

# **PEEL 2023–25**

## **Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy**

An inspection of Thames Valley Police

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# Overall summary

## Our judgments

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

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

We also inspected how effective a service Thames Valley Police gives to victims of crime. We don't make a graded judgment in this overall 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 am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Thames Valley Police in keeping people safe, reducing crime and providing victims with an effective service. But there are areas in which the force needs to improve.

Thames Valley is an area of high employment and low deprivation. The force's officers understand the importance of appropriate behaviours and demonstrate effective communication with the public. The force is involving community members in the scrutiny of how it uses police powers.

It is making good use of stop and search as a policing tactic and finds the object searched for in a higher proportion of cases than any other force in England and Wales. However, it needs to make sure that it records the grounds for search more consistently.

The force has nine multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH) due to the size of the force area. I am concerned about some of the processes in its MASHs. It needs to make sure it has effective and consistent processes in place to protect vulnerable victims and share information promptly with other safeguarding agencies. In view of these findings, I have been in regular contact with the chief constable, as I do not underestimate how much improvement is needed. I am pleased that there have been improvements since our inspection, but these need to be sustained and accepted by everyone.

Since our last inspection, the force has made a significant effort to review and improve its investigative standards, but it has more to do. I considered whether the delays

caused by the new assessment and investigation units (AIUs) required me to issue a cause for concern. But I am reassured that measures will be taken to meet my recommendation to achieve appropriate outcomes for victims. We will revisit the force to make sure that the necessary improvements have been made. In particular, the force needs to make sure that crimes allocated to desk-based investigators are dealt with promptly and potential lines of enquiry that could identify offenders are followed up.

We found that the force's plans aren't always supported by effective processes. It needs to make sure that it is effective in monitoring performance at all levels of the organisation.

The force should also improve the number of non-emergency calls that it answers promptly. The time taken to answer [101](#) calls has been increasing, and the abandonment rate is too high. The force also needs to improve the time it takes to attend urgent calls.

The force had a change in leadership in the six months leading up to our inspection, with the appointment of a new chief officer team, although the current chief was the deputy chief constable before promotion. The new leadership team has a clear purpose that it has communicated well, which focuses on building trust, serving victims, fighting crime and valuing the workforce.

I am pleased with the way the team has responded to my concerns, and I will be monitoring progress closely.



**Roy Wilsher**

HM Inspector of Constabulary

## Leadership

Using the [College of Policing leadership expectations](#) 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 in Thames Valley Police is newly formed. The recently appointed chief constable, who was previously the deputy chief constable, has established a set of guiding principles for the force. The new chief officer team has communicated this well through a series of briefings. These included making all officers and staff aware of the operational changes that will be taking place following a force review.

The force is committed to supporting the well-being of its workforce. It has also improved how it listens to its workforce. It surveys all officers and staff on a rolling programme to identify the issues that matter to them. This feedback influences its well-being offer and leadership training.

The force is innovative in the use of technology to improve service delivery and make savings. It makes extensive use of robotic process automation. However, there were problems in the way it used this in one specialist area. Delays in submitting risk assessments about vulnerable people interfered with the effectiveness of a robotic process in place to quickly identify risks to them. The planned introduction of the new digital citizens portal will relieve pressure on the contact management department.

Senior officers promote and instil an inclusive and supportive force culture, and our survey found that the workforce is generally proud to work for Thames Valley Police.

However, Thames Valley Police needs to improve elements of its governance and performance management framework, as some areas of the organisation are not managed as effectively as they should be. The force has failed to effectively resource some areas of high demand that cause backlogs and excessive workloads. These have an adverse effect on service provision.

The force's senior leaders have challenges to contend with, in particular high levels of demand and recruiting and retaining officers and staff. It is particularly challenging to retain student officers in a competitive job market.

More detail on Thames Valley Police's leadership is included in the main body of the report.

## Reducing crime assessment

The reducing crime assessment sets out what Thames Valley 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 make comparisons over time.

The force has worked hard to improve the quality of investigations. It has provided guidance on expected standards of investigation and access to management information to support effective supervision.

It needs to make sure that it has enough capacity to investigate more frequently reported crime, as we found it was taking too long for cases to be allocated for investigation.

The time the force takes to respond to some urgent calls is too long. Opportunities to gather evidence will diminish the longer it takes to arrive at an incident.

The force must improve the way it processes [vulnerable persons](#) referrals to share information and safeguard victims at the earliest opportunity. This will help it better protect vulnerable people and reduce crime in the future.

The force needs to improve the recording of the grounds for [stop and search](#) to show that police are using this power proportionately and in line with the legislation. However, the object searched for is found in a greater proportion of cases by Thames Valley Police than any other force in England and Wales. The effective use of stop and search helps the force to reduce crime.

The force plans to renew the work of its neighbourhood teams with additional staff. This is welcome, as its ability to tackle local problems is not consistently good across the force. This is despite it having invested in early intervention to prevent and reduce crime at the first opportunity, with a variety of promising crime prevention initiatives in place.

It works well with partner organisations to protect victims of domestic abuse. It has invested additional resources to improve its approach to victims of stalking and harassment. There is more use of prevention orders to protect victims.

More detail on what Thames Valley 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 Thames Valley Police provides to victims. This is from the point of reporting a crime and throughout the investigation.

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

As part of this assessment, we reviewed 99 case files. These included at least 19 that the force had closed with the following outcome:

When action is undertaken by another body or agency. This includes safeguarding the victim and managing the behaviour of the person responsible (outcome 20).

Although this 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

Thames Valley Police needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls. It also needs to reduce the number of non-emergency calls that the caller abandons because it isn't answered. When it does answer a call, it uses a structured process that considers [threat, harm, risk and vulnerability](#). It identifies repeat victims, meaning that it is aware of the victim's circumstances when considering what response it should give. Call handlers are polite and give victims advice on crime prevention and on how to preserve evidence.

## In most cases, the force responds promptly to calls for service

On most occasions, the force responds to calls for service appropriately. However, its response to grade two incidents, which the force has assessed as requiring an urgent, but not immediate, response, isn't good enough. It doesn't always inform victims of delays, meaning that victims' expectations aren't always met. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage from the process.

## **The force carries out effective and timely investigations**

In most cases, the force carried out investigations in a timely way, completing relevant and proportionate lines of enquiry. The force supervised investigations well and regularly updated victims. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when they receive regular updates.

A thorough investigation increases the likelihood of perpetrators being identified and arrested, providing a positive result for the victim. In most cases, victim personal statements were taken, which gives victims the opportunity to describe how that crime has affected their lives.

When victims withdrew support for an investigation, the force considered progressing the case without the victim's support. This can be an important method of safeguarding the victim and preventing further offences from being committed. In most cases, the force recorded whether it had considered using an order designed to protect victims, such as a [Domestic Violence Protection Notice](#) or [Domestic Violence Protection Order](#).

The [Victims' Code](#) requires forces to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage to determine whether victims need additional support. The force usually carried out this assessment and recorded the request for additional support.

## **The force assigns the right outcome type to an investigation, considers victims' wishes and the offender's background, but it doesn't always hold an auditable record of victims' wishes**

The force isn't consistently providing a level of service that makes sure it achieves appropriate outcomes for victims of crime. The force closes crimes with the appropriate outcome type. It records a clear rationale for using a certain outcome, and this is supervised effectively. It seeks victims' views when deciding which outcome type to assign to a closed investigation. However, the force didn't always obtain an auditable record of the victim's wishes when required. The force did inform victims of what outcome code was assigned to the investigation.

# Police powers and treating the public fairly and respectfully

Good

Thames Valley Police is good at using police powers and treating people fairly and respectfully.

## Area for improvement

**The force needs to improve the recording of the grounds for stop and search activity by its officers. It should make sure that people detained for the purpose of a search are told what the object of the search is, and where they can obtain a copy of the search record**

From our review of a sample of 143 stop and search records from the year ending December 2022, we estimate that 78.3 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 6.7 percent) of all stop and searches by the force during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. This is compared with the findings from our previous review of records from 2020, where we found 88.3 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.2 percent) of stop and searches had reasonable grounds recorded.

Of the stop and search records we reviewed for people from ethnic minority backgrounds, 86.2 percent (56 of 65) had reasonable grounds recorded.

We also reviewed a sample of the [body-worn video \(BWV\)](#) footage of stop and searches. While officers were polite and respectful in almost all of the cases we looked at, details about what was being searched for and how to obtain a search record were only given in 38.5 percent (5 of 13) of them.

This may mean that members of the public remain unclear about what is being searched for and how to obtain a record, and this could undermine their confidence that police are carrying out stop and searches fairly.

The force attributes this deterioration to large numbers of inexperienced officers and has adjusted the training on stop and search given to new officers to include more detailed guidance on recording reasonable grounds.

The force plans to incorporate more stop and search scenario-based training in its new annual officer safety training. This provides an opportunity to support improvement in this area.

Each policing area has a stop and search lead who reviews a sample of stop and search forms. This includes viewing associated BWV, which is used by officers in almost all cases.

First line supervisors are also expected to review the BWV associated with their officers' use of stop and search.

The force should make sure that this process is effective in improving the recording of reasonable grounds.

## Promising practice

### **The force is strengthening external scrutiny arrangements for the use of police powers**

There is a network of groups in the force that provide external scrutiny of stop and search and the use of force. Each local policing area has either a local scrutiny panel or a stop and search independent advisory group that scrutinises stop and search and the use of force, including by reviewing [body-worn video](#). These groups report to a force-wide police powers advisory group.

We found that the force takes these meetings seriously and responds to feedback, making changes to its approach, and providing training and guidance where necessary. For instance, guidance on compliant handcuffing has been created after consulting with a member of the group who had been subjected to this tactic.

The force wants to build on these arrangements and is taking stock of all external scrutiny through the creation of an independent scrutiny and oversight board. This will consider current scrutiny structures and desired membership of the various committees, advisory groups and panels. The force has invited people who have experience of encounters with the police to be part of its external scrutiny groups. These include those who have contacted the force to make complaints about how police powers have been used.

The force has funded external consultancy to complete a needs assessment about the range of people who should be part of these groups. The aim is to make sure they are representative of the policing area in terms of protected characteristics and include people who are disproportionately affected by the use of police powers.

## Main findings

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

### **The force has improved its understanding about how its officers use force**

In our [2021 PEEL inspection report](#), we said that the force needed to improve the levels of recording of use of force, so that it can better understand how this affects the public.

Since then, the force has put in place a new oversight and governance structure which looks exclusively at the effect of the use of force on police legitimacy.

Each local policing area (LPA) has a use of force lead with access to data to identify how force is being used. They attend the use of force board, where any disproportionality is discussed.

