



Tuesday 17th May 2022

Dear HMICFRS

I acknowledge that the Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published the PEEL report into the performance of Bedfordshire Police on the 13 April 2022.

The report was published at 00:01 hours on 13 April 2022. The report captures the continuous assessment activity and final evidence collection period of the PEEL programme and does not take account of any developments or action carried out since the final evidence collection period.

I am delighted on the outcome of receiving ‘outstanding’ for managing offenders and believe the report is a fair assessment. I am pleased that the outcomes matches the Force’s own assessment, indicating the level of maturity of the Force.

The Assessment

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

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

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HM Inspector's observations

Bedfordshire Police continues to improve and I congratulate the force on its performance in keeping people safe and reducing crime. But it does need to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service.

These are the findings I consider most important from our assessments of the force over the last year. The force's approach to integrated offender management has had impressive results. I congratulate the force on being the first to achieve an outstanding grading for the way it manages offenders and suspects.

Its approach to integrated offender management is highly effective.

It has demonstrably reduced reoffending for serious offences like burglary and those involving domestic abuse. The force works well with other organisations to achieve these reductions. Together, the organisations involved in the approach have an in-depth understanding of the financial benefits of reducing reoffending in Bedfordshire.

High-risk child abuse investigations are benefiting from effective investment in technology

The force's digital triage vans reduce the need for officers to seize multiple electronic devices from suspects and have dramatically reduced long-standing delays in digital forensics. The force's commitment to invest in this technology, using financial support from the Bedfordshire police and crime commissioner, is impressive. We have identified this as innovative practice so other forces can learn from it.

The force's approach to stop and search is open and effective

I am pleased to see that the force is still performing well in relation to stop and search. Its external scrutiny panel is important in making sure officers act with integrity and maintain public confidence. The panel consists of local residents. It provides robust scrutiny of stop and search encounters, reviewing footage from officers' body-worn video and giving feedback on this. The force is very open to this feedback and monitors trends so it can find ways to improve. These arrangements

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have again led to the force having impressive results in our stop and search audit. I congratulate the force on this achievement.

A new community policing model is helping to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour

The force has geographically reorganised its community policing model since our last inspection. It is now aligned with local authority area boundaries and is helping to prevent a range of crimes and anti-social behaviour throughout the county. I am encouraged to see that because the force has a properly resourced response team, community policing officers aren't now routinely being removed from problem-solving work for other tasks.

The force contact centre is not able to provide a consistently effective service to the public

The public isn't always well served by the force contact centre (FCC). Staff shortages mean that emergency calls are prioritised. This leads to frequent and sometimes lengthy delays in handling non-emergency calls. FCC staff work in a stressful environment. They don't always identify vulnerable callers or give advice on preventing crime or preserving scenes when this would help. The working arrangements within the FCC don't allow time for regular staff training and important updates. Indeed, there is a reliance on staff receiving training on days off. This isn't sustainable, especially as the force has identified the FCC as a department with higher staff welfare risks. I am encouraged that the force recognises these problems and is currently recruiting experienced staff into the FCC.

Investigations still lack appropriate oversight

The force is still not supervising investigations enough, to make sure their quality is consistently high and that their outcomes comply with national crime recording standards. In our last inspection of the force, we noted a lack of supervision of investigations and identified this as an area for improvement (AFI). I recognise that the force has recently made efforts to improve the quality of its investigations through better supervision. It is important that the force now prioritises this. It has a lack of detectives and an increasingly inexperienced workforce which needs support and guidance.

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Tri-force collaboration still isn't providing a consistently effective occupational health service

The force's long-standing collaboration with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire constabularies is still not providing an effective occupational health service. The force's approach to protecting the health and wellbeing of its staff is effective. But too often when its staff need help and support from occupational health professionals, they face delays. This risks undermining the high levels of confidence the staff have in the force. It also leads to inefficiency as the delays could mean some staff aren't used on the front line.

Moving Forward

The OPCC notes the following comments made by HMICFRS:

Providing a service to victims of crime

- The force allocates crimes to appropriate staff and victims are promptly informed if a crime is not going to be investigated further.
- The force doesn't always carry out effective or timely investigations.
- The force doesn't always follow national guidelines and rules when finalising reports of crime.

Engaging with and treating the public with fairness and respect - GOOD

- The force engages with all its diverse communities to understand and respond to what matters to them
- The force makes sure its workforce understands unfair behaviour
- The overwhelming majority of stop and searches are carried out on reasonable grounds
- The force understands and improves the way it uses stop and search powers
- Governance structures support effective stop and search
- The force understands and improves the way it uses force

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour – GOOD

- The force prioritises the prevention of crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability through clear governance structures

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- The force is effective at problem solving and works with other organisations to prevent crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability
- Community policing teams help reduce the harm caused by serious and organised crime
- The force uses community policing officers effectively to manage demand
- Analytical support to community teams has improved
- Community officers sometimes struggle to prioritise their workloads

Responding to the public – Requires Improvement

- The force should improve how it responds to non-emergency public calls for service and reduce the abandonment rate and wait times
- The force should make sure that repeat callers, and those that are vulnerable, are routinely identified
- The force should make sure that alternative methods of contact are well publicised, adequately resourced, and subject to performance management, risk assessment, and quality assurance which is consistent with traditional methods of contact.
- The force should make sure that call takers give appropriate advice on the preservation of evidence and crime prevention
- Call handlers are not using THRIVE to identify risk
- Working hours in the control room don't yet achieve the right balance between flexibility and needs
- The force is unable to train its staff to make its initial contact with the public more professional
- The force has identified wellbeing risks in the FCC and begun to address them
- The force is improving its response to incidents so it can more effectively protect victims and secure evidence

