crime because of the continual demands placed upon them in responding to incidents.

Quality of victim contact

Victim satisfaction in Bedfordshire remains lower than the rate seen across England and Wales as a whole, but it has improved over the last 12 months. Bedfordshire Police recognises the importance of becoming more victim-focused and has developed a new approach, known as CARE, which provides clear guidance to staff on victim care and their roles and responsibilities under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. This has been positive and it is evident that it is being put into practice by frontline staff. The new process ensures victims receive an individual agreement from the officer investigating their case, which sets out their agreed method of contact and the level of service they can expect to receive. Compliance with this agreement is measured by calls to victims by the detective chief inspector in charge of the initiative. Partners spoke positively about the attitude of officers towards victims and HMIC observed committed frontline officers supporting victims well. Victims' personal statements are regularly obtained and officers pay attention to victims' needs, making special arrangements as necessary. For example, to make court appearances less intimidating, victims can be given the option to provide their evidence at court by video link or from behind a screen.

An important measure of the impact of changes to service delivery for the public is how satisfied victims are with the overall service they receive when they seek police assistance. In the 12 months to the end of June 2014, Bedfordshire Police had a victim satisfaction rate of 83.3 percent (\pm 0.2 percent) which is lower than the satisfaction rate for England and Wales of 85.0 percent (\pm 0.2 percent). Its current rate is higher than the 82.3 percent (\pm 0.1 percent) recorded for Bedfordshire Police in the previous year.

Use of police tactics

Bedfordshire Police uses a broad range of tactics that help it to respond to crime concerns. There are a number of preventive operations and schemes in place. Examples of this include the ‘bobby van’ scheme aimed at vulnerable and older people, which provides practical measures to help improve home security, such as window locks and door chains. It also provides advice to prevent bogus callers from committing crime. Other examples include: Operation Boson, which is focused on investigating and reducing crimes relating to guns and gangs in the Luton area; Operation Peak, which focuses on the prevention of burglaries in the winter months; and Operation Bromley, which focuses on crimes associated with defrauding the elderly.

The force is changing its approach to dealing with offenders who may themselves be vulnerable, for example, working with partners to divert women away from street prostitution, as well as raising awareness of the potential for coercion, abuse or sexual exploitation of this group.

While this culture of forming initiatives and operations to deal with specific crime issues can have positive outcomes, it promotes a reactive approach to problems and takes resources away from local police work. This means that the force may not be as effective at longer-term crime prevention because it is not able to invest enough sustained staff time into core preventive policing. A number of staff expressed concern at the lack of proactive policing and patrolling being undertaken.

The force uses crime data and police intelligence to analyse crime patterns and identify hotspots. This analysis is considered at daily meetings to understand local threats and risks. However, HMIC found that these meetings are ineffective at allocating resources or tackling vulnerability. While so-called priority crimes and potentially vulnerable victims are discussed, because of other pressing demands, there is limited allocation of police officers’ time to prevention activity and victim care. These issues are more usually delegated to police and community support officers (PCSOs), with few checks on their ability or training to carry out these tasks.

HMIC found evidence during the inspection of the increased knowledge and use of police powers to deal with forced marriage and domestic abuse. Each local police area has an

officer who is the nominated contact point for so-called honour-based violence, who works with partners and the community to deal with such issues.

Partnership working and information sharing

Partnership working is a particular strength for the force. Partners spoke positively about both their relationships with the force and the impact that this joint working was having. There was clear evidence of effective preventive work through the integrated offender management (IOM) arrangements with partners. The force is in the process of developing a force-wide multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) which will enable the police to work closely with partners to share information and quickly provide an effective joined-up response to protect and support victims of domestic abuse and their children. There is good partnership working at a more tactical level, with effective examples of joint working and information sharing to prevent and reduce crime. For example, staff in police custody centres are referring detainees directly to drugs workers to provide them with support to prevent re-offending.

The force has an impressive volunteer strategy, which includes excellent working with various watch schemes including neighbourhood watch, street watch and community speed watch. Operation Vision involves neighbourhood watch volunteers patrolling with neighbourhood policing teams, and is effective in building relationships with communities, building the knowledge of volunteer staff and contributing to reducing and preventing crime.

Domestic abuse

In March 2014 HMIC found serious failings in the way Bedfordshire Police responds to victims of domestic abuse.