The use of force lead has identified and analysed several areas where people from ethnic minority groups appear to be disproportionately affected by the use of force. This analysis has included looking at criminal activity trends and viewing BWV footage.

Thames Valley Police recorded 11,751 use of force incidents in the year ending 31 March 2022. This was a 20.8 percent decrease compared with the previous year. Based on the number of arrests, we estimate that Thames Valley Police under-recorded its use of force during that period by at least 31,865 incidents.

The force has employed a dedicated analyst, who is improving the use of data to develop a more mature understanding of the way use of force affects the community. The force isn't sure about the reliability of some of the data and is working to resolve this.

It has raised awareness among officers of when the use of force should be recorded, introduced a new IT platform and implemented processes to support this in a systematic way. The force told us that officers are now recording force in about 80 percent of cases when it would be expected, compared to around only 30 percent a year ago. Despite this, some officers told us they were reluctant to record force due to the time it takes to complete the form.

The force has made progress in this area but needs to maintain its focus to fully understand how all officers are using force.

The force recorded 4.7 use of force incidents per 1,000 population in the year ending 31 March 2022. This is lower than most other forces in England and Wales. However, this difference may be due to historic under-reporting of incidents by the force.

### **The force makes good use of powers of stop and search to prevent and detect crime**

Training in stop and search forms part of initial recruit training. Officers we spoke to during our inspection had a good knowledge of these powers.

They were aware of the processes to be followed in respect of strip searches, particularly those involving juveniles. There are specific areas in custody suites that provide privacy for this purpose.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, the force carried out 13,843 stop and searches. This is 5.5 stop and searches per 1,000 population, which is in line with other forces in England and Wales. In the year ending 31 March 2022, there was a 27.1 percent decrease in the number of stop and searches compared to the year ending 31 March 2021. This is in line with the decrease for England and Wales (25.9 percent). During this period, based on population data from the 2021 Census, Black people were 3 times more likely to be stopped and searched by Thames Valley Police, compared to 4.8 times more likely across England and Wales.

During stop and searches, Thames Valley Police officers found the item sought in 33.7 percent of all cases. This is the highest find rate in England and Wales and indicates that use of stop and search in Thames Valley Police is effective.

### **The force makes good use of BWV when exercising police powers**

All officers in Thames Valley Police are issued with BWV, which they are expected to use when exercising police powers. There are high levels of compliance with this, which allows BWV to be reviewed at a later stage.

The force provided an example where a selective video of a stop and search taken by a member of the public had been circulated in the community, causing tensions. The force was able to show the parents of the individual searched the BWV footage, which included more context. This led to their concerns being resolved.

### **The force has improved its understanding of the use of stop and search**

The force has a quarterly force-wide stop and search monitoring meeting, chaired by a senior officer.

A quarterly data pack is produced for the meeting. It includes information such as find rates by ethnicity, frequent users of the power, and those members of the public

who have been searched repeatedly. The database used is capable of detailed bespoke searches to give stop and search leads the best possible understanding of a given issue.

Each LPA has a stop and search lead who holds monthly meetings to discuss the stop and search data held on force systems. This means the force can identify trends and changes in behaviour at a local level month on month.

For instance, in one meeting we observed, the data indicated that there had been a spike in stop and searches of Asian males in one area of the force. Analysis carried out locally linked this activity to a specific and targeted police operation.

### **Officers understand the importance of appropriate behaviours and generally demonstrate effective communication**

The force provides scenario-based training to officers during personal safety training which is based around stop and search activity. In October 2023, this will change to a two-day course in line with the national direction for personal safety training. There is a high level of completion of this training, with no backlogs.

In autumn 2023, the force is introducing training for all operational staff on challenges that the Black community face. This is positive, as most of the officers we spoke to had no recollection of receiving any cultural awareness training on the diverse communities in the Thames Valley Police force area.

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

## Adequate

Thames Valley Police is adequate at prevention and deterrence.

### Areas for improvement

#### **The force should make sure that it understands why it has the lowest reported levels of antisocial behaviour in England and Wales**

In our [2021 PEEL inspection report](#), we commented on the fact that Thames Valley Police recorded the lowest numbers of antisocial behaviour incidents of any force in England and Wales, at 11.9 incidents per 1,000 population in the year ending 31 March 2021. We noted that the Crime Survey for England and Wales showed the number of people who experience or witness antisocial behaviour in the Thames Valley Police area was at a similar level to many forces that record higher levels of incidents than Thames Valley do.

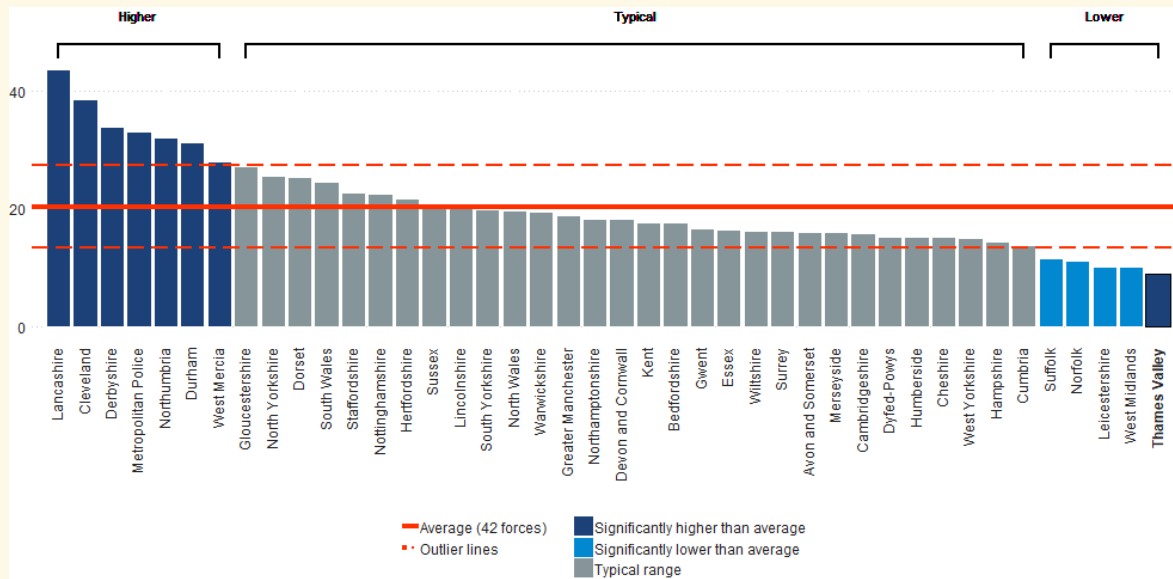
We suggested that the force should identify the reasons for this anomaly.

During this inspection, we found that levels of reported antisocial behaviour have decreased further. In the year ending 31 March 2022, Thames Valley Police recorded only 8.9 incidents per 1,000 population. It still has the lowest levels of recorded antisocial behaviour of any police force in England and Wales. The force has not taken steps to identify and understand the reasons for this.

It is important that the force learns the reasons for this disparity. This will allow it to understand and address antisocial behaviour in the force area or share good practice.



**Figure 1: The number of antisocial behaviour incidents per 1,000 population across the force in the year ending 31 March 2022**



## The force needs to make sure that it has enough capability and capacity in neighbourhood teams to consistently prevent crime, work with communities and tackle antisocial behaviour

During our last inspection, we found that neighbourhood police officers were removed from their area to other duties, particularly incident response, and often at short notice. This process is referred to as abstraction. We said that the force should take steps to understand the frequency with which this was taking place.

To reduce the number of unplanned abstractions, the force put in place a rolling programme where neighbourhood officers are abstracted for five-weekly blocks to support response officers. In some cases, these officers had multiple and even consecutive periods of abstraction. This, combined with high police community support officer vacancy levels in the force, has reduced the ability of locally based neighbourhood teams to perform their role satisfactorily.

In some areas, we saw good work to involve communities and work with partner organisations to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. But, in other areas, we were told that a lack of staff in neighbourhood teams reduced the time that could be spent on this activity. One effect of this was that some local priorities were decided by the police based on force priorities and crime trends rather than community priorities. This means that the needs and concerns of some communities may not be fully recognised and prioritised. In other areas, local priorities weren't published on the force website. We didn't find any examples of ward profiles describing the nature and needs of local communities.

This lack of capability and capacity is recognised by the force. It is planning to post new recruits directly to neighbourhood teams and has converted several vacant police community support officer posts into police officer posts. This will place an additional 115 police officers into neighbourhood teams over the next 12 months. The force is planning to introduce a new five-day neighbourhood officer training course to help the additional neighbourhood officers make a positive impact.

The force has also reduced the proportion of new entrants to the service who will be undertaking degree-level academic study as part of their training. This is expected to reduce the need for neighbourhood officers to cover for them.

The force needs to make sure that these proposals result in an increase in the capabilities and capacity of neighbourhood teams to work effectively across the force.

## Promising practice

### **Prompt youth offending team intervention stops arrested children from reoffending**

Our [2023 national child protection inspection report](#) highlighted Operation Deter as promising practice.

The force is carrying out an initiative called Operation Deter in Milton Keynes and Slough with the youth offending team.

This aims to provide alternative outcomes for children arrested in possession of bladed articles or knives. When a child is arrested, the youth offending team will visit them within 90 minutes of the referral being made by the police, and while the child is still in custody. When they are released from custody, the team starts intervention activity within 48 hours.

The force has done some analysis of the initiative. At the time of our inspection, the force told us that 57 children had been arrested under Operation Deter but only one of those children had been arrested again for a similar offence. The early findings from this initiative are extremely promising and suggest it helps prevent reoffending.

### **The Thames Valley Together database allows partnership data to be analysed effectively and used to reduce harm, vulnerability, offending and repeat demand**

The Thames Valley Together data-sharing and analytics platform allows data to be shared between police and partners (such as the fire and rescue service, probation, prison service and local authorities) across the force area. Each agency can log in and input and interrogate this data in a way that is suitable for them, in real time, to help meet their objectives.

Sharing data in this way allows the unit to focus police and partner activity on areas where people are most at risk of serious violence. These interventions may be diversionary, such as awareness-raising in schools, or patrols in areas with a high incidence of violent crime. The team has worked with the Information Commissioner's Office's 'sandbox' process to make sure that sharing this data is lawful. The results of this process will be available on the Information Commissioner's Office website.

One example of the analytics from this approach, Operation Rasure, has been highlighted by the College of Policing. This allows targeted patrols at identified violence hotspots, with officers tasked via their mobile phone on the Op Rasure app. Officers receive notifications on their mobile devices that tell them when and where they should patrol to be most effective at preventing violent crime. Officers are expected to perform foot patrol in those areas and then use the app to provide an update on activity. This then feeds into live time maps and reports of activity in these hotspots for review and monitoring. The operation has been designed so that the team can assess the effect of targeted patrol on these hotspots. This pilot is subject to full academic evaluation, which hasn't yet been completed.

