

PEEL 2023–25

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Durham Constabulary

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Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how good Durham Constabulary is in 11 areas of policing. We make graded judgments in 10 of these 11 as follows:

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

We also inspected how effective a service Durham Constabulary 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.

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 pleased with some aspects of the performance of Durham Constabulary in keeping people safe, reducing crime and providing victims with an effective service. I am satisfied with other aspects of the constabulary's performance, but there are areas in which it needs to improve.

Durham Constabulary's funding per 1,000 population is in line with the England and Wales average, and its charge rate is favourable when compared with other forces. But this funding isn't bringing about a good service in some important areas, such as protecting vulnerable people. Some 13 percent of neighbourhoods within the Durham Constabulary area are in the top 10 percent most deprived for income.

The constabulary has a higher-than-average number of non-emergency calls. But it doesn't always answer emergency and non-emergency calls in a timely way, and it doesn't always respond to calls for service as quickly as it should. This is partly because the constabulary hasn't re-invested in IT systems as they have become outdated. While the constabulary has tried to prioritise where it puts its resources, it needs to do more to meet the public's needs in all areas.

Overall, we found the constabulary isn't considering the breadth and depth of the available data to understand and improve its performance. This includes not doing analysis to fully understand its approach to vulnerability. The number of offences the constabulary records is in line with the England and Wales average. But it has the highest repeat incidents of domestic abuse per 1,000 population. And it isn't making good use of protective measures or effectively referring victims for support.

However, officers and staff feel that the constabulary supports them well. This is reflected in its success in retaining new recruits. But I want to see the constabulary do more to make sure that it fully represents the communities it serves. It is behind other forces in how it supports officers and staff from under-represented groups and makes sure that they progress in the service. I understand it has plans to address this and I look forward to seeing the impact this has in future inspections.

I was pleased to find that since our last PEEL inspection, the constabulary has continued to work well with local partner organisations to prevent crime and reduce [antisocial behaviour](#). It has shown that it is committed to problem-solving and tackling the root causes of crime. Responding to what is important to people improves confidence in policing and encourages local communities to get involved.

The leadership team has worked closely with inspection staff, and senior leaders have already started to plan how they will address the areas for improvement we have identified.

I hope the changes that follow result in improvements that help Durham Constabulary better meet the public's needs. We will be monitoring its 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 constabulary's leadership at all levels.

Senior leaders have clear plans that set out the constabulary's priorities. But they need to focus more on how these plans translate into operational activity and good performance. Progress recorded in some action plans was different from what we found during our inspection. Some governance processes aren't identifying demand and risks early enough. For example, despite the processes the constabulary has introduced to oversee the use of stop and search, performance in this area has deteriorated.

We found that leaders assessed their performance against outcomes and priorities but tended to focus too much on what is working well. Similarly, where performance falls below expectation, leaders tend to explain this in the context of underfunding and high demand. However, Durham Constabulary isn't an outlier in terms of funding or demand when compared with other forces in England and Wales. It creates new and innovative ways to reduce crime and keep people safe, but it needs to put the same energy into lower-performing areas. This is essential to achieving good performance and providing a better public service.

Senior leaders place great importance on officer retention, which has created a positive workforce culture. The constabulary shows a commitment to address unwanted behaviours and unfair treatment.

The constabulary is committed to developing leadership. It offers good 'leadership, well-being and inclusion' training for aspiring leaders. But it needs to focus on how it supports the progression of people from under-represented groups.

More detail on Durham Constabulary's leadership is included in the main body of the report.

Reducing crime assessment

The reducing crime assessment sets out what Durham Constabulary 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.

Durham Constabulary understands current and future demand. It has made problem-solving a priority throughout the organisation, which helps to reduce crime. It has effective processes to monitor the standard of investigations and help bring more offenders to justice.

The constabulary's [neighbourhood policing teams](#) work well with communities to understand and meet their needs. They are building trust and confidence with the public, encouraging them to share information to help deter crime.

The constabulary must improve the way it works with partner organisations to share information and safeguard victims, particularly those vulnerable to domestic abuse. It needs to understand why Durham and Darlington have more repeat incidents of domestic abuse than anywhere else in England and Wales. This will help it reduce crime in the future.

The constabulary needs to make sure that it consistently provides crime prevention advice at first contact. This helps the public to play their vital role in reducing crime.

The constabulary needs to improve its stop and search training/refresher training to make sure officers understand issues that can affect the fair treatment of the public. This will support better use of stop and search and help reduce crime.

More detail on what Durham Constabulary 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 Durham Constabulary provides to victims. This is from the point of reporting a crime and throughout the investigation. As part of this assessment, we reviewed 100 case files.

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

We selected 100 cases to review, including at least 20 that the constabulary had closed with the following outcome:

A community resolution (with or without formal restorative justice) has been applied in accordance with College of Policing guidance (outcome 8).

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

We set out more details about the constabulary's crime recording in the [crime data integrity](#) section below.

The constabulary needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency and non-emergency calls

The constabulary needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls and reduce the number of non-emergency calls abandoned by the caller because they aren't answered. In their calls, call handlers use a structured process that considers threat, harm, risk and vulnerability. But they don't always identify repeat victims. This means that they aren't always fully aware of the victim's circumstances when considering what response the constabulary should give. Call handlers are polite but don't always give victims advice on crime prevention and how to preserve evidence.

In most cases, the constabulary responds promptly to calls for service

On most occasions, the constabulary responds to calls for service appropriately. But sometimes it doesn't respond within set timescales. And it doesn't always inform victims of delays, meaning that their expectations aren't always met. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage from the process.

The constabulary's crime recording is of a good standard when it comes to making sure victims receive an appropriate level of service. It has effective processes in place to make sure it correctly records all crimes reported to it without delay.

We set out more details about the constabulary's crime recording in the [crime data integrity](#) section below.

The constabulary carries out effective and timely investigations

In most cases, the constabulary investigates crimes in a timely way, and it completes relevant and proportionate lines of enquiry. The constabulary needs to make sure supervisors effectively monitor investigations throughout and that investigators regularly update 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, the constabulary takes victim personal statements, which gives victims the opportunity to describe how that crime has affected their lives.

When victims withdraw support for an investigation, the constabulary considers progressing the case without their support. This can be an important method of [safeguarding](#) the victim and preventing further offences from being committed. In some cases, the constabulary doesn't always record whether it considered using orders designed to protect victims, such as a [Domestic Violence Protection Notice](#) or a [Domestic Violence Protection Order](#).

The [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) requires forces to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage to determine whether victims need additional support. The constabulary usually carries out this assessment and records the request for additional support if one is made.

The constabulary doesn't always assign the right outcome type to an investigation

The constabulary isn't consistently providing a level of service that gives victims the most appropriate result. It doesn't always close crimes with the appropriate [outcome type](#). It records a clear rationale for using a certain outcome, but it doesn't always effectively supervise this decision.

The constabulary seeks victims' views when deciding which outcome type to assign to a closed investigation. When required, investigators obtain an auditable record of the victim's wishes and the constabulary then informs them of the outcome code that is assigned.

Crime data integrity

Good

Durham Constabulary is good at recording crime.

The Home Office Counting Rules, which provide the standard for crime recording in England and Wales, have changed since the last time we inspected the constabulary for crime data integrity.

This change mainly relates to the way forces record violent crime. This means we can no longer compare the findings from this audit to those from previous audits.

We estimate that Durham Constabulary is recording 96.2 percent (with a [confidence interval](#) of +/- 1.9 percent) of all reported crime (excluding fraud).

We estimate that the constabulary is recording 94.2 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.0 percent) of sexual offences.

We estimate that the constabulary is recording 96.2 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.2 percent) of violent offences.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary needs to improve how it records equality data

Durham Constabulary's data for [victims](#) of crime shows that it records age and gender properly. But it doesn't always record ethnicity and it isn't good at recording other [protected characteristics](#). The constabulary should collect this information to understand the extent to which each protected group is affected by crime, how this differs from those without the protected characteristics and whether a different response is needed for these victims.