Investigating crime – Requires Improvement

- The force should make sure investigation plans are created where applicable, with supervisor oversight. This is to make sure that all appropriate investigative opportunities are pursued in a timely way.
- The force needs to put in place appropriate governance and monitoring processes to make sure that the use of outcomes is appropriate and complies

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with force and national policies. The force should make sure that where required, victims' views are recorded

- The force needs to make sure it complies with the Victims' Code of Practice
- Digital triage vans attend scenes to assess and secure digital evidence in high-risk investigations – Innovative practice
- Workloads are still high in some investigation teams and there is a shortage of detectives
- The force is taking steps to improve the quality and timeliness of its investigations

Protecting vulnerable people – Adequate

- The force should make sure its multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) is resourced effectively so that delays can be avoided in the assessment of child and adult cases
- The force should make sure that vulnerable people are routinely identified by the force contact centre
- The force has a clear governance and performance reporting structure for vulnerability
- Recent emphasis on using domestic abuse powers will protect more vulnerable people
- The force has strong partnerships with other organisations, which help it protect vulnerable people

Managing offenders and suspects – Outstanding

- The force works with partners to assess the risk presented by patients with mental health conditions due to be released from hospitals – Innovative Practice
- Integrated offender management is reducing offending and its cost to society
- Evidence demonstrates that the force's approach to managing offenders is effective
- Online child abuse investigations are timely and thorough
- Online child abuse investigations are supported by an impressive digital forensic capability
- The force is effective at managing the risk posed by the most dangerous offenders

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- The force uses technology effectively to support its management of registered sex offenders
- There is a clear policy for addressing outstanding suspects and the force prioritises domestic abuse suspects

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce – Good

- The force should close skills gaps by using up-to-date and accurate information about the diverse skills its workforce has. This information should inform the effective matching of people to posts
- The force prioritises the wellbeing of its workforce
- The force has effectively introduced remote and flexible working contracts
- Senior leaders in the force promote ethical behaviour
- The force understands the need to improve its diversity and has an effective plan in place to do this
- The force is building its workforce for the future

Strategic planning, organisational management and value for money – Good

- The force should review its S23 agreement on the provision of collaborated occupational health to make sure it is delivering what is agreed and that staff throughout the three forces are supported by an effective occupational health unit
- The force's workforce development unit is bridging the gap left by shared human resources
- The force has an effective strategic planning framework to make sure it tackles issues that are important locally and nationally
- The force manages its current demand well
- The force makes sure it has the capacity to meet and manage current demands efficiently
- The force makes the best use of the money it has available and its plans are both ambitious and sustainable
- The force can demonstrate it is continuing to achieve efficiency savings and improve productivity

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I am thrilled that Bedfordshire Police have been rated 'outstanding' for their management of offenders. It also shows a 91% reduction in burglars re-offending.

Reducing re-offending forms an integral part of my Police and Crime Plan. I have committed to funding £155,000 into 'adult offender management' as part of my Grant Fund for 2022/23 of which You Turn Futures are part of, so I look forward to continuing to invest in this area.

Alongside the 'Outstanding' grade for **Managing offenders**, Bedfordshire Police received 'Good' ratings in four areas:

- ***Engaging with and treating the public with respect***
- ***Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour***
- ***Building supporting and protecting the workforce***
- ***Strategic planning, organisational management and value for money***

It was graded 'adequate' for **Protecting vulnerable people** and 'requires improvement' in both **Responding to the public** and **Investigating crime**.

The inspection praised the force across a range of areas including work on digital engagement and ensuring ethical use of stop and search and use of force powers.

The work to tackle cyber crime including the innovative use of four digital vans to assess and secure evidence in high-risk investigations was also highlighted as good practice.

Areas for improvement included call handling in the Force Contact Centre and oversight of investigations to better protect victims including the use of orders such as Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) – with only 14 issued during 2020/21.

The fact the areas for improvement that the inspectorate has identified came as no surprise to the force executive says to me that the leadership of the force knows where more attention and investment needs to be made.

Feedback from residents given to me about the time taken to answer some 999 and 101 calls made it very clear more needs to be done. Call handling and the oversight of investigations were already highlighted to me as areas for concern by the Chief Constable, but investment was needed to deliver sustainable improvements. And that is where some of the increase in this year's council tax precept is going, straight into the areas that need to be improved.

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Into better technology and more call handlers in the force control room, twenty more detectives into our Emerald team dedicated to the investigation of domestic abuse and serious sexual offences, and almost doubling the size of our rural crime team.

Without a fair police funding formula for Bedfordshire there will always be areas that don't have the investment they need and a constant juggle of where to move resources to. I continue to lobby for the review of the funding formula to ensure that Bedfordshire receives what it needs based on the reality within our county boundaries, not on its historic status as a shire county.

I will continue to hold the Chief to account for the delivery of the improvements that need to be made. I want local people to be able to see and feel that the force is responding to the need to grow and develop across all parts of policing to tackle the increasing demand and changes in crime and criminality in Bedfordshire.

The OPCC will be working alongside Bedfordshire Police to ensure that the findings and recommendations are worked through and actioned. The PCC will be requesting updates through the Dealing and Beating Crime Board.

I acknowledge the success of the Force, I also note the recommendations offered by the Inspectorate and as detailed within this letter, will monitor them appropriately.

Yours Sincerely

Festus Akinbusoye
Police and Crime Commissioner

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