### **Operation Yale identifies and safeguards victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation**

As part of its strategy to reduce violence against women and girls, the force recognised that an unknown number of sex workers who advertise on adult service websites are victims of exploitation and trafficking. Operation Yale was introduced to develop intelligence from adult service websites to identify those who are likely to be sexually exploited. This work will be supported by research that will use the sexual trafficking identification matrix (STIM).

Once an advert of concern has been identified, the address is researched, and local officers carry out a welfare visit.

As a result of the operation, the force has completed 61 STIM assessments, carried out 15 safeguarding visits, debriefed and safeguarded 19 sex workers and made 5 arrests for exploitation. At the time of our inspection, the force had four ongoing investigations.

Sex workers are a hard-to-reach community. Through this initiative, the force is actively working with and safeguarding those who are victims of exploitation.

### **Operation Yeomanry aims to reduce the risk of registered sex offenders reoffending by proactively identifying and maximising opportunities to catch and convict suspects**

Operation Yeomanry is being piloted in three of the local policing areas and is designed to reduce rape and serious sexual offences.

The police target anyone who is suspected of committing two or more sexual offences. Once a suspect is identified, police make a plan to apprehend them for any offences committed, and consider partnership interventions and the use of preventative orders.

Through this structured activity, the force is increasing the likelihood of securing positive outcomes for these serious crimes and preventing reoffending.

## **Main findings**

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

### **The force works with seldom-heard communities**

The violence reduction unit works well with the voluntary sector to commission and support initiatives that involve the public. For example, hospital navigators is an initiative run by a third-sector organisation on behalf of the unit. Volunteers in five of the major hospitals speak to people who appear to be affected by, or vulnerable to, serious violence. The aim is to make contact with people who wouldn't normally communicate with police, at a key moment (when they have come into hospital), and signpost them to support.

The force worked with a local reality TV star to reach young women with a social media campaign about domestic abuse and sexual violence. Using social media allowed two-way communication.

It has 300 staff trained to use social media and has an email-based Thames Valley Police alert that is also a two-way means of communication.

It has also started to implement the [Police Race Action Plan](#) and introduced initiatives to reduce victimisation and marginalisation experienced by Black communities. The force has worked with these communities and, within six months, it hopes to have achieved the following trust and confidence priorities:

- new scrutiny structures;
- an enhanced approach to hate crime; and
- mapped communities.

Frontline officers we spoke to knew about the plan, which shows that the force was starting to implement it. For instance, one neighbourhood officer was able to talk to us about the plans that he was putting in place to consult with members of the Black community in his policing area.

The efforts of the force to involve marginalised communities are achieving some success. In Milton Keynes, work has taken place to build communication and relationships with several Black African communities.

There is also a dedicated rural crime team, who are conscious of the challenges faced by rural communities. Team members work with members of rural communities directly, and through forums representing rural land and business owners.

### **The force makes good use of data to understand crime and incidents**

The force makes good use of data to understand serious acquisitive crime. This includes domestic burglary, robbery, theft from a person, and theft of and from a motor vehicle. In the year ending 31 December 2022, Thames Valley Police recorded 21,999 offences of serious acquisitive crime. This is an increase of 17.1 percent from the year ending 31 December 2021 when the force recorded 18,785 incidents. This creates a risk for the force, because recently it has been more focused on vulnerability than serious acquisitive crime. The chief constable intends to focus more on burglary and robbery, given the effect these offences have on victims.

The force has created a group whose responsibility is to make sure that the force guidance on tackling series of multiple and potentially linked crimes is reviewed and updated.

The force monitors its progress in tackling serious acquisitive crime and comments on its trajectory at the monthly operational and organisational performance groups chaired by the deputy chief constable. It compares itself to other forces in the region and nationally and breaks down levels of serious acquisitive crime into individual offence types in each local policing area.

Analysis of rural crime patterns allowed the force to identify a location where it recovered items valued at around £500,000. The force told us these were stolen from around the country and are part of over £2m of stolen property recovered.

The force uses shared data to identify and prioritise [vulnerable people](#) with mental health conditions. Analysing police data allows bespoke intervention work to reduce offending or vulnerability. With ten new dedicated mental health support officers, the force plans to make sure data is being correctly recorded and to build up partnership links with professionals.

The force makes use of legislation to tackle repeat incidents. In one case, the force outlined how a street drinker who repeatedly displayed antisocial behaviour received a [Criminal Behaviour Order](#) from the courts. Following this, this series of incidents stopped.

### **The force works with partners using primary prevention initiatives to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour**

We saw examples of the force working with key partner organisations. In Slough, local partners attend tasking meetings. These operate as a forum for partners to bring cases to be resolved through joint working. To tackle antisocial behaviour in a park, the council provided additional community safety patrols and changed the physical environment. Education representatives were able to identify and work with the children involved in antisocial behaviour through their school. A local youth charity provided the children with free activities at the time they would normally commit antisocial behaviour. The force told us that this has resulted in reduced antisocial behaviour.

### **Recording problem-solving activity has improved but isn't yet consistent**

In our 2021 PEEL inspection, we said that the force should make sure that its approach to solving crime, community problems, and antisocial behaviour should be consistent and recorded well.

It has introduced guidance and resources to support officers and staff in deciding whether a problem-solving plan is needed, and how to record it. The force has promoted the use of the objective, scanning, analysis, response and assessment (OSARA) problem-solving model. There is also a site on the force intranet containing resources to support problem-solving. The force has also employed problem-solving analysts in each LPA to support the scan phase of the problem-solving model.

There is a central team that reviews problem-solving plans and provides feedback to local managers on quality and activity. The quality of the problem-solving plans they review is reported to the monthly force performance group. Any initiative funded by the violence reduction unit will always have a full OSARA plan, which will include final evaluation.

We spoke to officers and staff in neighbourhood teams and reviewed a selection of problem-solving plans. We found that problem-solving and its recording were still not consistent. While we found some good examples, there was little evidence of evaluation taking place, and not all officers and staff involved in problem-solving had

received training in it. In several locations, we were told that staff in neighbourhood policing teams were deterred from recording problem-solving plans because of the enhanced scrutiny these plans received.

# Responding to the public

Requires  
improvement

Thames Valley Police requires improvement at responding to the public.

## Areas for improvement

### **The force needs to reduce the number of non-emergency 101 calls that are abandoned**

The service given to the public who contact Thames Valley Police by telephone requires improvement.

The force told us that, in the year ending 31 March 2023, the average time to answer a call through the 101 system was six minutes and four seconds. This compares with the average time of three minutes and four seconds the previous year.

The force told us that 28 percent of callers to the Thames Valley 101 service hang up before their call is answered. The force believes that many of these are diverted to the online reporting provision, as many terminations occur when an automated message provides this option. However, there are others who terminate further into the call wait time that the force isn't able to track.

The contact management department has a high turnover of staff and difficulties replacing those who leave. The force told us that since April 2022, 120 staff have left the department, with only 70 replacements. This leaves the department understaffed, with ill-health absences rising from an average of 17 days per staff member last year to 20 days per staff member this year.

The force wants to provide a better service to callers and is planning to use new technology to improve the situation. It has estimated that 40 percent of the calls it receives are in connection with something that the caller has already contacted them about.



There will be greater options for callers to 'self-serve', such as victims of crime being provided with a code to log in to a citizen portal. This will allow communication with the investigating officer as well as automated messages, such as victim updates, reducing the demand on the contact management department.

The force has completed modelling which suggests that self-service will allow it to improve call handling times and reduce the number of 101 calls that are abandoned.

The force, along with Hampshire Constabulary, has invested £1.2m in this new service, but its implementation, due in July 2023, has been delayed. The force should closely monitor any further delay to make sure that anticipated improvements are achieved.

### **The force needs to attend calls for service in line with its published attendance times and make sure the caller is updated if there are delays**

The force has recently carried out a review of its response to incidents, including those classed as urgent, reported between September 2021 and February 2023. It found that it only attended 22 percent of these calls within 60 minutes, with large numbers waiting far longer. Of these calls, 18 percent weren't attended for over eight hours. This is not a satisfactory speed of response to urgent calls.

It needs to understand and address the issues behind this to make sure that its officers attend incidents quickly enough to gather evidence and safeguard members of the public.

The review also found that officers were uncertain about how quickly they were expected to attend incidents graded as urgent.

We reviewed a sample of urgent calls awaiting attendance. While in many cases some efforts to attend had been made, in others no units had been available for an extended period. We found domestic abuse cases a week old that had been graded as urgent that hadn't been dealt with. There had been no reassessment of the risk or escalation of these incidents to more senior officers. This means that any change in the risk or vulnerability of the person that might be caused by these delays wasn't identified.

As part of our victim service assessment, we also found that, where a delay in response occurred, the victim was only updated in seven of the 12 cases we reviewed. The force should make sure that it notifies the caller if there is a delay and reassesses risk and vulnerability.

During our fieldwork, we found confusion between the contact management department and local policing areas about the frequency with which an incident should be reviewed when there was a delay in attendance, and who should do this.

The force told us that it doesn't have a target attendance time for urgent calls. But the absence of clear guidance about what is expected brings a risk that urgent calls may be left to wait while other, perhaps less urgent, work takes precedence.

### **The force needs to make sure that risk assessments about vulnerable people completed by officers are detailed enough and submitted promptly**

Officers are trained to recognise when a person may be vulnerable. There are guides and structured assessment referral forms to help officers record different types of vulnerability and refer these people to the multi-agency safeguarding hub.

We found that officers were completing these risk assessments, which were then checked by supervisors. In some cases, supervisors gave feedback to officers.

However, some risk assessments weren't submitted promptly, and we found examples where they had been outstanding for some weeks.

This delay contributed to backlogs in the multi-agency safeguarding hub, as it interfered with the robotic process automation. It also contributed to the creation of queues of unassessed referrals. This in turn increased delays in full risk assessments and in sharing important information with partner agencies.

We raised this issue with the force during our inspection. The force told us that it was aware of the issue, but it was apparent that it hadn't yet been resolved.

It has now put in place new processes to improve oversight of when risk assessments haven't been submitted promptly. The force should monitor this process to make sure that it is effective.