The constabulary needs to improve the time it takes to record crimes

The constabulary records less than three quarters of reported crime within 24 hours. Some crimes that we reviewed took the constabulary more than three days to record. Recording crime without delay helps make sure that victims receive the support they need. It also helps establish an effective investigation.

The constabulary needs to improve how it records crime when ‘antisocial behaviour personal’ is reported

In most cases where [antisocial behaviour personal](#) is reported by victims, the constabulary doesn’t record a crime or tackle problems. Of the 50 incidents we examined, the constabulary recorded only 1 crime when it should have recorded 9. Victims of antisocial behaviour personal are often harassed and abused for a long time, and their neighbours often commit crimes against them. Failing to record crimes and provide an effective service to tackle antisocial behaviour personal can mean victims live in fear in their own homes while neighbours and other local people torment and abuse them.

Main findings

In this section we set out our main findings that relate to crime data integrity.

The constabulary records rape offences effectively

The constabulary has continued to record rape offences well. Rape is one of the most serious crimes a victim can experience. It is especially important that crimes are recorded accurately to make sure victims receive the service and support they expect and deserve.

The constabulary doesn’t always record crimes against vulnerable victims

The constabulary doesn’t always record crimes against vulnerable victims. We reviewed 70 incidents. Of these incidents, the constabulary had recorded 31 crimes when it should have recorded 35. Some of the crimes missed were of a serious nature, such as [stalking](#) and [controlling and coercive behaviour](#). When the crime wasn’t recorded, sometimes there was also no investigation or safeguarding of the victim. Failure to record these crimes can result in offenders not being identified or brought to justice.

Police powers and treating the public fairly and respectfully

Adequate

Durham Constabulary is adequate at using police powers and treating people fairly and respectfully.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary needs to improve its training to make sure that officers understand and use stop and search powers fairly and appropriately

During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 254 stop and search records from 1 January to 31 December 2022. Based on this sample, we estimate that 77.2 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 5.0 percent) of all stop searches by the constabulary during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. This is a statistically significant deterioration compared with the findings from our previous review of records from 2020, where we found 89.5 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 5.3 percent) of stop searches had reasonable grounds recorded. Of the 14 records we reviewed for stop and searches on people from ethnic minority backgrounds, 11 had reasonable grounds recorded.

It is important that officers fully understand the need to record a detailed written explanation of why they considered a search necessary. The constabulary should properly train supervisors to assess whether the recorded grounds are reasonable and provide developmental feedback when needed. Stop and search powers are a valuable tool in preventing and detecting crime. However, if the constabulary can't show that it has used the tool fairly and appropriately, this risks undermining public trust and confidence.

The constabulary needs to improve the effectiveness of its internal and external scrutiny of officers' use of stop and search powers

Despite the time the constabulary commits to reviewing its use of stop and search, the notable fall in reasonable grounds recorded brings into question the effectiveness of its arrangements.

A supervisor reviews every stop and search record. In addition, an internal scrutiny panel meets monthly and reviews a [dip sample](#) of [body-worn video footage](#) of officers' use of stop and search. The panel also examines written records. Externally, the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) co-ordinates a panel of members of the public and, more recently, a youth scrutiny panel.

Involving the community in improving the constabulary's fair and appropriate use of stop and search is essential to maintaining its legitimacy with the public. The OPCC external panel meets quarterly. On each occasion, it reviews, on a rotational basis, stop and search, the arrest of people from ethnic minority communities and use of force.

In our inspection, we found that the meeting they attended had lots of people present whom the OPCC had given the necessary information to support their review. But this rotational method means the public can only provide feedback to the constabulary once or twice a year. As such, the feedback has limited impact on improving its service.

Main findings

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

The constabulary has a good understanding of how to use police powers respectfully, but training could be improved

The way police treat people while exercising their powers has a direct impact on the public's confidence in policing. During our inspection, we reviewed [body-worn video](#) footage of 11 stop and search encounters with the public. This showed that officers communicated effectively and treated people with dignity and respect during the stop and search. However, the constabulary needs to be sure that the training it gives officers supports them in maintaining this standard.

The constabulary uses stop and search scenarios in annual officer safety training to maintain knowledge and skills. This is positive. But it only gives officers limited awareness about issues that can negatively affect their judgment. The constabulary should consider how broader topics in stop and search training, such as mental

health awareness, can support continuous improvement in officers' encounters with the public.

The constabulary monitors stop and search but needs to make better use of data to understand disproportionality

In the year ending 31 March 2022, Durham Constabulary carried out 2,231 stop and searches. This was a reduction of 6.2 percent compared with the previous year. This was a smaller reduction than the rate of 25.9 percent across all forces in England and Wales.

Based on data from the 2021 Census, in the year ending 31 March 2022, Black people were 2.4 times as likely as White people to be the subject of a stop and search by Durham Constabulary. The constabulary knows about this disproportionality. But it needs to analyse a more comprehensive set of data to better understand the situation.

The constabulary prefers to use 'positive outcomes' to measure how well it uses stop and search powers. Positive outcomes refers to action taken, such as an arrest, [caution](#) or warning. While not uncommon among forces in England and Wales, this method of measuring performance can mislead forces into concluding that their use of stop and search is more effective than it actually is. This is because the outcome being recorded may not be as a direct result of the search.

The constabulary should make better use of its linked [find rate](#) data to better understand why it is stop and searching more Black people than White people. The find rate is a measure of how often officers find the object they are looking for when doing a search. In the year ending 31 March 2022, officers in Durham Constabulary found the object they were looking for in 12.7 percent of searches. This is the lowest linked find rate in England and Wales. If the constabulary is to improve proportionality, it needs to understand why officers find what they are looking for on so few occasions.

The constabulary is recording most of use of force incidents

In the year ending 31 March 2022, Durham Constabulary recorded 9,208 use of force incidents. This is equivalent to 14.6 use of force incidents per 1,000 population – an increase of 10.8 percent compared with the previous year. However, this increase is unlikely to reflect a true increase in the number of use of force incidents. The constabulary has improved its recording practices following a recent system update and has been encouraging officers to submit forms for compliant handcuffing. These changes are likely to be contributing factors. Based on the number of arrests, we estimate that the constabulary still under-recorded use of force incidents by at least 432 during this period. While this is up slightly on under-recording the year before, it is a low figure when compared with the England and Wales average.

In the same period, 1.3 percent of the constabulary's use of force incidents involved people from an ethnic minority background. In the force area, 3.6 percent of the population is from an ethnic minority background.

The constabulary has recently invested in an application so officers can quickly and easily record a use of force incident via their mobile devices. This also provides the constabulary with more accurate data that is capable of supporting continued improvement in this area. We look forward to reporting on this in future inspections.

Preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behaviour, and reducing vulnerability

Good

Durham Constabulary is good at prevention and deterrence.

Main findings

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

The constabulary makes good use of its own and shared data

The inspection found effective multi-agency arrangements in place in relation to antisocial behaviour and harm reduction. The constabulary and local partners organisations provide access to each other's information systems, which makes meetings more effective. This means that parties are quickly able to share data and take action concerning vulnerable people, locations, repeat victims and offenders. This data is also available to officers and staff in the form of profiles, helping to make sure that the force prioritises people and locations vulnerable to crime and antisocial behaviour.

For example, the constabulary works with Durham County Council Selective Licensing Team to reduce antisocial behaviour associated with rented properties owned by absent landlords. People wishing to rent property in designated selective licence areas must have a licence. Licence conditions include maintaining the property to a reasonable standard and accepting responsibility for tenants' criminal conduct and/or antisocial behaviour. If landlords fail to get a licence or comply with conditions, they can be prosecuted. In some cases, the local authority can also take over the management of the property. Neighbourhood officers we talked to spoke positively about the impact the scheme was having on antisocial behaviour in rented property.