Since that inspection HMIC has returned to the force to assess progress a number of times. This crime inspection provided HMIC with a further opportunity to test whether the force is improving its response to domestic abuse. While recognising that the force was in the process of reorganising its public protection department (and allocating more staff to this important area) HMIC remained concerned by what we found. The force had made only limited progress.

In October 2014, HMIC undertook a further, more in-depth domestic abuse inspection. This time we found that the force is beginning to move in the right direction.

There are very early signs of an improved approach. There is now a new domestic abuse investigation unit in place, which is responsible for investigating crimes, safeguarding victims and ensuring offenders are brought swiftly to justice. Staffing numbers in the unit have increased and there are now domestic abuse advisors in the force control room to help

ensure victims get the right police response from the outset. These organisational changes now need to translate rapidly into an improved service to victims.

In response to HMIC's original domestic abuse inspection all forces were required to produce and publish an action plan setting out the steps they were taking to improve the services to victims of domestic abuse. The plan should demonstrate that HMIC recommendations are being addressed and also explain how:

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

HMIC has made an initial consideration of the action plan submitted by Bedfordshire Police. The force has provided a comprehensive action plan outlining activity which is in line with the agreed national priorities. There is evidence of activity in those areas requiring development. Although the action plan does not make direct reference to the HMIC recommendations for the force, there is evidence that the force has identified action designed to meet the recommendations for improvement.

Recommendations

Immediately, the force should:

- take steps to communicate the force priorities to staff, and implement measures to ensure operational activities reflect these priorities.

Summary

Requires improvement

- Bedfordshire Police faces some complex policing challenges, with unusually high levels of serious threats and criminality that are not normally dealt with by a force of its size.
- There are serious weaknesses in the service Bedfordshire Police provides to its public. Crime rates have fallen at a slower rate in Bedfordshire Police than across England and Wales over the past four years.
- Victims are less satisfied with the police service in Bedfordshire than across England and Wales as a whole although satisfaction levels have improved in the last 12 months.
- Bedfordshire Police's priorities are not clearly understood by the workforce and are prone to frequent change as new threats and risks emerge. This lack of clarity means that it is difficult to develop sustainable plans to cut crime.
- Partnership working is a real strength in Bedfordshire and there are excellent examples such as how the most prolific offenders are managed to reduce crime, as is the force's work with volunteers.
- Over the last year HMIC has had consistent concerns about the service to victims of domestic abuse, and has returned to the force to assess progress a number of times. The most recent inspection in October 2014 identified very early signs of an improved approach, but these changes need to rapidly translate into an improved service to victims.

How effective is the force at investigating offending?

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

Vulnerability, risk and victims

It is of the utmost importance that the police take steps to understand and assess the risks faced by a victim of crime at the earliest opportunity so that they can respond accordingly. HMIC found fundamental weaknesses with the way the force identifies and tackles risk. The number of calls received, the systems used within the force control room (FCR) and staff shortages – as a result of FCR staff being taken off to work on other activities – mean that a significant number of vulnerable victims are not identified at the earliest opportunity. This is aggravated by the relatively high number of calls, both emergency and non-emergency, that the force fails to answer.

The force does not consistently identify that a caller may be already known to the police as a vulnerable victim of crime, and HMIC is concerned that the electronic marker for identifying repeat victims is not consistently used. To get a full picture of the previous history, the staff dealing with calls have to check numerous different systems, which is time consuming and may not provide reliable results. This means that the decision about the speed and type of police attendance needed may be made without knowing the full police history. Officers sent to attend the incident may not have the full picture when they arrive to investigate. This means that the force cannot be confident that victims are consistently getting the appropriate police response to meet their needs.

While the CARE process does demonstrate the force's intention to support victims of crime better, in practice there is still a lack of awareness and understanding of victims' needs among some frontline officers. This is particularly concerning where victims may be vulnerable in some way and need an enhanced level of service from the police and partner agencies. HMIC found that it is unclear what additional support is available for such victims. We found examples from our review of investigation files where, despite there being clear vulnerability aspects identified by staff, it was unclear what measures had been put in place to safeguard the victim, apart from arresting an offender. There is an apparent lack of wider safeguarding measures and partners complained of inappropriate case referrals from the police. Staff within the domestic abuse unit stated that they have a backlog of over a week to provide support for high-risk victims of domestic abuse, and up to three weeks for medium or standard-risk victims. This is unacceptable.