## **Main findings**

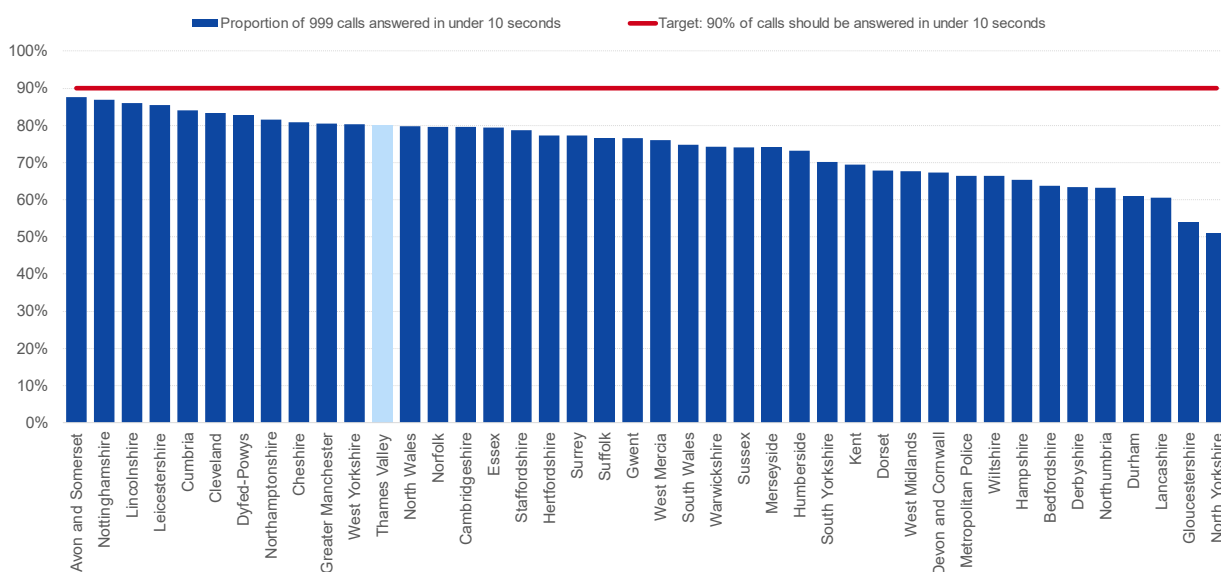
In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force responds to the public.

### **The force gives a timelier service to members of the public who contact it through the 999 system**

In the year ending 31 March 2023, Thames Valley Police received 142 999 calls per 1,000 population. This was in line with other forces in England and Wales.

National call handling standards for 999 calls set out an expectation that 90 percent of these calls should be answered within ten seconds. In the year ending 31 March 2023, Thames Valley Police answered 80 percent of its 999 calls within ten seconds. This was below the expected standard. Every force in England and Wales was below the 90 percent standard. Thames Valley Police had the twelfth highest percentage of calls answered within 90 seconds. The force is failing to meet national call handling standards for 999 calls and should continue efforts to improve this, alongside its 101 call handling performance.

**Figure 2: Proportion of 999 calls answered within ten seconds by forces in the year ending 31 March 2023**



### The force is working to make sure that people with mental health conditions receive the right response

Officers responding to people in mental health crisis have access to advice and guidance from mental health experts. Triage cars, which are staffed by an officer and a mental health service member of staff, operate during peak demand hours. Outside these hours, officers can get advice by phone.

Our previous inspection found that the force didn't fully understand the amount of time its officers were spending looking after people detained under the [Mental Health Act](#). It now has a better understanding of this demand and is phasing in the implementation of the [Right Care, Right Person guidance](#). This aims to make sure that people suffering a mental health crisis receive support from the right agency.

It has invested in ten dedicated mental health support officers, whose role is to build up partnerships with professionals. These were new posts at the time of our inspection so we couldn't assess their effect.

Control room staff have received training on when mental health calls should have a police response. They know how and who to refer calls to if they aren't suitable for

a police response. In addition, a senior officer chairs a strategic meeting with partners who respond to mental health crisis events. The purpose of the meeting is to co-ordinate implementation of the Right Care, Right Person guidance and identify issues that partners need to work together to resolve.

### **The public can contact the force through appropriate and accessible channels**

Members of the public can report crimes and other issues, such as road traffic incidents and antisocial behaviour, via the force's website. It doesn't currently offer a live chat service, but it plans to introduce this. Staff in the contact management department monitor all online reports. They make sure that vulnerability is identified at the earliest opportunity and pass incidents requiring a response on to call handlers in a timely fashion.

The force makes it clear on its social media that these online routes shouldn't be used to report incidents. As a result, posts from the public aren't continually monitored. The force plans to fill this gap by introducing a digital desk as part of the work it is doing to improve the use of new technology to provide a more comprehensive online service to callers. In the interim, the corporate communications department reviews social media posts daily and aims to make sure that the relevant member of staff responds to all contact from members of the public.

### **The force has improved the way it identifies and records vulnerability at first point of contact**

As part of our inspection, we carried out an assessment of the service Thames Valley Police provides to victims. This victim service assessment (VSA) included looking at how the force responds to callers. We found that call handlers acted politely, appropriately and ethically, and used clear, unambiguous language, without apparent bias, to carry out a structured initial triage and risk assessment with callers in all cases.

Improving the way the force identifies and records vulnerability at first point of contact was an area for improvement in our 2021 PEEL inspection. Since then, changes have been made to the way call handlers identify and record threat, harm, opportunity, and risk when assessing incidents reported to them. Training has been updated and there is a quality assurance function in the contact management department.

Our recent child protection inspection found that call handlers could improve how they assess the risks to children. But in other aspects we found that the actions taken by the force have had positive effects. Call takers now identify a higher proportion of callers with mental health issues than in our last inspection. Our VSA also found that 57 of the 59 cases we reviewed had evidence that the call handler used a structured triage approach to assess risk and consider the needs of the victim and/or caller.

### **The force now provides advice about crime prevention and scene preservation more consistently**

Our previous inspection found that call handlers weren't consistently giving advice to callers about crime prevention and scene preservation. This was identified as an area for improvement for the force. Call handlers have since received training in preservation of evidence by crime scene investigators and guidance to make sure they provide callers with consistent advice. Call handlers will direct victims to the force's crime prevention advice page on its website when appropriate. In our VSA, we found that call handlers gave appropriate advice on preservation of evidence in 21 of the 24 cases we reviewed. And call handlers gave appropriate advice on crime prevention in 22 of the 25 cases reviewed. This is an improvement since we last inspected the force.

# Investigating crime

Requires  
improvement

Thames Valley Police requires improvement at investigating crime.

## Areas for improvement

**The force should carry out proportionate, thorough, and timely investigations into all reported crimes, keeping victims updated in accordance with the Victims' Code**

In our 2021 PEEL inspection, we found in the sample of crimes we reviewed that investigations weren't always effective and timely, relevant lines of enquiry weren't always completed and victims weren't always kept updated.

As part of its overall approach to improvement in this area, described in more detail in the main findings section below, the force has created assessment and investigation units (AIU), which went live across the whole force in April 2023. The force intends the AIUs to free up the time of incident and response officers to provide a better service to the public, while also improving the quality of investigations.

The unit first assesses the suitability of the crime to make sure there is no need for police to attend, assesses the risk to the victim and puts initial investigative actions in place. The force aims to complete this initial stage within 24 hours of the report.

Following this assessment, where appropriate, crimes requiring further investigation are allocated to an investigator within an AIU and dealt with in priority order. There are three AIUs that between them cover the force area.

We recognise the ambition of the force to improve its service to members of the public and victims of crime through the creation of this unit.

However, during our inspection in July 2023, we found that some of the AIUs didn't yet have enough officers and staff to complete these tasks in a timely manner. This led to delays in both the initial assessment process and investigations being started. We found that 1,659 crimes were awaiting allocation to an investigator, with 937 waiting two weeks, 379 waiting four weeks and 116 waiting six weeks since the date of the offence.

There were also too many crimes awaiting an initial assessment. In one AIU there were some waiting for up to nine days for this to take place. In addition, there were too many victims of crime who had received no contact from the force about the progress of the investigation for more than 28 days.

We found evidence of shoplifting offences not receiving a full investigation – despite there being lines of enquiry such as CCTV evidence and named suspects – because victims of crime hadn't returned pro forma statements or CCTV to the force. This meant that opportunities were being missed to bring offenders to justice and prevent further offending.

We immediately shared our findings with the force. It has provided details of its plans to improve processes in the AIUs to become more efficient, and how staffing, including early actions to reduce the backlogs, will be increased.

We are encouraged by the force's plans and the steps it has taken since our inspection.

The force should make sure that the resources needed to help the AIU achieve what is intended are put in place and maintained to make sure that crimes are investigated effectively and victims updated in a timely manner.

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

The force isn't always achieving acceptable [outcomes for victims of crime](#). It has low numbers of crimes that are solved following investigations. The force needs to understand the issue and work to achieve better outcomes for victims.

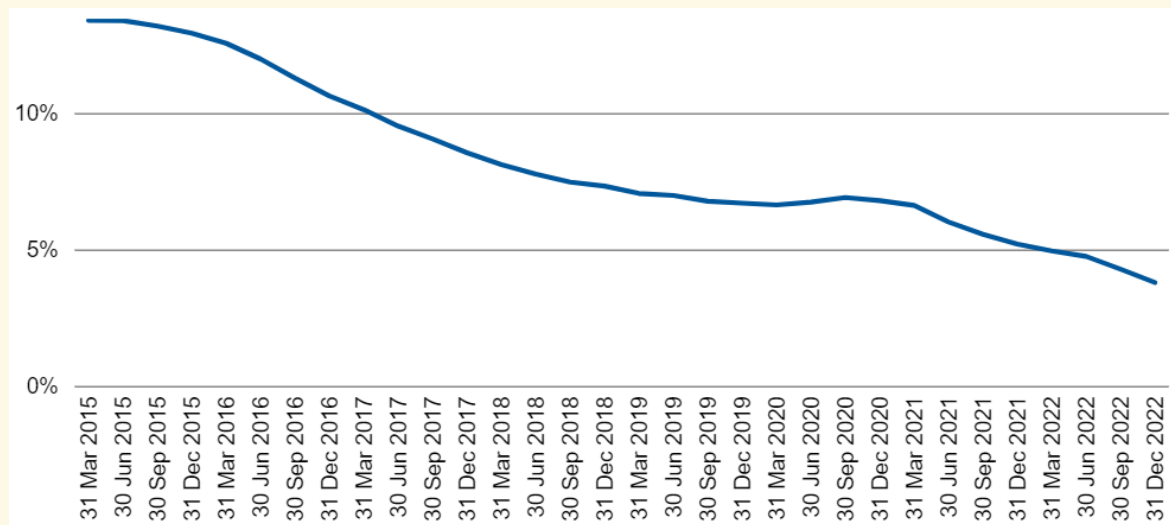
**Figure 3: Proportion of victim-based crimes assigned specified crime outcomes by Thames Valley Police compared to forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 December 2022**

| <b>Outcome types</b>  | <b>Thames Valley rate</b> | <b>England and Wales rate</b> |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1: Charged/ summonsed   | 3.8%                      | 4.6%                          |
| 2 and 3: Caution – youths and Caution – adults  | 1.0%                      | 0.7%                          |
| 8: Community resolutions  | 2.9%                      | 1.4%                          |
| 9: Prosecution not in the public interest (Crown Prosecution Service decision)  | 0.0%                      | 0.0%                          |
| 10 and 21: Prosecution not in public interest (police decision) and further investigation to support formal action not in public interest (police decision) | 0.6%                      | 0.8%                          |
| 14: Evidential difficulties (suspect not identified; victim doesn't support further action)   | 8.5%                      | 5.6%                          |
| 15: Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)  | 13.7%                     | 11.7%                         |
| 16: Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim doesn't support further action)   | 15.5%                     | 21.9%                         |
| 17: Prosecution time limit expired  | 0.6%                      | 0.3%                          |
| 18: Investigation complete – no suspect identified  | 38.8%                     | 40.9%                         |
| 20: Responsibility for further investigation transferred to another body  | 3.8%                      | 1.4%                          |
| 22: Diversionary, education or intervention activity  | 0.0%                      | 0.4%                          |

**Note: England and Wales excludes City of London data.**



**Figure 4: Proportion of victim-based crimes assigned a charged/summonsed outcome (outcome 1) by Thames Valley Police between the year ending 31 March 2015 and the year ending 31 December 2022**



In the year ending 31 December 2022, Thames Valley Police recorded 147,367 victim-based crimes.