The constabulary uses a range of prevention initiatives to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour

During our inspection, we found many examples of how the constabulary works with other organisations to prevent or reduce crime. For example, the constabulary has promoted the windows, interior, doors, exterior (WIDE) crime prevention initiative, which it told us has achieved a 64 percent reduction in burglaries reported in hotspot areas.

In Darlington, the constabulary has used external funding to support people affected by crime in the night-time economy. Working with the local authority, police and civic enforcement officers provide a dedicated approach to women identified as potentially vulnerable while out in the town. Help points fitted to town centre lampposts are also available to anyone who feels unsafe. The user can simply push a button to connect with town centre CCTV operators who can quickly assess the situation, gather evidence and get help to the scene if needed.

The constabulary has invested in its police community support officers

In many forces, the number of police community support officers (PCSOs) has declined. Durham Constabulary has maintained its numbers of PCSOs and made a notable investment in their professional development. All PCSOs must achieve a level 4 higher education certificate in community policing. One area tested by the training is the ability to identify a local issue and develop a problem-solving plan in response.

A PCSO we spoke to described how, having been through the training, they identified an increase in thefts from a row of local shops. They made a link between the thefts and a known antisocial behaviour offender living nearby who was sending his visitors out to steal for him. The PCSO worked with the private landlord to secure an eviction order and worked with the local authority to successfully apply for a criminal behaviour order. The removal of the suspect put a stop to visits from people willing to steal on his behalf and reduced crime among local businesses.

This training helps PCSOs to prevent emerging problems escalating into crime and antisocial behaviour in the community.

Durham Constabulary works well with the public

During our inspection, we found that neighbourhood police officers and PCSOs were highly motivated and committed to meeting the needs of the local community. The constabulary understands the importance of talking to people as a way of understanding what the local community needs. While it still holds more traditional police and community meetings, it has recognised the need to be creative in how it communicates with the public.

For example, Cop a Bike is an initiative whereby the police invite members of the community, often young people, to come and help officers repair donated bicycles, which they can then keep. Alternatively, if a local person has a bicycle in need of repair, they can bring it to the sessions and an officer will fix it. The officer can talk with the person while fixing the bike. This gives officers valuable insight into what is happening in their area while diverting young people away from crime and antisocial behaviour.

Senior leaders can do more to show the value they place on neighbourhood policing

The constabulary has worked hard to raise the profile of neighbourhood policing within the organisation with formal reward and recognition for problem-solving and prevention work. However, some officers and PCSOs we spoke to felt that senior leaders don't always value neighbourhood policing. For example, we were told that senior leaders rarely have contact with neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs).

We understand that the constabulary has to make difficult decisions about resource allocation. At the time of our inspection, it had identified areas in need of more support and had temporarily moved some officers away from their main duties to support colleagues on response teams to answer calls for service. We also found that there were some NPT vacancies. The constabulary has maintained its PCSO numbers and invested in better training to reduce the impact of these vacancies. This means that PCSOs can take on greater responsibility and maintain the constabulary's commitment to neighbourhood policing. The constabulary also promotes the role of volunteers and the special constabulary well. This includes providing opportunities for volunteers and special constables in areas normally reserved for paid officers and staff.

We are satisfied that the constabulary has a clear and achievable plan to address its NPT vacancies. But we would encourage it to make sure that its senior leaders communicate with NPTs. This will support a clearer understanding of constabulary resourcing decisions and help avoid further damage to officer and staff morale.

Responding to the public

Requires
improvement

Durham Constabulary requires improvement at responding to the public.

Areas for improvement

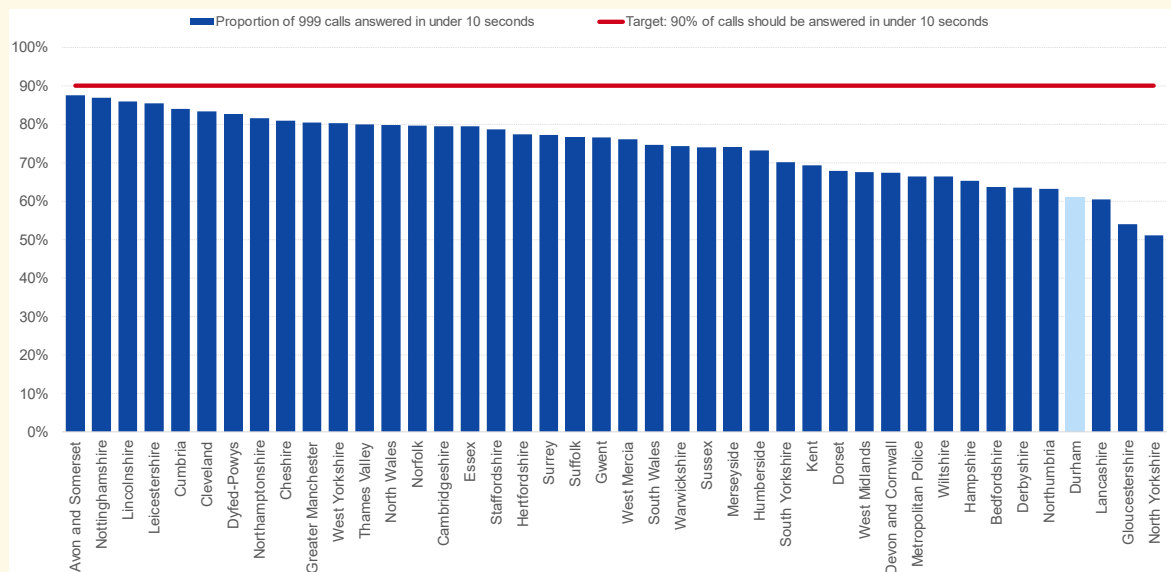
The constabulary needs to make sure it answers calls quickly enough

In the year ending 31 March 2023, Durham Constabulary received 155 calls to,999 per 1,000 population. This was in line with other forces in England and Wales.

In the same period, the constabulary answered 61 percent of its 999 calls within 10 seconds. This is below the expected standard of answering 90 percent within 10 seconds. Some of these emergency calls are likely to go unanswered. Similarly, the constabulary told us that, during the same period, an average of 20.2 percent of its non-emergency calls were abandoned before being answered.

The constabulary understands its call data and has taken some action to improve performance. But a lack of long-term investment means systems are outdated and not meeting current demand. The constabulary told us of its plan to improve call-handling systems and, at the time of our inspection, an increase in staffing numbers had been approved. We would encourage the constabulary to make sure that these plans are implemented to avoid further deterioration in service. Failing to answer calls quickly enough can mean losing both public confidence and investigative opportunities.

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



The constabulary needs to attend calls for service in line with its published attendance times

In our victim service assessment, we found that the incident response time was within the required attendance time in only 59 of the 78 relevant cases we examined (whether downgraded or not). This delayed response can lead to the constabulary missing opportunities to safeguard victims and/or collect evidence. The constabulary should have the right levels of oversight in place to improve the way it prioritises its response to incidents and how quickly it responds. If the constabulary doesn't understand its performance at answering calls and responding to incidents, it will find it more difficult to improve the service it provides.

The constabulary needs to make sure it promptly identifies vulnerability when people go missing

During our inspection, we found that the constabulary didn't always identify vulnerability when people, particularly children and young people, go missing. In the cases we examined, it had incorrectly assessed some children vulnerable to exploitation and/or with a history of self-harm as medium risk. We found that some supervisor reviews didn't adequately identify or understand risk, which is a concern. For example, an inspector assessed a [looked after child](#) as medium risk and they had a history of self-harming and were believed to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The decision was made because the child went missing frequently and was usually found at their estranged mother's address in a neighbouring force area.