HMIC found a number of examples where inexperienced or untrained staff are expected to manage victim care for complex cases. The service to victims of sexual assault is not of a consistent standard due to the shortage of specialist officers who provide initial support and gather evidence from victims of sexual assault. For example, a PCSO was asked to support a rape victim, with limited checks as to whether the officer had the skills to do so.

Investigation

There are weaknesses in the force's approach to managing investigations of crime. The daily briefing meetings through which work is issued to local officers are ineffective. They fail to manage the process of allocating appropriate resources to crimes and do not provide proper direction and guidance on the tactics to be used. For example, we heard a discussion regarding an increase in house burglaries in one area which did not include any direction about how this would be investigated or by whom, no discussion about the investigative opportunities available (such as research into stolen jewellery), and no allocation of responsibility for intelligence gathering or research to try to identify the offenders.

We found that investigations lack rigour and are of an inconsistent quality. There is a lack of investigation planning within crime reports and limited evidence of effective supervision of crime investigation. This means that evidential opportunities to detect the crime may be missed, the offenders may not be brought to justice and the victims do not get the service they deserve from the police.

HMIC found that initial investigation tends to focus on progressing an enquiry to the point where an arrest can be made, at which time the responsibility for the enquiry is passed to the prisoner handling unit (PHU). The force has a robust process for focusing on people who are wanted for offences.

Evidential arrest files passed to the PHU are often not completed to a satisfactory standard, and not all reasonable lines of enquiry are followed up prior to any arrest. This is especially true of incidents where suspected persons are arrested at the scene of a crime. This places an additional burden on the PHU which has responsibility for contact with victims and progressing investigations to a standard where they are ready for a court hearing. In addition, the focus on arresting people gives no consideration to the other resourcing issues facing the force, in particular, the staff shortages within the PHU and the limited accommodation within custody centres. HMIC was given examples of people being released on bail to return to a police station at an agreed later date, without any investigation or interview, due to a shortage of staff within the PHU. This practice is inefficient, ineffective and not in the interests of the victim or the offender.

The majority of investigative work, including lengthy and complex investigations, is dealt with by staff within prisoner handling units. These units are understaffed, with relatively inexperienced (but very committed) individuals managing difficult cases concerning vulnerable victims. There is a limited amount of effective supervision. The unit suffers from significant losses of staff to other duties and they have extremely high caseloads. The practice of officers handing over responsibility for all aspects of the case to the PHU on arrest creates a “conveyor belt” of work for this team, which makes it very difficult for them to take a victim-centred approach. This is detrimental both to the investigation and to continuing victim care. There is a lack of support from specialist units.

PCSOs also undertake some investigative tasks which are outside their remit, for which they have not received training and which take them away from their primary duties working within communities.

Tackling repeat and prolific offenders

The integrated offender management¹ (IOM) programme is a strength for the force. The force has good partnership arrangements in place for managing the most prolific offenders who pose a risk to the public. The force recognises that preventing re-offending requires a joined-up approach from all partners locally. It operates an IOM unit at two different locations across the force area which brings together the police and local authorities and also involves the probation service, the prison service, the Department for Work and Pensions, the health service and housing providers. The IOM structure is well managed with very good partnership working, interaction and commitment. This process has been independently evaluated and has clearly contributed to a reduction in offending, particularly in relation to house burglary. The identification and management of offenders in co-operation with partners, including the courts, is a main factor in the success of this programme. The force has plans to extend the IOM approach into other areas and to use it to identify vulnerability in offenders.

According to the force’s definition², Bedfordshire Police had 117 prolific offenders as of 31 July 2014. As of 31 July 2014, the force had 253 offenders under the IOM programme.

1 Decisions as to who is included on the integrated offender management scheme are made with partners (police, probation, YOS, prison service, local authority) at a monthly selection panel meeting. Offenders are selected, deselected and can have a status change.

2 Bedfordshire Police defines a prolific offender as: “priority and prolific offenders are the ‘top tier’ of offenders (those representing the top 5% of repeat offenders) who commit crime.”

The force has an effective way to identify and prioritise dealing with organised crime groups (OCGs); the force accepts that it cannot tackle them all at any one time and needs to prioritise those presenting greatest risk of harm to communities. We found that the quality of recorded plans to tackle OCGs is inconsistent and staff are unclear as to who has responsibility to review them. There is some evidence of positive work and activity to disrupt the activities of OCGs in relation to gun-related crime in Luton. The force is attempting to move towards a model where local policing teams take on some responsibility for dealing with lower risk OCGs. However, this process is not fully operational. Frontline officers have poor awareness of the OCGs based in their local areas. Intelligence is not always shared with frontline officers and police and community support officers and their involvement is inconsistent.

