

PEEL 2023–25

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Avon and Somerset Constabulary

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Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how good Avon and Somerset Constabulary 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	Developing a positive workplace	Responding to the public	
	Preventing crime		Investigating crime	
			Protecting vulnerable people	
			Managing offenders	
			Leadership and force management	

We also inspected how effective a service Avon and Somerset Constabulary gives to [victims](#) of crime. We don't make a graded judgment for this area.

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

We also assess the constabulary'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 Avon and Somerset Constabulary in keeping people safe, reducing crime and providing victims with an effective service. But there are areas in which the constabulary needs to improve.

Since our last inspection, the constabulary has improved its performance in some areas, but there are many areas that still require improvement. And some of the areas for improvement are identical to those we identified in the last inspection.

The way the constabulary treats the public and manages its use of powers such as [stop and search](#) remains positive. So does the way the constabulary prevents and deters crime, and how it communicates with the public. We saw positive change in the constabulary's approach to problem-solving and its provision of bespoke training for [neighbourhood policing teams](#).

There has also been some improvement in how promptly the constabulary answers emergency calls. And there has been a reduction in the number of non-emergency calls abandoned by callers. But there are still improvements needed to bring these areas up to sustained acceptable levels. Critically, the time it takes for officers to attend incidents is still longer than it should be.

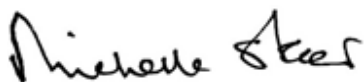
The constabulary needs to make sure it properly allocates, plans and supervises investigations, so that victims get the service they deserve. It also needs to make sure that crime investigations are given the correct outcome when they are finalised. And that more investigations result in offenders being brought to justice.

The way the constabulary protects vulnerable people and manages offenders hasn't improved since our last PEEL inspection. The way it identifies and prioritises vulnerable people for referral to other agencies requires improvement, as does management of the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#). Additionally, how the constabulary manages registered sex offenders and those responsible for online crimes of abuse against children hasn't improved. These are vital areas of the constabulary's duties.

Overall, the constabulary looks after its workforce and trains it well. It encourages officers and staff to be fulfilled and productive in their roles. However, its occupational health team can't help the personnel who require its services quickly enough.

Lastly, we found that the leadership and governance of the constabulary could be improved in terms of its overall management structure and operating model, its use of data, and how its leaders communicate and work with their workforce.

I look forward to seeing how the constabulary brings about positive change in these areas. I will be closely monitoring this in the months ahead.



Michelle Skeer

HM Inspector of Constabulary

Leadership

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

The constabulary benefits from having an established [chief officer](#) team. The chief constable has been in post since 2021. A deputy chief constable, three assistant chief constables, and two chief officers support the chief constable.

The constabulary's leaders are making efforts to improve the culture of the organisation, both internally with its workforce and externally with its communities. They take the time to speak with and listen to their colleagues. But the workforce sometimes feels that leaders could do more to improve communication at all levels.

The constabulary has a clear governance structure and senior leaders have established areas of responsibility. But it should improve the structure of that governance to help the constabulary better manage its assets and make necessary improvements to its performance.

The constabulary could also improve how its leadership and governance affect teams who are working at a local level. This is particularly the case in fundamental areas of policing such as responding to the public and investigations, where the public expects the most attention. Eight of the areas for improvement that we identified in our [PEEL 2021/22 inspection](#) remain in this report.

However, the constabulary's leaders are investing in their workforce. The constabulary's leadership academy has a training pathway available to all officers and staff. It includes mandatory and voluntary training. The constabulary's First-Line Leadership programme provides training for supervisors at various stages and focuses on well-being, inclusivity and psychological safety.

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

Reducing crime assessment

The reducing crime assessment sets out what Avon and Somerset 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 draw comparisons over time.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary needs to make sure it answers emergency calls quickly enough. It also needs to reduce the number of non-emergency calls abandoned by callers. It has worked hard in recent months to improve in these areas, but more improvement is necessary.

It also needs to respond to incidents within its published timescales and inform callers of any delays. By not always doing this, it is missing opportunities to safeguard the public and reduce crime.

The constabulary is good at identifying vulnerability through use of initial [risk assessments](#), which helps it safeguard vulnerable people. It is good at identifying vulnerable and repeat callers at the first point of contact. Call handlers consistently provide crime prevention advice, which helps prevent further abuse, risk, harm or imminent threat.