The constabulary needs to make sure its officers and staff have a thorough understanding of the vulnerabilities connected with missing from home incidents. It needs to make sure that risk assessments properly reflect these vulnerabilities. And it needs to monitor the quality of supervision. Failing to properly recognise risk leads to missed opportunities to safeguard vulnerable people, which potentially exposes them to further harm.

Innovative practice

The constabulary makes good use of volunteers to reduce control room demand

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner funds and organises a community peer mentor (CPM) project. CPMs are volunteers who help reintegrate vulnerable members of the community into society. In addition to offering support, the project aims to reduce demand on services by diverting people toward learning new skills and coping techniques.

Sometimes, people who feel isolated call emergency services because they have nobody else to talk to. The constabulary gave examples of the force control room using CPMs to support frequent callers who felt isolated. The CPMs had successfully diverted the callers into other activities, with the potential to make their lives better. In some examples, the constabulary saw a notable reduction in the number of calls a person made and in others the calls completely stopped.

Main findings

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

The constabulary uses structured triage so it can prioritise calls and give the public an appropriate response most of the time

As part of our victim service assessment, we found that, in 92 of the 94 calls we reviewed, the constabulary accurately recorded a structured triage and risk assessment. This is important to making sure that the constabulary properly assesses a victim's needs and responds in the right way. A comprehensive [risk assessment](#) means that the constabulary can prioritise calls even in times of high demand.

However, we found that the constabulary had inappropriately allocated some incidents for a scheduled appointment. It has a robust process, which means that a scheduled appointment supervisor uses the [THRIVE model](#) to assess the suitability of all incidents allocated for scheduled appointments. If they believe the incident should be a greater priority, then it is returned for reassessment. However, scheduled appointment supervisors are only available between 8am and 10pm. During the night, [control room](#) sergeants provide this supervision. But, during our inspection, we found that this didn't always happen. We would encourage the constabulary to make sure that the supervision of incidents is consistent day and night.

Call handlers don't always give appropriate advice on the preservation of evidence and crime prevention

As part of our victim service assessment, we found that, in 26 of the 32 calls we reviewed, the call handler gave appropriate advice on the preservation of evidence. They also gave appropriate advice on crime prevention in 42 of the 55 relevant cases reviewed.

The preservation of evidence is crucial to achieving a good outcome for victims, bringing offenders to justice and preventing further offending. Victims of crime have an important role to play in helping the police achieve this, but they need the right advice. When that advice isn't consistently provided, evidence can be lost or destroyed. The same importance must be applied to supporting the public with crime prevention advice. Good crime prevention advice reduces harm to the public and demand on the service.

The constabulary hasn't acted quickly enough to assess future demand and risk in contact management

We acknowledge that the constabulary has had to make difficult decisions about where to put its resources and spend its money. Before the pandemic, there was a plan in place to improve contact management systems. But post-pandemic economic instability in the industry caused the constabulary to withdraw from the project.

During our inspection, we found contact management senior leaders had a good understanding of control room demand and its risks to service. But the constabulary hasn't invested in this area. As a result, at the time of our inspection, it was unable to meet 999 and non-emergency call demand or attend incidents within its published attendance times.

In the year ending 30 September 2022, the constabulary received 417.5 non-emergency calls per 1,000 population, which is notably higher than the England and Wales average of 256.6. However, it recorded a low number of incidents, when compared with other forces, at 186.7 per 1,000 population in the same period. This might suggest that a considerable volume of the constabulary's non-emergency call demand doesn't represent a call for service.

Despite this, the constabulary has been slower than other forces to introduce different ways for the public to contact them. For example, its facility for the public to report online ([single online home](#)) is currently limited to road traffic incidents and violence against women and girls. One result is that the constabulary can't adequately meet its non-emergency call demand. Broadening this service sooner could relieve some non-emergency demand and provide a better service to the public.

Since our inspection, the constabulary has allocated additional resources to the control room. And it has a plan to improve systems and fully implement single online home. With appropriate oversight, this plan has the potential to improve performance in this area which we look forward to reviewing in future inspections.

Investigating crime

Adequate

Durham Constabulary is adequate at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary doesn't consistently achieve appropriate outcomes for victims

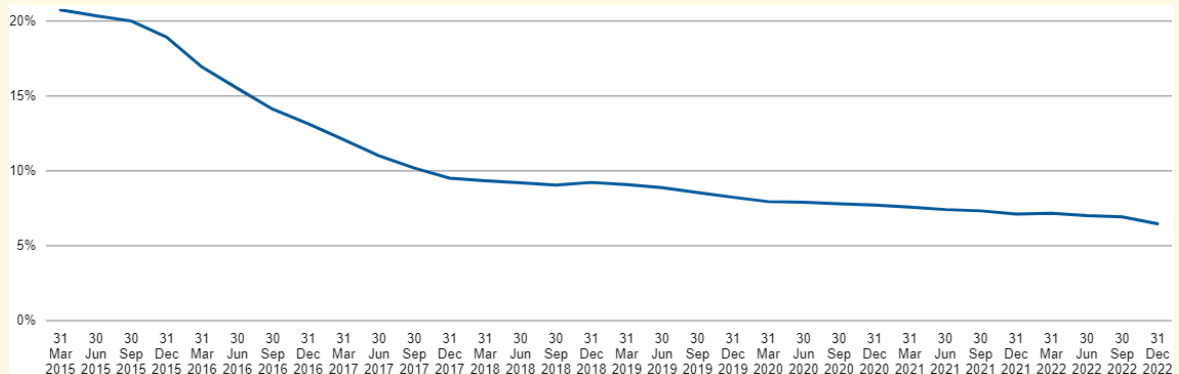
The constabulary doesn't always achieve acceptable outcomes for victims of crime. It solves unacceptably low numbers of crimes following investigation. The constabulary needs to understand the issue and work to achieve better outcomes for victims.

Figure 2: Percentage of victim-based crime recorded by Durham Constabulary and all forces in England and Wales by selected outcome types in the year ending 31 December 2022

Outcome types	Durham rate	England and Wales rate
1: Charged/summonsed	6.4%	4.6%
2 and 3: Caution – youths and caution – adults	1.2%	0.7%
8: Community resolutions	4.2%	1.4%
9: Prosecution not in the public interest (Crown Prosecution Service)	0.0%	0.0%
10 and 21: Prosecution not in the public interest (police decision)	2.2%	0.8%
14: Evidential difficulties (suspect not identified; victim doesn't support further action)'	2.1%	5.6%
15: Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)	19.7%	11.7%
16: Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim doesn't support further action)	18.4%	21.9%
17: Prosecution time limit expired	0.0%	0.3%
18: Investigation complete – no suspect identified	35.8%	40.9%
20: Action taken by another body	1.6%	1.4%
22: Diversionary, education or intervention activity	1.0%	0.4%

Note: England and Wales; excludes City of London data

Figure 3: Proportion of victim-based crimes assigned a ‘charged/summonsed’ (outcome 1) by Durham Constabulary between the year ending 31 March 2015 and the year ending 31 December 2022



In the year ending 31 December 2022, Durham Constabulary recorded 51,315 victim-based crimes. Of these recorded offences, 13.3 percent were assigned an ‘offences brought to justice’ outcome, the highest across England and Wales. More specifically, 6.4 percent were assigned a ‘charged/summonsed’ outcome.

In the year ending 31 December 2022, the proportion of victim-based crimes assigned [outcome 15](#): ‘Evidential difficulties: suspect identified; victim supports further action’ by Durham Constabulary was 19.7 percent. This is a decrease from the previous year, when it was 25.9 percent, but it is higher than expected compared with other forces in England and Wales (the average is 11.7 percent).

This reduction is positive. But, given the closure of some investigations with inappropriate outcomes, we can’t confidently say that it is entirely due to an improvement in investigations.