Learning from experience

Professional development in the training of detective officers has been allowed to lapse, but there is evidence that the force is taking steps to rectify this. It has introduced professionalising investigation programme (PIP) training and development of detectives and frontline detectives were positive about the changes. There is also evidence of continuing professional development for detectives in the form of specific crime seminars that had been introduced. However, until recently there has been little investigative training for uniformed officers, or supervisors. This presents a major challenge for the force as it tries to improve the quality of investigations.

Part of its response is the, “Streetwise Max”, training programme introduced recently by the force. This has been very well received and is reported as significantly improving the skills levels and awareness of officers who have completed it. Streetwise Max uses case studies to promote officers’ understanding of their powers to take positive action at an early stage. The force currently has no plans to extend this training to PCSOs.

The force has gaps in its ability to deal with new and emerging crime types, such as cyber-crime. It has provided cyber-crime prevention training to the force crime prevention officers and the schools and young people development officers.

Recommendations

Immediately Bedfordshire Police should:

- review the resourcing, training and operation of the force control room in relation to its ability to answer emergency and non-emergency calls for service and assessing vulnerability at first point of contact. By the end of December 2014 the force should have commenced implementation of a plan to improve services in relation to answering and assessing calls.

Within three months Bedfordshire Police should:

- develop and commence the implementation of an action plan to improve the quality of victim service and contact, especially in relation to support for vulnerable victims, which will ensure that:
 - (a) investigating officers and police staff are aware of the standards required within the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and have the professional skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties;
 - (b) supervisors know what is expected of them in driving up standards;
 - (c) there is appropriate monitoring and oversight of quality and timeliness of victim service and contact; and
 - (d) feedback from victims is used to improve the service provided.
- develop and commence the implementation of an action plan to improve the quality of investigations which will ensure that:
 - (a) investigating officers and police staff are aware of the standard required and have the professional skills and expertise to fulfil their duties;
 - (b) supervisors know what is expected of them in driving up standards;
 - (c) the right resources are targeted in the right areas; and
 - (d) there is appropriate monitoring and oversight of investigative quality and timeliness.
- ensure that relevant staff, particularly those in frontline roles, have clarity over their role, responsibility and tasks they need to perform in relation to the tackling of organised crime groups.
- review the role that PCSOs perform in relation to the investigation of crime and by March 2015 provide guidance for their continued use and, if required, introduce appropriate training.

Summary

Requires improvement

- There are fundamental weaknesses in the way the force identifies risks to victims, from the moment the victim first contacts the police. The force does not identify if a victim of crime is vulnerable, or at especially high risk from harm consistently. It is therefore unable to provide the additional support that a victim may need to keep them safe. The force recognises this and has invested in training for officers over the last 12 months.
- There are serious weaknesses in the force's approach to managing crime investigations. Uniformed officers have not been properly trained; investigations are not consistently well planned; opportunities to gather the best evidence are missed and supervision is ineffective.
- The majority of investigations are managed by units that are understaffed and not all officer have the necessary skills. This severely limits the quality of both the investigation and the support to the victim.
- The force works well with partners to prevent re-offending.
- It is able to identify organised criminal groups operating in the area but there is room for improvement in ensuring that local policing units are involved in disrupting their activities.

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

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

Community contact and victim care

The force recognises the need to identify previous victims of anti-social behaviour and those who may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of anti-social behaviour. There are systems in place to ensure that staff who take calls about crime or anti-social behaviour can easily access victim records to check if the caller is known to the police as a repeat or vulnerable victim. However, the practice of referring most anti-social behaviour incidents through to the neighbourhood teams to deal with leads to unacceptable delays in police action.

There is multi-agency support for victims of anti-social behaviour and it is clear that neighbourhood teams are responsible for anti-social behaviour. Local teams use an IT system known as *SafetyNet* to develop plans for problem solving and record their activities in anti-social behaviour cases; the system enables them to record and manage the risks to victims effectively. We found that the plans on SafetyNet are comprehensive and appropriate to managing the issues, although there is little evidence that the force is reviewing or evaluating the effectiveness of the approach taken. HMIC understands the force has plans to ensure that the extensive information and activity recorded on safety net can, in the future, be accessed or used by call-takers in the control room when making decisions about the police response to a caller.