The constabulary's neighbourhood policing teams prioritise the prevention of crime, antisocial behaviour and vulnerability. They use problem-solving methods. The constabulary uses a broad range of crime prevention techniques to reduce crime.

We found most recorded grounds for stop and search by the constabulary's officers to be reasonable.

However, the constabulary needs to improve the quality of its investigations. It requires better investigation plans and supervision and needs to do more to achieve appropriate outcomes for victims. This will help reduce crime in the future.

More detail on what Avon and Somerset 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 Avon and Somerset 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:

Where police decided formal action wasn't in the public interest.

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

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. It also needs to reduce the number of non-emergency calls that callers abandon because they aren't answered. When it answers calls, it uses a structured process that assesses threat, harm, risk and vulnerability.

It mostly identifies repeat victims. This means it is fully aware of the victims' circumstances when considering what responses it should give. We found call handlers were polite and gave victims advice on crime prevention. But they didn't always give victims advice on how to preserve evidence.

In some cases, the constabulary doesn't respond promptly to calls for service

The constabulary doesn't always respond to calls for service within its set timescales. And we found that when call supervision is required, it isn't always effective or appropriate. The constabulary doesn't always inform victims of delays in police attending incidents, so victims' expectations aren't always met. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage from the process.

The constabulary carries out timely investigations, but they aren't always thorough and effective

In most cases, we found the constabulary carried out investigations in a timely way. But it didn't always complete relevant and proportionate lines of inquiry.

The constabulary also didn't always supervise investigations. And it didn't always complete a victim contract to agree the frequency and nature of updates. But it did regularly update victims when required. 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, which is a positive result for the victim.

In all cases, we found officers took victim personal statements. These give victims the opportunity to describe how the crime has affected their lives.

Where victims withdrew support for an investigation, the constabulary mostly considered progressing the case without the victims' support. This can be an important method of [safeguarding](#) the victim and preventing further offences from being committed. In some cases, the constabulary didn't record whether it had considered using orders designed to protect victims, such as a [Domestic Violence Protection Notice \(DVPN\)](#) or [Domestic Violence Protection Order \(DVPO\)](#).

The [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) requires forces and constabularies to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage to determine whether victims need additional support. The constabulary mostly did these assessments, and recorded requests for additional support.

The constabulary doesn't always assign the right outcome type to an investigation, and it doesn't always consider victims' wishes or hold an auditable record of them

The constabulary isn't consistently achieving appropriate outcomes for victims of crime. It doesn't always close crimes with the appropriate outcome type. It also doesn't always record a clear rationale for using a certain outcome and the rationale isn't always effectively supervised.

It doesn't always ask for victims' views when deciding which outcome type to assign to a closed investigation. It doesn't always get an auditable record of the victim's wishes when required. And the constabulary doesn't always inform victims which outcome code it has assigned to their investigation.

Police powers and treating the public fairly and respectfully

Good

Avon and Somerset Constabulary is good at using police powers and treating people fairly and respectfully.

Innovative practice

The constabulary is making efforts to better understand how and when officers use handcuffing

Avon and Somerset Constabulary carried out a survey to better understand the effects of handcuff use on members of the public and the officers' use of handcuffs. The survey aimed to explore issues such as fear of escape and assault, and what support is available to officers when they use such powers. Over 500 officers responded to the survey.

The survey also covered so-called 'compliant' handcuffing, which is when officers use handcuffs with the consent of the person being handcuffed. For example, to protect themselves or others from assault.

The constabulary has set up a group to analyse this survey data for [organisational learning](#) purposes. This includes incorporating the learning outcomes into frontline officer training.

Main findings

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

Officers are trained to prevent unfair behaviour and to treat people respectfully

During our inspection, we found that officers received communication skills and de-escalation training in several ways. These include [public and personal safety training](#) and through the First-Line Leadership programme. This training helps officers to communicate with the public more effectively. The constabulary gave us data on the number of officers whose public and personal safety training certificates had expired. It follows the College of Policing's national guidance when considering whether those officers can be safely deployed.

As well as training in the areas of [unconscious bias](#) and cultural awareness, officers receive training under the constabulary's [Race Matters](#) programme. This is a one-day training session for frontline officers, covering how to carry out fair and respectful policing in the community. Frontline officers also take part in a half-day, in person stop and search training session. This focuses on:

- legislation;
- themes and trends from internal scrutiny data;
- de-escalation tactics; and
- how to use handcuffs during stop and search.