When considering positive outcomes for victims, the number of offenders actually prosecuted can get lost. Across England and Wales, the number of offenders charged with offences has been decreasing for a notable period of time. Despite having a higher percentage of positive outcomes than most forces, the percentage of cases where Durham Constabulary achieves a good outcome for the victim remains unacceptably low. The constabulary must strive to improve this and maintain its focus on bringing offenders to justice.

The constabulary needs to make sure it is using outcomes appropriately, which comply with force and national policies, leading to satisfactory results for victims

The constabulary doesn't always close crimes with the appropriate outcome type. During our inspection, we found it had applied the correct outcome in 67 of the 91 relevant cases reviewed. The correct application of outcomes is essential for effective performance monitoring. If the constabulary incorrectly applies outcomes, established performance frameworks may not identify emerging themes. This could undermine its aim of achieving better results for victims.

Innovative practice

The constabulary is using medical evidence effectively to pursue more evidence-led prosecutions in domestic abuse cases

Victims of domestic abuse don't always feel able to tell the police what has happened. Evidence of a visible injury can help police to prosecute a perpetrator without the victim needing to provide evidence themselves. But sometimes a medically qualified person will need to corroborate this evidence, which isn't possible if the victim doesn't feel able to accept treatment. Similarly, medical statements that are given can take many weeks to become available to investigators. In both instances, this reduces the possibility of an evidence-led prosecution.

Durham Constabulary is trying to overcome this by broadening the terms of its force medical provision to include a medically qualified doctor attending the scenes of domestic abuse incidents. The doctor will examine and treat the victim, with their consent, and note and photograph any visible injuries. They will then prepare a medical statement that is immediately available to investigators. This independent evidence increases the possibility of charging an offender on their first visit to custody and reduces the likelihood of the victim coming to further harm.

The constabulary is using SmartWater technology to protect victims of stalking

The SmartWater crime prevention tool can forensically link offenders to objects or locations. It looks like ordinary water, but each container has its own unique forensic code registered to the person it is issued to. When sprayed onto property, it leaves an invisible trace on any person handling that item, meaning that, should the property be stolen, police are able to forensically link people to it.

Durham Constabulary issues SmartWater 'smart-tags' to people vulnerable to stalking behaviour. If, for example, a stalking perpetrator is following a victim or invading their personal space, the smart-tag can be used to spray the offender and leave that invisible trace. This helps the constabulary to forensically link the perpetrator to the behaviour the victim reports and removes the opportunity for the offender to say they weren't there, or that it was somebody else. This improves the potential of achieving a prosecution and offers additional reassurance to vulnerable victims.

The constabulary is improving the digital competence of investigators

Digital devices feature in more investigations. Durham Constabulary has therefore made efforts to broaden investigators' skills in this area while reducing the number of enquiries directed toward its digital forensics department.

The digital advisory network (DAN) is made up of volunteer police officers and staff who have a professional interest in digital investigation. Any investigator can 'Ask DAN' by emailing a question to a dedicated inbox. That question is then circulated automatically around the network and those able to help email answers directly to the investigator asking. Officers and staff we spoke to found the initiative a helpful but informal way of accessing specialist knowledge. This has had the added benefit of reducing enquiries received in the digital forensics department, meaning that more time can be spent on specialist digital investigations.

Main findings

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

The constabulary has effective governance and oversight of investigations

Durham Constabulary's overall approach to improving investigations is referred to locally as Operation Crystal. The constabulary has established a range of scrutiny panels for victim-based crime within this framework. Accredited senior investigators oversee the panels and examine the quality of investigations. They give individual feedback where necessary. They also identify themes for consideration at the investigations governance group chaired by the head of crime.

The constabulary has introduced a range of templates and guides designed to improve, among other themes, victim focus, supervisor input and handover quality. Officers and staff we talked to spoke positively about the impact Operation Crystal has had on their investigative knowledge. We found this framework to be effective in identifying key areas where the constabulary can continue to improve investigations and secure better outcomes for victims.

The constabulary provides a good level of service under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime most of the time

In the year ending 31 December 2022, 18.4 percent of outcomes assigned to victim-based offences recorded by Durham Constabulary were 'evidential difficulties: suspect identified, victim does not support further action' ([outcome 16](#)). We found an auditable record of the victims' views in 28 of 34 relevant cases we reviewed that had this outcome. When a victim withdrew their support for the investigation, the constabulary considered evidence-led prosecutions to protect them from further offences in 17 of the 21 relevant cases we reviewed.

We found that the constabulary updated victims on the outcome of an investigation in 83 of the 85 cases we reviewed. It provided a good level of service in line with the code of practice for victims of crime in 92 of the 100 cases we reviewed.

In the year ending 31 December 2022, 19.7 percent of outcomes assigned by Durham Constabulary for victim-based crime were 'evidential difficulties; victim supports action' ([outcome 15](#)). This is a decrease of around 6 percentage points on the previous year.

The reductions are positive. But, given the closure of some investigations with inappropriate outcomes, we can't confidently say that this is entirely due to an improvement in the handling of investigations.

Providing a high level of service is essential to maintaining the trust and confidence of victims of crime. It encourages reporting, supports the constabulary's efforts to bring offenders to justice and ultimately contributes to a reduction in crime.

The constabulary needs to continue to improve how investigations are supervised

Within the comprehensive framework, Operation Crystal, the constabulary scrutinises how effectively investigations are being supervised. Officers and staff we spoke to were positive about the supervision of investigations they were managing. Despite this, we found evidence of effective supervision in only 69 of the 88 relevant cases reviewed.

Operation Crystal remains a relatively new initiative and it is possible that some of the investigations we reviewed took place before it was introduced. We would encourage the constabulary to maintain its proactive approach to improving investigations. It should confirm that supervisors understand what is expected of them in making sure that investigators pursue all investigative opportunities from the outset and throughout an investigation.

Protecting vulnerable people

Requires
improvement

Durham Constabulary requires improvement at protecting vulnerable people.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should establish an effective performance framework for its multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to make sure it is capable of meeting current and future demand

The constabulary contributes to two [multi-agency safeguarding hubs \(MASHs\)](#), each covering its constituent local authority area of Durham or Darlington. During our inspection, we found that the constabulary's MASH function was struggling with demand. This was evident in the backlogs of referral forms awaiting triage, minutes of child safeguarding strategy meetings waiting to be added to force systems, and out-of-county enquiries that hadn't been addressed.

The constabulary was able to show how it monitored MASH demand. But officers and staff we spoke to were unsure how supervisors reviewed this at a senior level. Progressing safeguarding referrals quickly is critical to keeping people safe.

The constabulary needs to make sure that its MASH function is properly equipped to meet demand. It should make sure that it has effective performance frameworks. These frameworks should be capable of identifying emerging demand pressures and reducing the additional risk caused by delays in the assessment of referrals being shared with partner organisations within the hubs.

The constabulary needs to make better use of protective measures to keep vulnerable victims safe

In the year ending 30 September 2022, Durham Constabulary recorded 16.8 repeat domestic abuse-related incidents per 1,000 population. This was the highest number across forces in England and Wales. It notably exceeds the average of 2.1 incidents per 1,000 population. The constabulary also recorded the highest number of repeat domestic abuse-related crimes in that period, at 14.0 per 1,000 population. The England and Wales rate was 5.8 crimes per 1,000 population.

Despite this, the constabulary applied for only 3.6 [Domestic Violence Protection Orders](#) per 1,000 recorded domestic abuse-related crimes during that period. This was lower than the England and Wales average of 12.2 Domestic Violence Protection Order applications per 1,000 recorded domestic-abuse related crimes.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, Durham Constabulary recorded 3,616 domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences, equalling 5.7 offences per 1,000 population. This is higher than the England and Wales average of 3.9 offences per 1,000 population. During this time, the constabulary made only two full [Stalking Protection Order](#) applications at court, and only one of those applications was successful.