Of these recorded offences, 7.9 percent were assigned an ‘offences brought to justice’ outcome. This was within the normal range compared to other forces in England and Wales but was a reduction from 10 percent in the year ending 31 December 2021.

More specifically, 3.8 percent of victim-based crimes were assigned a charged/summonsed outcome in the year ending 31 December 2022. This was lower than expected when compared to all forces in England and Wales (4.6 percent).

The force also uses alternative methods to bring offenders to justice:

- 1.1 percent were assigned a caution outcome – this is as expected when compared to other forces in England and Wales.
- 2.9 percent were assigned a community resolution outcome – this is higher than expected when compared to other forces in England and Wales.
- 0 percent were assigned a diversionary, education or intervention activity outcome – this is lower than expected when compared to other forces in England and Wales.

Between the year ending 31 December 2021 and 31 December 2022, the proportion of victim-based crimes assigned [outcome 16](#): evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim doesn’t support further action) by Thames Valley decreased from 19.4 percent to 15.5 percent. The value for the year ending 31 December 2022 is lower than expected compared to other forces in England and Wales.

Between the year ending 31 December 2021 and 31 December 2022, the proportion of victim-based crimes assigned outcome 14: evidential difficulties (suspect not identified; victim doesn't support further action) by Thames Valley increased from 6.2 percent to 8.5 percent. This value is higher than expected compared to other forces in England and Wales.

The force is within the normal range for the England and Wales rate in almost all other outcome categories for victim-based crimes. The exception is outcome 20: Responsibility for further investigation transferred to another body, which, at 3.8 percent, is higher than expected when compared to other forces in England and Wales.

We found that the force scrutinised disposal outcomes at the force performance meeting and crime standards board meetings. This allows senior leaders to understand what leads to better outcomes and what improvements might be needed to give victims better justice.

## Main findings

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

### **The force has an effective management structure in place that provides appropriate governance and oversight of investigations once allocated**

There is a crime standards board chaired by a senior officer which provides oversight of the processes and resources involved in improving investigations.

This has led to improvements in how the force investigates crime, including the introduction of a new crime management framework. This sets out how and by whom all investigations will be progressed. It includes mandatory reviews of individual crimes, which are carried out by senior officers at set points during the investigation.

Force performance meetings review overall crime investigation data and scrutinise high-risk or underperforming areas.

The force has introduced a direct entry route for becoming a detective which speeds up training for new officers. Positive and proactive mentoring and support have led to very few of these recruits leaving the organisation.

The force has also undertaken initiatives to recruit detectives internally. Consequently, the force told us only 39 of its 900 detective roles were vacant at the time of our inspection. However, the force recognises that as most of these vacancies are at detective constable level, recruiting and retaining staff in those roles remains a challenge.

## **The force has improved the overall quality and supervision of investigations**

In our 2021 PEEL inspection, we noted that the supervision of investigations wasn't always effective. The crime standards board has overseen subsequent work to raise the standards of investigation.

There is an ongoing programme called Endeavour in place, along with its crime academy programme. These provide resources and training for staff in investigative matters.

The force has created a crime management framework that sets out expected investigative standards for different types of crime. This is linked to the new performance monitoring database known as TEMPO. This helps supervisors keep track of cases held by their staff. It includes when reviews and updates are required. Officers we spoke to during the inspection talked positively about the new arrangements.

It is mandatory that all sergeants who haven't got experience as a detective take part in an investigative skills training course, to improve investigative standards.

Our VSA audit found that the force has improved its performance in this area since our last inspection. In this inspection we found that there was evidence of an appropriate investigation plan in 49 of the 54 cases reviewed, and effective investigations in 85 out of 92 cases reviewed.

## **The force has improved how it pursues prosecutions where the victim doesn't support police action, but it still needs to improve the consistency with which it records victims' wishes in such cases**

In our 2021 PEEL inspection report, we said that the force could make better use of what are known as evidence-led prosecutions. This is where the force seeks a prosecution even if the victim doesn't support it. We also said that the force should make a record of why the victim doesn't support any police action.

In this inspection we found that the force now makes better use of BWV to gather evidence, and officers and staff are clear about when it should be used. Training and supervisory oversight of evidence-led prosecutions have been improved.

Our VSA audit found that the force considered progressing or tried to progress the case without the support of the victim in 21 of 22 applicable cases and made a record of why a victim didn't support police action in 29 of the 36 cases reviewed.

This means that the force has successfully improved the use of evidence-led prosecutions to protect vulnerable people who lack the confidence to support police action. But it must do more to record the victim's wishes.

## **The force has improved its overall compliance with the Victims' Code**

In our 2021 PEEL inspection, we found that the force wasn't carrying out victims needs assessments or making sure that victims were being kept up to date on the progress of their case at regular intervals. We also found that in many cases it wasn't obtaining victim personal statements when these were required.

Improving compliance has been a priority for the force. A senior officer has co-ordinated activity to raise awareness of the Victims' Code and its requirements. Each supervisor now has access to data that keeps track of compliance. Overall compliance is monitored at both local and force performance meetings.

Our VSA audit found that the force provided service in line with the Victims' Code in 88 of 95 cases we reviewed. A victims needs assessment was recorded in 52 of 57 relevant cases. Victims' personal statements were considered in seven out of ten applicable cases.

This is an improvement on what was found in our previous inspection.

# Protecting vulnerable people

## Inadequate

Thames Valley Police is inadequate at protecting vulnerable people.

### Causes of concern

#### **Thames Valley Police needs to improve its performance in the multi-agency safeguarding hubs to better protect vulnerable people**

Every [multi-agency safeguarding hub \(MASH\)](#) includes a range of partners whose function is to work together to assess and manage the risk to individuals who have been identified as a vulnerable adult or child. Many are victims of domestic abuse. This is achieved through the prompt assessment of safeguarding referrals by the force and sharing information about those at risk of harm with the other safeguarding agencies.

In some cases, agencies need to discuss the details of individual cases to agree the best strategy to protect the person from harm. In cases involving children these should be held as soon as possible. This is generally within 24 hours, depending on the child's level of need and risk, but they must be held within three working days ([Children's Act 1989](#)). Despite the force's objective to always hold these as soon as possible within 24 hours, but no longer than 72 hours, we found that strategy discussions concerning children were delayed beyond this. We found in one MASH that 28 strategy discussions were delayed beyond 72 hours, seven of which were at least two weeks old.

We found that some of the MASHs' staffing levels weren't sufficient to deal with demand. This means that the force isn't fully aware of the risks contained in queues of referrals, as they aren't being checked for risk in a timely manner.

Referrals that need to be shared with partners aren't always being shared in a timely way. This means that the support vulnerable people need is delayed. In one case, a vulnerable adult hadn't been assessed for six weeks.

The large backlogs we found means that staff in the MASH are spending less time on reviewing the information recorded in police systems about people mentioned in the referral. This means that they base some decisions about whether to share the referral with partners solely on the information in the referral, without reviewing all the information that might be on police systems. This is a significant risk, as the full picture of what is known isn't being considered before determining the level of risk or the appropriate level of support.

Staff reported feeling overwhelmed with the pressure of having to manage the burden of risk daily. They were unaware of any plan to improve this situation. This added to the levels of stress and anxiety, with the associated risk of ill health or loss of valuable staff.

We immediately raised our concerns about the safeguarding structure and processes with the force. It accepted that there was a need for urgent action.

The force has immediately taken steps to increase staffing levels within the MASHs to cope with demand. We are encouraged by the steps the force has taken to address these concerns and the positive impact these are having. The force plans to carry out an in-depth review of how this unit functions and can be improved.

The force told us that at the time of our fieldwork staff vacancies in the MASH were at their highest levels since the MASH was implemented. This was due to a new exploitation team and shift pattern being introduced, which prompted numerous staff movements. The effect on those remaining was made worse by the seasonal increase in demand for leave in the pre-school holiday period. The force should make sure that it reviews and understands all factors that contributed to the situation.

We will continue to monitor the effect of the steps the force has taken to make sure that backlogs and risks don't develop in the future.

## **Recommendations**

Within three months, Thames Valley Police should:

- make sure it has sufficient trained personnel within the [multi-agency safeguarding hub](#) structures to manage current demand;
- reduce the number of outstanding assessments of new cases; and
- prioritise assessments according to the assessed level of risk and make timely referrals to partner organisations.

Within six months, Thames Valley Police should:

- have sustainable safeguarding systems and processes, with sufficient trained personnel in the multi-agency safeguarding hubs to meet current and future demand to protect vulnerable people.

**Thames Valley Police needs to make sure that all personnel have appropriate training and/or knowledge of their role requirements when attending child and adult strategy discussions**

In our [May 2023 national child protection inspection of Thames Valley Police](#), we found that not all personnel attending multi-agency strategy discussions were fully trained for their role.

During our national child protection inspection, we also found police officers attending strategy discussion meetings who had no training for this role.

**Recommendations**

Within three months, Thames Valley Police should:

- take steps to make sure that it has provided appropriate training to all officers attending child and adult strategy discussions with partner organisations.