Officers understand the requirements in relation to the use of body-worn video

[Body-worn video \(BWV\)](#) is a useful tool in providing an accurate record of interactions between the police and the community. The use of BWV is mandatory for officers when using stop and search powers. During our inspection, we found that officers have a clear understanding of when to use BWV. They told us they didn't have any technical issues with its use.

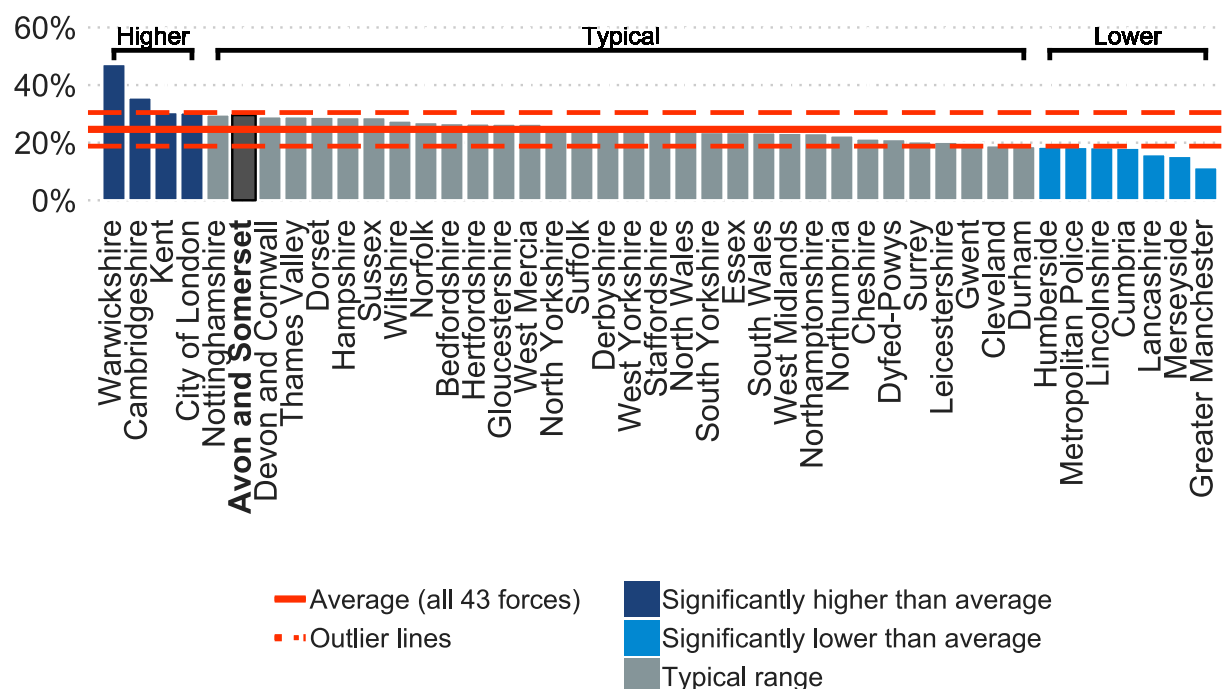
The constabulary told us that compliance rates for using body-worn videos for use of force incidents has remained at around 90 percent for the past 12 months. For stop and search incidents, compliance rates are at around 99 percent. Our audit of BWVs showed that officers complied with guidance, known as [GOWISELY](#), and demonstrated positive behaviours during stop and search encounters. This includes officers starting their body-worn videos early, explaining what they are searching for, and actively listening to the person they are dealing with.

The constabulary uses stop and search powers effectively, and has processes to monitor and scrutinise the use of these powers

During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 169 stop and search records from 1 May 2023 to 30 April 2024. Based on this sample, we estimate that 91.1 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.2 percentage points) of all stop and searches by the constabulary during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. This is broadly unchanged compared with the findings from our previous review of records in 2021, when we found 87.4 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.8 percentage points) of stop and searches had reasonable grounds recorded. Of the records we reviewed for stop and searches on people who self-identified as from an ethnic minority background, 38 of 42 had reasonable grounds recorded.

The constabulary’s [linked find rate](#) is at the higher end of the expected range for England and Wales. A linked find is when an officer finds the stolen or prohibited item that they were looking for in the search. In the year ending 31 March 2023, 29.6 percent of stop and searches by Avon and Somerset Constabulary had linked find outcomes. This is at the top end of the typical range for forces in England and Wales.