Protective measures are a powerful tool designed to help keep vulnerable victims safe. The space that protective measures create between a victim and a perpetrator provides an opportunity for other services, such as Women's Aid, to intervene and offer support. Failure to apply for protective measures, where appropriate, denies victims this opportunity and potentially places them at risk of greater harm.

The constabulary needs to improve how it manages multi-agency risk assessment conferences and multi-agency tasking and co-ordination referrals

The [SafeLives](#) recommendation for the number of [multi-agency risk assessment conference \(MARAC\)](#) cases to discuss in Durham, based on the size of the local population, is 1,040. In the year ending 31 March 2023, Durham Constabulary discussed 718 cases. This is an increase from 630 the previous year but is still lower than we would expect.

We therefore reviewed the rationale given in high-risk cases that weren't referred to MARAC. We found that some unreferred cases should have been discussed at MARAC. Examples included incidents where victims had been strangled, suffered violence with weapons in front of their children and/or been subjected to violence or abuse while pregnant. We are concerned that a supervising officer had endorsed these decisions.

The constabulary needs to make sure that all victims who meet the MARAC criteria are being provided with access to the full range of interventions MARAC can offer. It should satisfy itself that officers and staff involved in the referral decision-making process fully understand the MARAC criteria. And it should consider how it monitors the quality of decision-making in this area.

We found that a lack of available resources had resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of perpetrators referred to multi-agency tasking and co-ordination (MATAC) meetings, from over 150 the previous year to 14 at the time of our inspection. MATAC is a process used to identify and tackle serial perpetrators of domestic abuse.

While the constabulary isn't required to have a MATAC process, it does need to have effective measures in place to mitigate the harm caused by perpetrators. The constabulary needs to make sure that any process is properly resourced and supported by the right organisational structure. In relation to both MARAC and MATAC, the constabulary risks placing victims at risk of further harm if improvements aren't made.

The constabulary should improve the timeliness of disclosures made under the criteria of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme

The [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme \(DVDS\)](#) is also known as Clare's Law. It allows the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's or ex-partner's previous abusive or violent offending.

When a disclosure application is successful, the police should disclose relevant information within 28 days. At the time of our inspection, we found that the constabulary was consistently failing to meet this timescale with the longest period being 64 days.

We were pleased to find that the constabulary had made the DVDS application process available online to encourage more people to use the scheme. This has resulted in an increase in applications, but the constabulary hasn't invested in the necessary infrastructure to meet this additional demand. We found that it was managing the demand through overtime and the lack of available resource was delaying disclosure.

Once the police are satisfied that there is information suitable for disclosure, they must take steps to disclose this as quickly as possible. Delays restrict a victim or potential victim's opportunity to make an informed decision about a potentially violent or abusive person's role in their life and this increases the risk of harm.

Main findings

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

The force vulnerability action plan doesn't always translate into effective operational practice

The constabulary has a vulnerability action plan and a child-centred strategy. But it is unclear how these strategies influence activity. This is evidenced by the number of areas for improvement identified in this report.

The constabulary has a governance framework and holds regular meetings to oversee and improve its approach to vulnerability. These meetings bring together appointed leads to examine, support and understand performance in this area. Despite this, until we identified them during this inspection, the constabulary wasn't aware of all the areas it needed to improve. On the contrary, it had described some parts of its vulnerability action plan as effective, when this wasn't the case.

The constabulary has current profiles for some types of vulnerability and takes steps to get feedback from victims. We were pleased to see how victims' feedback has influenced the content of the domestic abuse training that the constabulary has provided to over 1,400 officers and staff.

We would encourage the constabulary to review its strategy and action plan with a view to establishing how these influence operational practice and make people safer.

The constabulary uses victims' feedback to improve domestic abuse training

The constabulary has made good use of victims' feedback to develop its domestic abuse training. The training focuses on the difficult topic of coercion and control and features an in-depth case study of how that affected a real family. This is given from the family's perspective. It challenges officers to consider coercion and control when attending incidents, even when everything they observe they wouldn't otherwise question.

Similarly, the constabulary has developed an effective first responder training package. This training takes officers through each step of attending a domestic abuse-related incident. It includes the importance of empathy and the impact of first impression on a victim's decision to tell police what has happened.

Officers we spoke to told us that the training had helped them consider domestic abuse-related incidents from the victim's perspective. This kind of victim-focused training is essential to improving the service given to victims and bringing more offenders to justice. The constabulary may wish to consider using it as an opportunity to raise officers' awareness of protective measures, given its performance in this area.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

Durham Constabulary is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary needs to make sure that bail is always considered as a safeguarding measure

The constabulary has processes in place to monitor the use of [bail](#) and this is reported on during force performance meetings. But it doesn't consistently use bail as a safeguarding measure. We found that only 11 of 69 suspects under investigation for [indecent images of children](#) offences were subject to bail conditions. This means that, despite the nature of offences under investigation, there were no safeguarding measures to prevent those [released under investigation](#) from having contact with children.

It is appropriate for investigators and supervisors to consider each case on its merits. But the constabulary must make sure that every opportunity to safeguard children is taken. This should include the application of bail conditions where suspects present a risk to children and vulnerable people.

The constabulary should review how it uses its resources to manage registered sex offenders

The constabulary has a hybrid model for managing registered sex offenders. Officers managing very-high and high-risk offenders are based in a centralised [public protection unit](#). 'Locality' officers manage medium and low-risk offenders based at local stations.

During our inspection, we found occasions where officers carried out very-high and high-risk registered sex offender visits alone when the risk management plan (RMP) required officers to visit in pairs or 'double crewed'. The constabulary responded quickly to this feedback and on further inspection we were pleased to find that measures had been put in place to prevent this from happening. Where the RMP doesn't mandate double crewing, the constabulary sends lone officers to very-high and high-risk offender visits, with at least every third visit double crewed. This sits outside [authorised professional practice](#) for managing of registered sex offenders. By comparison, we found that locality officers consistently visited registered sex offenders in pairs. This means that a very-high or high-risk registered sex offender is more likely to be visited by an officer working alone than an offender who presents a medium or low level of risk.

Accurate RMPs rely on detailed observation of an offender's environment. This is more difficult for officers working alone. Authorised professional practice is guidance only and forces do have the discretion to step outside its recommendations. We recognise the constabulary has sacrificed double crewing every visit to make sure visits are prompt. However, we encourage the constabulary to review its position on officer allocation, making sure that the appropriate resources are directed toward the highest-risk offenders.

Innovative practice

The constabulary provides support to the families of those under investigation for indecent images of children offences

When someone is arrested and/or investigated for [indecent images of children](#) offences, the consequences are often devastating for the suspect's family. This can result in the suspect losing their job and reputation. Where there are children in the family, local services will be involved, meaning that families will sometimes become separated. Suspects' partners might blame themselves for not knowing about the suspect's behaviour.

Durham Constabulary has recognised this and has taken steps to make sure families get the support they need in these circumstances. Working with victim care services, families are offered a referral at the time of arrest. The offer is repeated after three weeks. This provides an opportunity for the family to reflect on what has happened and to be in a better position to accept support.

Main findings

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

The constabulary effectively pursues suspects and wanted persons to protect the public from harm

The constabulary prioritises and monitors suspects. It makes good use of its operating system, Red Sigma, to prepare offender profiles to make sure that the highest-harm offenders are arrested quickly. The constabulary discusses suspects that it considers to be high priority at daily force management meetings and senior leaders take responsibility through the allocation of resources. The constabulary prepares data that tells senior leaders how many suspects or wanted persons haven't been located.

The constabulary doesn't have specific guidance that would support officers and staff to decide when a suspect should be circulated as wanted on the [police national computer](#). Officers and staff we spoke to had different views on when this should happen. The constabulary requires detective inspectors to review investigations, including what steps have been taken to arrest suspects, to safeguard against suspects not being circulated when they should be. The effectiveness of this process wasn't tested during our inspection. As such, the constabulary should provide clearer guidance to officers and staff to make sure that suspects are added to the police national computer without delays.