Within six months, Thames Valley Police should:

- have reviewed its training arrangements to make sure that all officers attending strategy discussions have a sound knowledge of their role at these meetings; and
- make sure suitably trained personnel undertake strategy discussions with partner organisations.

## Areas for improvement

**The force should make sure that there are processes in place to monitor protective orders and make sure that breaches are prioritised to safeguard the victim**

The force should make sure that there are consistent processes in place to monitor protective orders and make sure that breaches are prioritised to safeguard the victim. In our 2021 PEEL inspection, we said that the force should actively consider the use of measures to protect people from domestic abuse cases. Since then, it has implemented better processes to achieve higher levels of applications for [Domestic Violence Protection Notices](#) and is now in line with many other forces in England and Wales. It converts more than 90 percent of these into [Domestic Violence Protection Orders](#), which provide greater protection for victims.

We found some evidence of a structured approach to enforcing Domestic Violence Protection Orders, but, overall, we didn't find a consistent force-wide approach to this. This means that in some areas identifying that a breach has occurred may be reliant on the victim getting in touch with police. This isn't the best approach, as a victim who is traumatised or afraid may not do so.

**The force needs to make sure it has sufficiently trained officers and staff and resources to make sure the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme function complies with the required legislative processes and timescales**

The force doesn't make full use of the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme's \(DVDS\)](#), also known as Clare's Law) right to know and right to ask. This allows the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's previous abusive or violent offending.

In the year ending 30 September 2022, Thames Valley Police recorded 154 right to know applications and 29 such disclosures, which equated to six applications and 1.2 disclosures per 100,000 population. These values were lower than expected compared to other forces in England and Wales. In the same year, the force recorded 721 right to ask applications and 109 disclosures, which equated to 29 applications and 4.3 disclosures per 100,000 population. This right to ask disclosure rate was lower than expected compared to other forces in England and Wales. In addition, the force can't easily monitor the numbers or timeliness of the DVDS disclosures made. This means that it can't identify how well it is using this tool. The force told us that the disclosure process was often completed outside recommended timescales.



The process for using the DVDS differs across the force. In some areas, staff in the domestic abuse investigation unit complete the necessary research when other commitments allow, which can contribute to delays. The force ran a recent pilot where a researcher in an assessment and investigation unit was responsible for this work. This led to an increase in applications and timelier disclosure to potential victims.

The force has reviewed this area of work and has identified a way forward that involves the creation of a small team to bring consistency and oversight to this important area of activity.

In the short term, the force is using overtime working to improve the timeliness of referrals, but in the longer term the force should reassure itself that it is able to make proper and consistent use of the DVDS.

## Promising practice

### **The force has taken effective steps to address police-perpetrated domestic abuse and support victims**

The force's approach to dealing with police-perpetrated domestic abuse is led by a senior officer and involves dealing with offenders and giving effective support to victims.

The force has placed officers with domestic abuse expertise within the professional standards department to investigate all allegations of this nature. This is designed to give confidence to victims and maximise the force's response to crimes.

It has funded the use of independent domestic violence advocates, and there are external resources to give support to victims that can be accessed.

The force has supported former victims by creating internal support groups for rape and sexual offences and for domestic abuse.

The force has provided data indicating that since these measures were put in place it has taken robust action against perpetrators, and victims have the confidence to come forward.

## Main findings

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

### **The effectiveness of the robotic process automation (RPA) used by the MASH to help identify the risk to vulnerable people was undermined as a result of referrals not being competed promptly**

The force has developed an RPA that checks police systems for specific types of incidents, domestic abuse, vulnerable adults and children at risk of harm, linked to or involved in these reported incidents. The RPA will automatically generate a notification to the MASH when it identifies these specific profiles. The RPA automatically carries out its checks to identify any information held by the force to inform the risk level involved. It will open and scan the referral several times over a 72-hour period to check if a risk assessment has been submitted by the attending officer. Once this is received by the MASH, the RPA will give the referral a grading, which is then reviewed by a member of staff.

If the notification involves a child or young person, the RPA will automatically inform the MASH team of the report.

This notification process was to assist the MASH in considering making early referral decisions to partner organisations if officers hadn't attended the incidents and there was a significant risk that partners may need to act on before assessment by the attending officers. However, the RPA can't grade the risk to the parties involved until officers have completed the relevant risk assessments.

During our inspection, the MASH had significant backlogs of referrals awaiting processing to send to partners. The early notification process by the RPA was adding to these backlogs by adding notifications that couldn't be assessed for risk due to the non-attendance of officers or completion of relevant referrals.

The MASH didn't have enough staff to review these incidents, which meant that they couldn't assess all risk in a timely way. It also meant the RPA process wasn't always adding value to the safeguarding decisions in the MASH. We discussed the issue with the force, which has promptly brought in revised processes to rectify this issue.

### **The force doesn't have an effective strategy, performance framework or governance structure in relation to all aspects of vulnerability**

The force has an overarching vulnerability board chaired by the assistant chief constable. The work of the board is carried out through a range of operational groups, each of which has a senior officer lead and associated action plans.

There are also seven strategic safeguarding boards and nine MASHs dealing with vulnerable children and adults across the force area. Each of these is attended by the head of public protection on behalf of the force.

The force has a performance framework aligned to its governance structure, with action plans, to provide scrutiny and assurance for implementing the College of Policing's 13 strands of vulnerability. The force has a multi-agency violence against women and girls' strategy and action plan that is monitored and carried out through a partnership steering group.

The vulnerability board meets on a quarterly basis and is provided with updates on vulnerability, including child protection, such as child abuse, exploitation of vulnerable people, and missing persons. In our 2023 national child protection inspection, we looked at how effective these arrangements were. We found that, due to the number of elements of vulnerability this meeting addressed, and its frequency, the momentum to drive effective delivery on child protection was limited. In this report, we recommended that these arrangements, specifically in relation to protecting vulnerable children, be reviewed.

### **The understanding of vulnerability across the workforce is varied**

The College of Policing vulnerability training has been provided to all frontline officers and command and control room staff. Training in domestic abuse matters has now been completed by 80 percent of frontline officers, and there are 150 domestic abuse champions in the force to promote the importance of this area of work. In addition, the force has provided templates for staff to fill in that use structured models to help identify all relevant risk factors for vulnerable children and adults.

Unfortunately, the 2023 national child protection inspection of Thames Valley Police found that frontline officers and control room staff were inconsistently recording the [voice of the child](#). Some domestic abuse referral forms lacked enough detail to assess the impact on the child and possible onward referral for support, which is a requirement of the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#).

The force has an action plan in place to address the recommendations.

### **The force works effectively with other organisations to keep victims of domestic abuse safe**

The force is actively seeking to improve its approach to victims of domestic abuse.

It is acting on recommendations from two independent reviews it commissioned into the effectiveness of its [multi-agency risk assessment conferences \(MARACs\)](#) and multi-agency tasking and co-ordination (MATAC) arrangements.

For instance, it is employing additional MARAC co-ordinators to make sure that these are working as well as possible to support victims of domestic abuse.

The impact of the review into the MARACs was enhanced by the inclusion of the views of the victims. This means that the force is taking account of victims' views in shaping future services.

MARACs within the force are generally effective but too reliant on being police led. This was also a conclusion of the independent review and provides the force with an opportunity to address this with its partners.

Each local policing area has a domestic abuse scrutiny panel. These have representation from partner agencies and examine a selection of domestic abuse incidents. Observations are passed back to attending officers and their supervisors.

The force has invested in support for victims of domestic abuse. They have put in place dedicated court independent domestic violence advocates and stalking advocates. Partners in the third sector provide support to victims of stalking during their journey through the criminal justice system.

### **The force makes good use of prevention orders to reduce the risk from stalking and harassment**

The force is increasing its use of [Stalking Prevention Orders](#). In the year ending 30 September 2022, Thames Valley Police recorded that two interim and two full Stalking Prevention Orders had been applied for at court, and that one of each had been granted. The force told us there were 14 full and 3 interim orders in place at the time of the inspection. There are dedicated experts who provide training on stalking to the wider workforce, and act as a single point of contact for dedicated stalking leads in each local policing area.

# Managing offenders and suspects

Requires  
improvement

Thames Valley Police requires improvement at managing offenders and suspects.

## Areas for improvement

### **The force should improve its oversight and understanding of risk in relation to wanted people**

The force intelligence and specialist operation unit has created a database of all wanted persons. It has categorised them into red, amber and green according to the level of identified risk. This includes those wanted on warrants, foreign offenders and outstanding suspects.

At the time of the inspection there were more than 3,400 people on this list. We looked at 11 cases with ten separate outstanding suspects. In three of these we found that the suspect had been dealt with, but the record hadn't been updated. This means that an individual may be incorrectly identified as an outstanding suspect by other officers. It also means that the data held by the force about the numbers and potential risk posed by outstanding offenders is flawed.

In other cases where the suspect was still outstanding, some investigations involving serious offences had taken too long.

This contrasted with findings from our victim service assessment and our fieldwork, where we saw timely efforts to track down outstanding offenders.

This indicates that while immediate efforts to apprehend outstanding offenders are generally satisfactory, they aren't as good when an investigation takes longer. This may be linked to problems with record keeping on the IT system the force uses to record actions about investigations, known as Niche. The problems with record keeping make it difficult to understand when suspects have been dealt with.

The force has recently made corrections to its crime recording system that have reduced the number of suspects shown as outstanding. There is further work happening to identify why some of the data on the system is incorrect. Unless this data is accurate, the force will not fully understand how to prioritise its activities to apprehend offenders.

It could also make more use of information on wanted persons to oversee and drive activity at a strategic level. The data produced by the intelligence and specialist operation unit about overall numbers and the risk classification is provided to local commanders. But the same data and any direction of travel isn't used at any strategic performance oversight group. And, as our inspection revealed, its use as a performance management tool is undermined by inaccuracies in Niche, because suspects who are no longer outstanding are still recorded as wanted.

The force should take steps to make sure that it can rely on the accuracy of the data on its Niche system and that it has strategic oversight of the overall risk posed by outstanding offenders.

### **The force should develop a more detailed performance framework in respect of its management of registered sex offenders**

The framework should help it to understand:

- the number of solo visits to registered sex offenders and any associated risk that may be incurred as a result; and
- the context of its backlogs of active risk management system assessments, risk management plans and supervisory reviews.

We found that both warranted officers and non-warranted staff carry out visits to registered sex offenders on their own. These solo visits are contrary to [authorised professional practice](#) because of the risk that the attending staff could be vulnerable to grooming by the registered sex offender, the risk that the quality of visit will be reduced and the risk to officer safety.

Senior leaders told us that solo visits only occurred after being subject to risk assessment and with supervisory oversight. However, staff told us that this was a frequent practice in place to manage workloads. We found that supervisory decision-making and risk assessments about solo visits weren't recorded on the Violent and Sex Offender Register. They also weren't detailed in any performance management data.