The force uses the data from SafetyNet to identify its top ten most vulnerable victims of anti-social behaviour in each area and to ensure that each case is allocated to a PCSO with specific responsibility to provide an enhanced service to support the victim. However, although there is clarity that PCSOs are responsible, it is of concern that they may not have the time to do so because of workload, or they may not have been properly trained, and hence lack the skills and knowledge to provide the service that victims need.

When a call about an anti-social behaviour incident into the control room is assessed as not requiring an immediate police response, it is referred to the neighbourhood policing teams for review by a sergeant, who then decides on the most appropriate response. This referral process can lead to delays in incidents being reviewed by the neighbourhood sergeant, particularly over a weekend when fewer resources are available. An example was given of one officer who had 28 incidents to review after a weekend off. It is unclear why such incidents could not have been dealt with earlier. This delay also means that there is a significant risk that victims may not get the service they need if the initial assessment in the control room missed the fact that the victim was vulnerable.

PCSOs are the mainstay of neighbourhood policing in Bedfordshire. The neighbourhood teams are almost exclusively staffed by PCSOs. They generally demonstrate a comprehensive understanding the needs of the local community. PCSOs have good knowledge of the areas they patrol, although the reductions in PCSO numbers mean that they now cover larger areas, and as a result their local knowledge is becoming more diluted. PCSOs are increasingly undertaking disruption, investigation and enforcement roles, for which they are not adequately skilled or trained. Workload pressures elsewhere limit the support that police officers are able to provide to PCSOs. The combination of these factors means HMIC has significant concerns that the level and quality of service provided by neighbourhood policing is declining and is not as effective as it should be.

Partnership working

Partnership working is effective and partners are positive about the arrangements in place. Information is shared with partners using SafetyNet and other IT platforms to enable a multi-agency approach to solve problems. For example, officers patrol jointly with local authority environmental protection officers to deal with noise nuisance at the earliest opportunity, with the aim of preventing an escalation of anti-social behaviour problems.

Improving services to the public

People living in the Bedfordshire Police force area are less likely to suffer from anti-social behaviour than in England and Wales as a whole, as their rates are lower than the figure for England and Wales and there has been a relatively large reduction in the number of anti-social behaviour incidents in the last year. In the 12 months to March 2014, Bedfordshire Police recorded 19,628 incidents of anti-social behaviour. This is a reduction of 30 percent against the previous 12 months.

Effective partnership and community links have assisted the force in making constructive efforts to engage with hard-to-reach groups. The force has sought to increase its capacity through recruiting volunteers from the community to support local policing through an impressive volunteer strategy. This has led to effective working with various watch schemes; for example, neighbourhood watch, street watch and community speed watch. Operation Vision involves community representatives patrolling with PCSOs in anti-social behaviour hotspot areas and has been positively received and found to be effective in building relationships, increasing community confidence and assisting in targeting the causes of anti-social behaviour.

Recommendations

Immediately the force should:

- Ensure that the timeliness of allocating incidents of anti-social behaviour to neighbourhood staff for attendance improves.

Within six months the force should:

- As part of its broader change programme, review neighbourhood policing to assess whether it has the appropriate number of staff with the correct skills to provide an effective neighbourhood policing service. It should then introduce any changes immediately to ensure that the public are effectively served.
- Ensure that there are methods in place to:
 - (a) systematically review and evaluate the benefits from both current tactics and new crime fighting and anti-social behaviour initiatives;
 - (b) systematically capture learning and good practice in crime prevention and local problem solving;
 - (c) share learning and good practice across the force.

Summary

Good

- People living in the Bedfordshire Police force area are less likely to suffer from anti-social behaviour than in England and Wales as a whole. There has been a large reduction in the number of anti-social behaviour incidents in the last year.
- Staff who take calls about anti-social behaviour have information on previous incidents and are able to identify if the victim is vulnerable. However, there can be unacceptable delays in neighbourhood teams taking action.
- PCSOs deal with anti-social behaviour. They have excellent local knowledge and strong commitment to improving the service to victims. However, they have a heavy workload and sometimes struggle to provide the level of support that a victim needs.

What each judgment means

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

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

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

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