The constabulary uses nationally recognised risk assessment tools to manage registered sex offenders

On initial inspection, there was a backlog of registered sex offender visits and records such as risk management plans weren't always up to date. The constabulary responded quickly to the feedback we provided and made sure that it included processes for monitoring overdue work within its performance meetings. On further inspection, we were pleased to find no notable backlog of registered sex offender visits and that records were regularly updated.

Offender managers carry out most visits unannounced and the quality of risk assessments they produce is of a good standard. Supervision of risk assessments is also good. Supervisors' reviews of the records we reviewed were specific to the offender being managed, and provided a good level of support and oversight to officers and staff. This is essential for making sure that offender managers properly identify risks and put a plan in place to mitigate them.

Overdue visits, or visits soon to become overdue, form part of a monthly dataset that the constabulary uses to monitor team performance and take remedial action where necessary. It is too early for us to report the long-term impact these changes have made, but we look forward to reviewing this during future inspections.

The constabulary effectively manages the risk posed by online child abuse offenders

The constabulary has a small but dedicated online child abuse investigation team (OCAIT). OCAIT manages the majority of [indecent images of children \(IIOC\)](#) cases that the constabulary investigates, with a small number of cases allocated to investigators in the criminal investigation department.

During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of investigations. We found that the constabulary consistently acted within nationally recognised risk assessment timescales for enforcement action. Officers consistently arrest IIOC suspects and appropriately use powers from the [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984](#) to search. But the constabulary doesn't always use the powers provided by a search warrant. This limits investigators' powers if they are unable to complete the arrest for any reason and this could risk the loss of evidence.

OCAIT investigators understand the importance of completing a referral to social services as quickly as possible when they believe that a suspect has access to children. This allows the services to begin sharing information and helps them build an accurate picture of the risk that the suspect poses.

It is important that forces take extra steps to identify victims and safeguard them from further abuse wherever possible, in addition to proving any offences. The constabulary has invested in a victim identification post, which is a positive addition to OCAIT's capability.

The constabulary makes good use of digital forensics in managing registered sex offenders and indecent images of children suspects

The constabulary has a dedicated digital investigation and intelligence unit (DII). During our inspection, we found no notable backlogs in the examination of [digital forensics](#) that might delay investigations. It was clear that the DII prioritises investigations involving vulnerable persons. The DII and OCAIT are located together and share a second line manager. This has fostered a collaborative relationship between the two departments.

In our 2021 inspection, we reported on Operation Parallelogram. This initiative uses DII resources to proactively target registered sex offenders suspected of breaching the terms of their sex offender registration. The constabulary told us that, since 2021, the DII has taken action on 475 occasions and examined over 1,000 devices. This has resulted in 16 arrests and 14 charges that otherwise wouldn't have happened.

As the police have become more proactive in how they tackle online child abuse and exploitation, the number of registered sex offenders living in the community has risen. This creates demand pressures on forces and can sometimes mean that registered sex offender management becomes overly reactive. A proactive approach is essential in not only detecting breaches but also making sure that registered sex offenders are abiding by conditions set by the court to protect the public from their behaviour.

Disrupting serious organised crime

We now inspect [serious and organised crime \(SOC\)](#) on a regional basis, rather than inspecting each force individually in this area. This is so we can be more effective and efficient in how we inspect the whole SOC system, as set out in HM Government's SOC strategy.

Each force works with [regional organised crime units \(ROCU\)](#)s to tackle SOC. These units lead the regional response to SOC by providing access to specialist resources and assets to disrupt [organised crime groups](#) that pose the highest harm.

Through our SOC inspections, we seek to understand how well forces and ROCUs work in partnership. As a result, we now inspect ROCUs and their forces together and report on regional performance. Forces and ROCUs are now graded and reported on in regional SOC reports.

Outstanding

Durham Constabulary is outstanding at managing serious and organised crime. You can [access the regional report on our website](#).

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Adequate

Durham Constabulary is adequate at building and developing its workforce.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary needs to improve the effectiveness of its professional development reviews and make sure the workforce is fully involved

Professional development reviews (PDRs) should be an effective tool for officers and staff to record their objectives and achievements. PDRs are essential to helping supervisors understand the development needs of their officers and staff. Although Durham Constabulary has an established process for completing PDRs, the officers and staff we spoke to didn't value this highly. Many described PDRs as only having value for those seeking promotion. Some viewed them as merely an administrative task that senior leaders don't promote. This is consistent with the constabulary's completion rate. The constabulary told us that, in the year ending 31 March 2023, 46.64 percent of the workforce had a completed PDR with evidence recorded against the previous year's career objectives.

The workforce should have formal reviews that involve a series of conversations between individuals and their line managers where they plan and subsequently review their professional development over a 12-month period. The workforce should value these reviews and believe they are effective. Without an effective PDR process where the workforce is properly involved, the constabulary can't confidently support people's development needs, recognise achievement and identify future talent. This is important to the overall workforce perception of how Durham Constabulary values its people.

The constabulary needs to do more to support the development and career progression of people from underrepresented groups

Policing relies on the consent of the public to operate effectively. It is essential that the police are representative of the communities they serve to achieve this. While improvements have been made across England and Wales, some roles and ranks still lack the diversity needed to properly represent communities. It is important that forces identify the barriers that prevent people from underrepresented groups making progress in the service and take steps to address them.

During our inspection, we found that Durham Constabulary had identified some barriers it was working to rectify, but there was no overall strategy or formal action plan. The constabulary has invested in an equality, diversity and inclusion team, but the team has limited involvement in the design and implementation of internal selection processes. There is a good range of staff networks. But those involved told us they could do more to help the constabulary develop its approach to supporting people from underrepresented groups if there was better communication with senior leaders.

The constabulary needs to formally develop its approach to support people from underrepresented groups if it is to attract and retain talented officers and staff.

Innovative practice

The constabulary recognises the personal financial challenges faced by officers and staff

The constabulary has responded to the personal financial challenges sometimes experienced by officers and staff by offering interest-free loans. While available to everybody, it is often new recruits who are most affected. This is because joining the police often means a reduction in pay, or recruits are just starting out having completed their further education.

An unexpected cost like a car repair can have serious consequences for some people, particularly if their only means of paying is by using credit. Spiralling debt can then affect well-being and mental health. The constabulary offers interest-free loans to the value of a month's salary to help with this and these are repaid direct from payroll. This negates the need for officers and staff to turn to credit cards to meet unexpected costs, and it helps avoid debt having an adverse effect on well-being.

Main findings

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

The constabulary occupational health service is working well

The constabulary [occupational health \(OH\) service](#) is working well to support officers and staff. We found appointment waiting times are low, with the average being five days. The department is fully resourced with no vacancies for qualified OH nurses. The force medical examiner (doctor) provision is consistent with what we would expect to find in a force the size of Durham Constabulary.

Officers and staff we talked to spoke positively about their experience of OH and said they felt supported. The constabulary has listened to what is important to them and has adjusted the service to meet that need. For example, waiting times for officers and staff needing physiotherapy due to injury are short at OH but much longer with the external provider. OH now covers all physiotherapy provision itself, with two days of appointments available each week to address this.

The constabulary understands the specific challenges faced by new recruits and is working well to retain officers

The constabulary offers multiple entry routes for people looking to join the service and therefore attracts a diverse range of people. It has worked hard to make sure that new recruits are fully supported as they adjust to life in policing.

The constabulary works with Northumbria University to deliver the [Policing Education Qualifications Framework \(PEQF\)](#) and has established an integrated PEQF team to support new recruits. The team works closely with recruits and their first-line supervisors to make sure that the constabulary properly measures progression, and identifies and addresses any areas needing additional support at an early stage.