The force regularly produces performance data on the capacity and activities of the [management of sexual and violent offenders](#) unit. This provided detail for use by junior managers and separate information for senior leaders. We found that the information presented to senior leaders was insufficient to allow them to understand how far behind some activity was and the associated level of risk.

During our review of Violent and Sex Offender Register records, we found delays in completing [active risk management system](#) assessments for some registered sex offenders. In other cases, there were inappropriate delays in completing visits to others.

It is important that senior leaders have clear oversight of performance indicators that allow them to easily understand developing risk and backlogs, and, importantly, the extent to which solo visits are being used.

**The force should make sure that safeguarding information is shared with local authorities before taking enforcement action, to effectively safeguard children from serious harm**

In our [2023 national child protection inspection](#) and this PEEL inspection, we found that there are sometimes delays in consulting with social services to instigate safeguarding of children.

Staff told us that is because of a concern that early action taken by children's social services may alert suspects, leading to the loss of evidence. Offenders may then remain at liberty and pose a future risk.

Thames Valley Police has told us that it has now introduced a pilot in some areas, where it notifies children's social services as soon as a suspect and an associated address are identified. It makes further disclosures to children's social services as the investigation and risk assessment develop. The force says that once these pilots have been completed and evaluated it will introduce this across the force area.

However, this isn't yet in place across the entire force area. The force should always make sure it completes a referral to children's social services at the earliest possible opportunity when it believes a suspect has access to children. This will allow information-sharing to begin between the two services and would help them build an accurate picture of any risk the suspect poses.



## Promising practice

### **Supporting families of suspects in online child sexual abuse cases**

The Family Matters pilot is supporting families of suspects in online child sexual abuse cases.

Between November 2021 and August 2022, in collaboration with the Policing Institute for the Eastern Region and the University of Huddersfield, the [paedophile online investigation team](#) from Thames Valley Police carried out the Family Matters pilot project.

A unique feature was the use of a proactive approach to supporting families who live with someone who is suspected of online sexual offences against children and who is subject to a police search warrant. This intervention fills a gap by providing support to families that isn't usually available.

During the pilot, Family Matters received 35 referrals from the police, with 23 families choosing to receive support. Of those families, 52 percent had children under the age of 18 and 39 percent had children present at the time the search warrant was executed.

In March 2023, an evaluation by Anglia Ruskin University identified positive feedback from the families supported by the project.

### **All staff who manage sexual and violent offenders living in the community receive two days' training in digital technology to create a structured approach to every visit to the home of offenders**

The use of technology by sexual and violent offenders is commonplace. Often, they are subject to controls in court orders and prison release licence conditions to limit their access to technology.

It is the role of the offender managers working in the [management of sexual offenders and violent offenders](#) unit to check compliance with these conditions as well as to consider any risk to public safety caused by the use of digital devices.

The force recognised a skills gap for their officers and staff around digital technology, which may have led to them missing important evidence.

It developed a two-day course to improve staff's knowledge about the various types of devices they could find on visits to registered sex offenders. The course also equipped staff with the skills to review online and other activity.



The force told us that it had seen an improved level of confidence in those attending the training, and that the training had led to better risk assessment. This in turn had led to breaches of court orders, such as [sexual harm prevention orders](#), being identified.

The force is working with the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) and [College of Policing](#) to fully develop this training so it can become part of the national accredited training provided for all those involved in the management of sex offenders.

## Main findings

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

### **The force generally uses bail as an effective way to protect vulnerable victims**

[Bail](#) is a tool for police to protect and safeguard vulnerable people and locations through the imposition of conditions. Officers use bail conditions to prevent suspects from approaching or contacting victims and to prevent them from entering particular locations. This helps to prevent further crime being committed and safeguards vulnerable people.

The force has created a centralised bail management team and put in place governance arrangements. These give it an understanding and oversight of the use of bail, [released under investigation \(RUI\)](#) and [voluntary attendance](#).

These arrangements help to make sure that officers make full use of the recent changes in the bail legislation. The force has seen an increase in the use of police bail, with a corresponding decrease in the use of RUI.

The role bail plays in protecting vulnerable people is well understood in the force. There are processes to make sure that the vulnerability of the victim is considered in any decision to change the status of a suspect from on bail to RUI. Despite this, we found some cases where officers hadn't followed these processes or there was no recording of a supporting risk assessment process. The force should remind officers of the importance of recording why the suspect's bail reverts to RUI.

In addition, there are too many occasions when the allocated officer in the case isn't present when suspects return on bail. This can lead to bail being cancelled or the investigation being discontinued.

The force is taking steps to understand why this happens and has an escalation process in place to manage the immediate issues. It is developing a bail app which will provide easier access to bail data and make sure that officers are fully aware of when suspects will return on bail.

It should make sure that the new bail app successfully reduces the occasions when officers aren't present to deal with suspects returning on bail.

### **The force needs to do more to manage backlogs in taking action against suspects**

Where there are backlogs in taking action against suspects, the force should make sure that any delays in dealing with those who may pose a risk to children are subject to an intelligence refresh process.

This should be carried out often enough to determine whether there has been any change in risk level during the intervening period before enforcement action.

As part of our case file review, we reviewed activity in respect of cases involving possession of child sexual abuse images. Those categorised as high or very high risk were promptly dealt with by the [paedophile online investigation team](#). Others classed as medium or low risk were allocated to locally based detectives.

Those allocated to local detectives were more likely to have experienced delays in enforcement activity. We didn't find any evidence that intelligence checks had been refreshed during these delays. Such checks are needed to establish any increase or decrease in risk to the suspect, victim, or any other person involved.

The force has taken action to address these backlogs and is now dealing with them in line with required timescales.

However, it hasn't yet put in place a policy requiring a proactive approach to such checks. It is relying instead on markers on the force computer system to alert it to any new intelligence, crime occurrence or information, which may then prompt a refreshed risk assessment. This may not be robust enough to proactively identify and address any emerging risks if backlogs build up again.

### **The force makes sure staff who are responsible for managing registered sex offenders are appropriately trained and equipped**

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.

Staff we spoke to reported manageable workloads, and they had received training and guidance to support them in their role.

The force makes good use of eSafe, a software product used to help staff who monitor the online activity of registered sex offenders. The force currently has 500 licences permitting it to use this software, of which 475 are in use. When officers visit registered sex offenders at their home address, they have access to tools which allow them to identify concerning online behaviour or potential further offending. This allows

early intervention by officers to manage the risk. Officers have access to a dog that is trained to find electronic devices that may be hidden at premises.

### **Child protection inspection**

As already mentioned in this report, we inspected Thames Valley Police as part of our programme of national child protection inspections. In that inspection, we considered how the force approaches online child abuse investigations and how it manages registered sex offenders. You can read the [national child protection report for Thames Valley Police](#) on our website.

At the time of this PEEL inspection, the force hadn't yet seen the final national child protection inspection report or recommendations. It had only received verbal feedback. The force has used that to create an action plan based on that inspection. It was too early to draw conclusions as part of our inspection about the progress the force has made.

# Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

## Adequate

Thames Valley Police is adequate at building and developing its workforce.

### Areas for improvement

#### **The force needs to better understand why officers, and in particular new recruits, wish to leave the force, in order to improve the support it provides**

Greater numbers of police officers are leaving Thames Valley Police than expected. In the year ending 31 March 2023, 251 constables left the force. In addition, the force told us that a further 53 student officers left between April and mid-July 2023.

Thames Valley Police has one of the highest levels of police officers who resign or transfer to other forces among all forces in England and Wales. This turnover is placing significant strain on the force. This is because of the loss of experienced officers, but also because of the impact on other areas, such as training and vetting. This leads to delays in replacing staff elsewhere in the organisation. It is estimated that the full cost to forces of each officer who resigns after one year's service is around £80,000. This means that the force is also having to absorb a large financial impact in replacing officers they have invested in.

The resignation of student officers is a particular problem for the force. We found many student officers had multiple tutors, some of whom were themselves inexperienced. Once the tutoring relationship had ended, some student officers felt abandoned. They told us that they didn't feel ready for the role without any ongoing support.

In our PEEL workforce survey, open between 14 February and 24 March 2023, we found that in Thames Valley Police, 72.1 percent of new recruits (303 of 420 respondents) didn't have either a buddy or a mentor. In Thames Valley Police, 70 percent of student officer resignations occur in their first 12 months of service. We also found that the integration of new recruits into their teams was inconsistent, and guidance on locally welcoming and supporting new recruits wasn't always followed.

The force is aware of this issue and classes resignations as either avoidable or unavoidable. For instance, an officer reaching the end of their career would be expected to retire and would be viewed as an unavoidable loss. However, many resignations are viewed as avoidable.

Regarding new recruits, the force believes that many officers resign because they start with unrealistic expectations of the role of a police officer. In other cases, the force feels that the additional burden of study for the academic routes into policing has been too much.

To address this, many new recruits now starting in the force are on the independent police learning and development programme pathway, which doesn't require academic learning. It is also introducing a local interview as part of the recruitment process, to make sure applicants fully understood the role and have the necessary attributes.

It is also planning to put in place a small retention team. The team will work with individuals to establish and resolve issues that might be precursors to a resignation.

However, the force's understanding of resignations and what could have been put in place to retain officers is hampered by inconsistent completion of exit interviews, and the lack of a systematic review of all types of leavers. The force needs to improve how it gains data about resignations, which will help it better understand when and why people leave.

The steps that the force is taking are welcome but need to be enhanced by improving the data available. Better data will allow it to identify why so many officers consider leaving the force and put targeted interventions in place to address those issues.

**The force should assure itself that its occupational health, reasonable adjustment management process (RAMP) and workplace needs services (WNS) fully meet the needs of the workforce in a timely and effective way**

In our 2021 PEEL report, we said that Thames Valley Police needed to improve its understanding of all data around well-being. The force has received some feedback about its mental health provision, but it hasn't completed a full evaluation of its RAMP, WNS and occupational health services.

Plans for future development of these services aren't documented and are reliant on the professional knowledge and judgment of staff. This means that the force may not have a full picture of all the current needs of the workforce.

Using the [Blue Light Wellbeing Framework](#), the force should complete a gap analysis of these services to fully identify gaps in provision and areas for improvement.

For instance, during our inspection, we found there are delays in considering workplace adjustments. Some of these have arisen because the force has raised general awareness of neurodiversity and thereby further increased demand. A gap analysis, with an associated improvement plan, would help make sure the force has the correct resources and interventions in place to support the workforce now and in the future. This may also put the force in a better position to understand this additional demand.