We found sufficient mentors and tutor constables in place to meet the needs of new recruits. And the PEQF team supports supervisors well. The constabulary fully evaluates training learning outcomes against the skills shown by new recruits in the workplace. The officers we spoke to felt supported and said supervisors created an inclusive environment within which they could progress.

When new recruits leave the service, Durham Constabulary makes sure that it understands their reasons. This means it can continuously improve how it meets the needs of new recruits. The constabulary told us that, since January 2021, only 18 officers across all entry routes had decided to leave the constabulary. This is a low number when compared with some other forces and is a positive reflection on the support the constabulary offers its new officers.

The constabulary needs to make sure that it fully supports the well-being of officers and staff in high-risk roles

The constabulary has identified roles that present a higher-than-normal risk to officer and staff well-being. However, the constabulary had difficulty showing us what additional well-being provision was available to high-risk postholders.

The constabulary has fully established the [trauma risk management](#) process throughout the workforce. It has invested in training over 700 officers and staff in the use of trauma-informed preventative techniques. But not all the officers and staff in high-risk roles we spoke to had been properly prepared in advance of taking up the post.

The constabulary relies on supervisory discussions and self-management as a means of identifying potential risks to individuals' well-being. This is a risk. Officers and staff deployed into high-risk roles are usually highly motivated individuals with specialist skills who have worked hard to be selected and trained. This means that they can be the least likely to seek help when traumatic incidents affect their well-being or mental health. The constabulary should easily be able to show what enhanced provision is available to consistently monitor and support the well-being of all those in high-risk roles.

Vetting and counter-corruption

We now inspect how forces deal with vetting and counter-corruption differently. This is so we can be more effective and efficient in how we inspect this high-risk area of police business.

Corruption in forces is tackled by specialist units, designed to proactively target corruption threats. Police corruption is corrosive and poses a significant risk to public trust and confidence. There is a national expectation of standards and how they should use specialist resources and assets to target and arrest those that pose the highest threat.

Through our new inspections, we seek to understand how well forces apply these standards. As a result, we now inspect forces and report on national risks and performance in this area. We now grade and report on forces' performance separately.

Durham Constabulary's vetting and counter-corruption inspection hasn't yet been completed. We will update our website with our findings and the separate report once the inspection is complete.

Leadership and force management

Adequate

Durham Constabulary's leadership and management is adequate.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should make sure it is effective at managing demand and can show it has the right resources, processes, or plans in place to meet current demand

The constabulary should make sure that its operating model and workforce help it to respond to priorities and meet both current and future demand in all areas.

During our inspection, we found examples of inconsistent performance across the areas inspected. Governance structures need to have good-quality data and information so that the constabulary can maintain effective oversight of performance in all areas. The constabulary should reassure itself that the data it produces is capable of highlighting emerging issues. This will allow senior leaders to develop a better understanding of them and act earlier when necessary.

The constabulary also needs a better understanding of unlogged demand on its contact centre, which is significant. During 2022, the constabulary told us that it didn't record an incident for 58.1 percent of 999 and 69.4 percent of all 101 calls. It has invested additional resources in its switchboard to expand its operating hours to help it manage current demand. However, it should reassure itself that it understands the underlying cause behind these pressures. This will improve its ability to manage and reduce demand across the entire organisation and provide a better service to the public.

The constabulary needs to make sure that it prioritises investment in new technology that will make its systems and processes more efficient and effective

Durham Constabulary continues to make investments in technology. But it needs to make sure that it prioritises and appropriately funds its plans to replace and upgrade its aging IT infrastructure. It should also make sure that it sorts out the systems that have the greatest impact on its ability to make full use of the data and digital processes. This will reduce sources of internal demand.

The constabulary isn't currently making the most of the technology it has available due to the limitations of its IT systems. This is restricting progress. We were encouraged to see some use of digital solutions such as Power BI. But the constabulary continues to operate with several manual and time-consuming processes. Some of these could be replaced with automated systems that would allow it to produce and present good-quality data more efficiently.

The constabulary also lacks some of the capacity it needs within its IT function but is taking steps to address this. Creating this capacity is essential and will help the constabulary implement its IT plans and develop its use of technology to benefit from the efficiencies it can offer. For example, force systems don't communicate well with each other. This can make gathering data much more difficult and time-consuming before any analytical work can be carried out. The constabulary needs to sort out the inefficiencies within its systems and processes so that the workforce can be more productive. This will help the constabulary to meet current and future demand.

Main findings

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

The constabulary has an effective strategic planning framework, making sure that it tackles what is important locally and nationally

The constabulary makes effective use of its information when making plans. It has a detailed 'plan on page', which considers the Police and Crime Commissioner's [Police and Crime Plan 2021–24](#). This provides the constabulary with strategic direction and supports the development of force priorities. It has produced an effective [force management statement](#), which makes good use of the data it has available. The force management statement shows that the constabulary has been mindful of the police and crime plan, and it sets out how the constabulary expects to change in the future.

The constabulary has taken steps to address the underlying causes of some repeat demand. For example, in 2019, it introduced its 'familiar faces' initiative with partner organisations. This was intended to reduce the number of mental

health-related incidents the constabulary responded to. This partnership approach sought to make sure that the most frequent callers for service had access to help they needed from the most appropriate agency. The constabulary told us that this initiative is still in place and continues to reduce repeat demand while providing a better service to vulnerable people in need of help.

The constabulary has a good level of investment in leadership

The constabulary supports its leaders and has developed a training programme called the 'supportive leadership, well-being, and inclusion course. This has been designed to provide first and second-line managers with the knowledge and skills they need to be effective in their leadership roles. The constabulary also supports a limited number of people each year to study for a university degree in leadership and management. And it offers less formal development opportunities through regular [continuing professional development](#) events and a structured coaching and mentoring scheme.

At the time of our inspection, the leaders we spoke with commented positively about how [chief officers](#) strongly encouraged a supportive style of leadership that was helping to create a positive working environment. The constabulary is investing in its leadership and this commitment is outlined within its publication, *Our leadership approach*. This clearly sets out the standards and expectations the constabulary has of its leaders, along with its commitment to them.

The constabulary collaborates to improve services and has a clear focus on evaluation to make sure that these continue to offer benefits

The constabulary has a good track record of working with other organisations to help improve efficiency by sharing the costs of some functions.

The constabulary works particularly closely with Cleveland Police and shares some services. These include a joint fingerprint unit, legal services and a joint tactical firearms training facility. The constabulary also works with Cumbria Police and it collaborated with this force to develop the Red Sigma computer system. It also shares some premises with the fire service to reduce estate costs.

The constabulary has a rigorous approach to monitor outcomes and review the ongoing benefits from its collaborations to make sure that they continue to offer good value for money.

The constabulary has sound financial management processes in place

In the year ending 31 March 2023, Durham Constabulary received £146.8m in funding. It receives 29 percent (£42m) of its total funding from council tax precept. The PCC increased the [police precept](#) for the year 2023/24 by £15 per band D property. The constabulary allocated this extra funding to support improvements to IT, new shift patterns for some of the workforce, an increase in cybercrime capability, and maintained police officer and PCSO numbers.

There is a clear link to constabulary plans and priorities, which is reflected in the PCC's plans. The constabulary is investing in its services to bring about improvements in performance. Planned capital spending for 2023/24 amounts to £13m. This includes £5.5m to create a new investigative hub and £3m for investment in its IT systems. The constabulary should reassure itself that this level of funding is sufficient to deliver its plans.

The financial forecasts within the mid-term financial plan are based on realistic assumptions about future funding and expenditure. In 2022/23, the constabulary maintained a balanced budget and expects to deliver this again at the end of this financial year. However, it needs to make savings over the future years of the mid-term financial plan and has identified the areas where £4.7m can be made. The constabulary is confident these savings are achievable. It holds general reserves over 4 percent of its net revenue budget, which is considered prudent.

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