## **Main findings**

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

### **The force has taken steps to make workloads more manageable**

In our 2021 PEEL report we said that the force should make sure that its officers and staff have manageable workloads. Since then, the force has taken steps to reduce excessive workloads.

The creation of the AIUs has meant that some crimes previously investigated by incident and crime response officers are now dealt with by the AIUs. Although we have concerns about how the AIUs are working, officers told us this change had made a real difference to them. In our PEEL workforce survey, we found that 77.4 percent of new recruits (325 of 420 respondents) agreed that their line manager actively checks that their workload is manageable.

Since our previous inspection, there has been an uplift of staff in some areas that were experiencing high demand. A further uplift to support the child abuse investigation unit is taking place.

However, there are still some areas where workloads are heavy, such as in the MASH, and we heard that there is still frequent use of overtime to manage demand.

The force recognises that excessive workloads will cause well-being issues for its staff, and reducing these is an objective of the ongoing force review. The force believes that by creating larger and more self-contained operational units it can release resource for frontline work. This will provide greater resilience and flexibility at times of peak demand. We will be interested to see how this develops as the new model is implemented.

### **The force has improved its understanding of well-being of its workforce**

In our 2021 PEEL report we said that Thames Valley Police needed to improve its understanding of factors that affect staff well-being.

In this inspection, we found that it had improved in this area and that senior leaders actively listen to their workforce to understand the issues affecting them. Examples of this are:

- In addition to the National Wellbeing Survey, the force told us that on a rolling basis 25 percent of the workforce are invited to complete a sentiment survey. Themes from the survey are analysed and taken into force planning processes, such as the well-being plan and leadership training.
- The frontline voice group is a means by which operational officers from across the force can raise issues and make suggestions directly to senior management. Details of the issues considered by the group and what action is taken are published on the force intranet.

It recognises that finance and mental health are the highest drivers of well-being issues. It has maximised the salary of police officers and regraded some staff roles where turnover was high, such as crime scene investigators, to increase wages.

### **There are opportunities for officers and staff from under-represented groups to develop and progress**

The force and its senior leadership are committed to building a diverse and representative workforce at all levels. There are measures in place designed to make this objective become a reality, which include:

- 20 senior officers providing coaching to officers from under-represented groups;
- chief officers having reverse coaches, where they are mentored by a more junior colleague from an under-represented group, who can provide a different perspective on the organisation;
- enrolling officers from under-represented groups on training and awareness courses in duty time, with the emphasis on them opting out rather than opting in; and



- providing access to leadership and development programmes specifically for officers from under-represented groups.

The force has analysed the impact of these programmes and tracked the relative success in terms of promotion exams, completion of temporary duty at a higher rank and promotion. The results show that, as a result of the programmes, officers from under-represented groups are developing and progressing.

### **The force has put well-being support in place for those who work in high-risk roles or have experienced traumatic incidents**

The force has an annual psychological screening programme in place for staff working in roles identified as carrying a high risk of psychological harm. It keeps the roles this covers under review, but not all who would benefit from this process are considered. Locally based investigators who assess abusive images of children don't have access to the programme, despite the risk of psychological harm to them.

We found a good awareness of Operation Hampshire, known in Thames Valley Police as the seven-point plan. The operation is used when an assault on an officer or staff member takes place. There is monitoring of repeat victims. When a staff member is assaulted three times in a year, this generates a supportive supervisory review.

The force has trained a number of staff to give enhanced support via the College of Policing's Emergency Services Trauma Intervention Programme and the demobilising and defuse model [trauma risk management](#) process. It also has an employee assistance programme to which officers and staff can self-refer. Following a significant incident, the force contacts all staff involved to offer support from a welfare bronze co-ordinator, who is always on call to address urgent cases. The force told us that it has trained 800 supervisors and peers to follow a process of demobilising and defusing after traumatic incidents. This includes the option to direct staff to specialist support.

In our PEEL workforce survey, we found that 53.5 percent of respondents (955 of 1,787) agreed that the force prioritises time for debrief and decompression sessions after incidents. The percentage of police and student officers agreeing that time is prioritised for these sessions was lower, at 44.6 percent (411 of 922). We found good evidence that these approaches were working, but also found that the force didn't always identify repeat exposure to traumatic incidents.

The force told us that there are currently 48 Blue Light peer supporter volunteers in the workforce, who can be contacted directly by staff needing help. They have received specific training. Occupational health provides clinical governance via a nurse who makes sure they don't have too many appointments with one individual and that they aren't overused.

Thames Valley Police also has 180 Blue Light champions, but they don't have the same training and clinical governance as Blue Light peer supporters.



# Leadership and force management

Requires  
improvement

Thames Valley Police's leadership and management requires improvement.

## Areas for improvement

**The force needs to assure itself that it has effective governance processes that are capable of overseeing strategic risks to make sure they are well managed**

We found gaps in the force's governance of its risk register, leading to a lack of appropriate progress.

The force has a detailed strategic plan for 2022/23, which considers the police and crime commissioner's [Police and Criminal Justice Plan 2021–25](#). The force has invested in systems and processes to give a better understanding of data and insight. The data is clearly aligned with the force's priorities. An established governance structure allows the force to measure performance progress against the plans.

However, we found several concerning issues that had already been identified as risks to the force and recorded on the force risk register. These are covered in more detail in other areas of this report, but include staffing in the [multi-agency safeguarding hubs](#), high levels of staff turnover and unmanageable workloads. Despite being on the force risk register for a considerable length of time, they hadn't been effectively resolved. We found similar issues in these areas during our last inspection.

The force needs to assure itself that its governance functions, especially those designed to identify and address force risk and operating issues, are more effective. This will help the force to anticipate and address more serious issues in a timely way and make sure its operating model and workforce help it to respond to priorities and current and future demand.

### **The force should create the capability and capacity it needs to invest in force leadership to help it become more efficient**

The force has prioritised leadership training for newly promoted police sergeants, but this has limited the training available for other leaders across the force. We were told that due to capacity issues in learning and development the force hasn't advertised leadership training opportunities to police staff managers since 2021.

While some leadership training is available to police staff, the force hasn't made this a mandatory requirement. This has led to a disparity between the levels of investment the force is making in its leaders. According to data provided by the force, a total of 167 out of 457 police staff employed in a supervisory capacity have had no formal leadership training that has been provided by the force.

Police leadership is a crucial factor that allows a force to perform well and be effective and efficient. The force should assure itself that its leadership training is proactive, effective and is available across the workforce.

## **Promising practice**

### **The force has improved productivity and efficiency by using robotic process automation**

During our last inspection, we found the force was using robotic process automation (RPA) to complete some repetitive administrative tasks. RPA works by using software to replace policing processes that were completed manually. We were pleased to see that the force has continued to invest in the use of RPA and now has nearly 50 in use. These include:

- helping the workforce with processing online firearms applications;
- transferring online reports to force computer systems;
- filing crimes;
- bail management checks;
- invoicing, processing CCTV requests;
- collecting data that help staff carry out risk assessments; and
- writing standard letters.

The force has also reviewed and updated RPA processes, such as how it supports the [multi-agency safeguarding hub](#) referral process, to maximise their effectiveness and address unintended consequences of automation.

The force has developed a PowerBI dashboard (data visualisation software) that tracks the benefits of using RPA. We were told that, during 2022, RPA completed over 90,000 hours of manual work that would previously have needed to be completed by a person. The time saved by replacing manual activities has removed demands in some areas of the force. This has created extra capacity and allowed the force to be more productive.

## Main findings

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

### **The force needs to make sure it is effective at managing demand and can demonstrate it has the right resources, processes and plans in place to meet current demand across the force**

The force is aware of its areas of risk, which are made clear through its performance framework and risk management. Despite this, there are areas of the force where demand continues to outstrip capacity. The force is committed to finding and driving out inefficiencies, and thereby releasing staff to priority areas. This work needs to continue if the force is to improve how well it manages its current demand.

### **The force has invested in digital improvements which support operational staff**

The force has invested in technology that provides operational staff with easier access to the systems, processes and data that they need to perform their roles efficiently. For example, the force uses Pronto, which gives officers access to force systems on their mobile devices. It has developed different ways to access data, in addition to traditional performance packs that are produced by analysts. While these are still important for providing helpful insight, leaders are also able to access data through a system called TEMPO. This can be filtered to provide performance information from a force level down to individual officers. The force has also developed Power BI (data visualisation) dashboards to cater for specific data needs. The force provides its workforce with access to good-quality information that is presented in a clear format to help make understanding the data easier.

The force has also looked for other ways to help make completing tasks faster and more efficient. For example, it has attached QR codes to workstations to make reporting IT faults easier. This allows officers to scan the code with their mobile device if there is an IT fault. This automatically creates most of the information needed to report the fault, such as the location and person reporting it. The officer then just needs to add some text to describe exactly what the issue is before submitting it. The force told us that issues are getting reported more consistently and are being resolved much faster because of this process. The force is now considering introducing a similar process to make reporting vehicle faults easier.

### **The force collaborates to improve services and has a clear focus on evaluation to make sure they continue to offer benefits**

The force collaborates effectively with its primary partner, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary. The forces work together in a range of different areas, which helps them to make savings by sharing resources. For example, the IT department provides a service to both forces, and they share a joint operations unit that includes functions such as roads policing, firearms, operations support, the dog unit, and mounted section. More widely, the force collaborates regionally with five other forces on its vehicle fleet.

The force has a rigorous approach to monitoring outcomes and reviewing the ongoing benefits from its collaborations to make sure they continue to offer the force good value for money.

### **The force's financial plans, including its investment programme, are affordable and will support it to continue to meet future demands**

The force shows effective financial management. It makes the best use of the finance it has available, and its financial plans are well thought out and sustainable.

In the year ending 31 March 2023, Thames Valley Police received £505m in funding. The force receives 45 percent of its total funding from council tax [precept](#), representing £228m. The police and crime commissioner (PCC) increased precept for the year 2023/24 by £15 per band D property. This extra funding was allocated to support improvements to public contact, local policing and crime prevention and to cover inflationary pressures the force is facing.

There is a clear link to the force's plans and priorities, which is reflected in the PCC's plans. The mid-term capital plan shows the force is investing in its services to bring about improvements in performance. Planned capital expenditure for 2023/24 amounts to £51m, including planned investment in its systems to support the force's longer-term ambition to provide innovative policing more efficiently.

The financial forecasts in the mid-term financial plan are based on realistic assumptions about future funding and expenditure. In 2022/23, the force maintained a balanced budget and expects to achieve this again at the end of this financial year. To achieve this, the force needs to make savings of £20m and has identified the areas where these will be made. The force is confident that the savings are achievable, and some of them have already been made in line with its savings plan. The force holds general reserves close to 3 percent of its net revenue budget, which is considered prudent.