Figure 1: Linked find rates by forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2023



Source: [Stop and search and arrests, year ending March 2023 \(second edition\)](#) from the Home Office

In the year ending 31 March 2023, officers were 4.7 times more likely to stop and search Black or Black British individuals than White individuals. This is higher than the England and Wales average of 4.1 times more likely.

The constabulary is taking steps to understand the effects of disproportionality. It has carried out research into why its disproportionate use of stop and search is higher than the national average. During our inspection, the constabulary told us that it was in the process of improving how it uses its available data to identify stop and search trends. This includes information such as which officers carried out the most stop and searches, and which officers repeatedly used the power against ethnic minority groups.

As well as supervisors checking the stop and search records of their officers, the constabulary has a well-established internal scrutiny panel. Their role is to review BWVs, and records of stop and searches and use of force. The panel consists of around 80 to 100 staff and officer volunteers. They review stop and search records in one quarter and use of force records in another. The panel reviews around 200 records each meeting, using a set template. Results and feedback from these reviews are collated, and themes and trends are identified. The panel's learning points help form part of the half-day stop and search training for officers.

The constabulary worked with a local production company to produce a short film explaining stop and search powers. The film provides the community with information about the constabulary's use of the power. This demonstrates the constabulary's commitment to transparency and to getting local communities involved.

The constabulary invites external challenge through an independent stop and search and use of force scrutiny panel

The [Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner \(OPCC\)](#) leads a quarterly [Independent Scrutiny of Police Powers \(ISoPP\)](#) meeting, chaired by an independent community member. This includes representation and insight from each of its external scrutiny panels. The meetings cover stop and search, use of force, body-worn video, and the constabulary's use of the Taser less-lethal incapacitant device.

The panel reviews between 50 and 60 cases before the meeting. It then prioritises some videos to discuss at the meeting. During our inspection, we saw that representatives were confident in challenging the constabulary during this meeting. Appropriate representatives from the constabulary were present to answer questions from the panel.

The constabulary collects all the feedback from the panel and reviews it. Information and other data from the Independent Scrutiny of Police Powers meeting is published on the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's website.

The constabulary needs to make sure that it is effectively monitoring its use of force, and that it improves its understanding of disproportional use of force

In the year ending 31 March 2023, the number of use of force incidents by Avon and Somerset Constabulary decreased by 6.1 percent compared to the year ending 31 March 2022. In the year ending 31 March 2023, the constabulary recorded 17,015 use of force incidents, which was 1,963 fewer incidents than estimated. The estimate was based on arrest data. The constabulary recently updated the data it provided to the Home Office relating to arrests made during this period. It should take steps to make sure that it is using the correct data sets.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds account for 9.2 percent of the local population in Avon and Somerset, but we found that in the year ending 31 March 2023, they accounted for 14.1 percent of use of force incidents and 14.8 percent of arrests. This indicates that the constabulary is more likely to arrest those from ethnic minority backgrounds. It may also mean that the constabulary is under-recording use of force, or that it has an issue with the quality of its use of force data.

We found that the constabulary's data shows that Black people are more likely to be subject to force than White people. But the constabulary doesn't have the data to help it easily understand where, when or why this is happening. Nor can it identify which circumstances, teams or individuals are using force in this way.

The constabulary should make sure it has a better understanding of use of force and disproportionality. This would help it improve its performance and manage the expectations of the communities most affected by its use of this power.

Preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behaviour, and reducing vulnerability

Good

Avon and Somerset Constabulary is good at prevention and deterrence.

Innovative practice

The constabulary has piloted a scheme for women to show police community support officers the locations where they feel unsafe

Violence against women and girls is a national priority for policing, as those groups are more likely to be victims of violent crime.

In April 2024, the constabulary piloted a scheme called '[walk and talk](#)' in the Somerset West area. It encouraged women to contact their local policing team about places in their local area where they felt unsafe. The women then went to those areas in the company of a police community support officer. This allowed the women to visit those areas safely and explain why they felt unsafe there. It also reassured them that the constabulary was taking an interest.

As a result, the local policing team began consultations with other local agencies. They are working together to bring about changes in the areas identified. It has shared this tactic with other neighbourhood teams in the constabulary.

Main findings

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

The constabulary uses data to identify and prioritise its prevention activity

The constabulary uses data and information at meetings to prioritise activities to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour. At a constabulary-wide level, this information includes key performance indicators, such as the outcome rates for neighbourhood crimes and the status of problem-solving plans in each of the local policing areas.

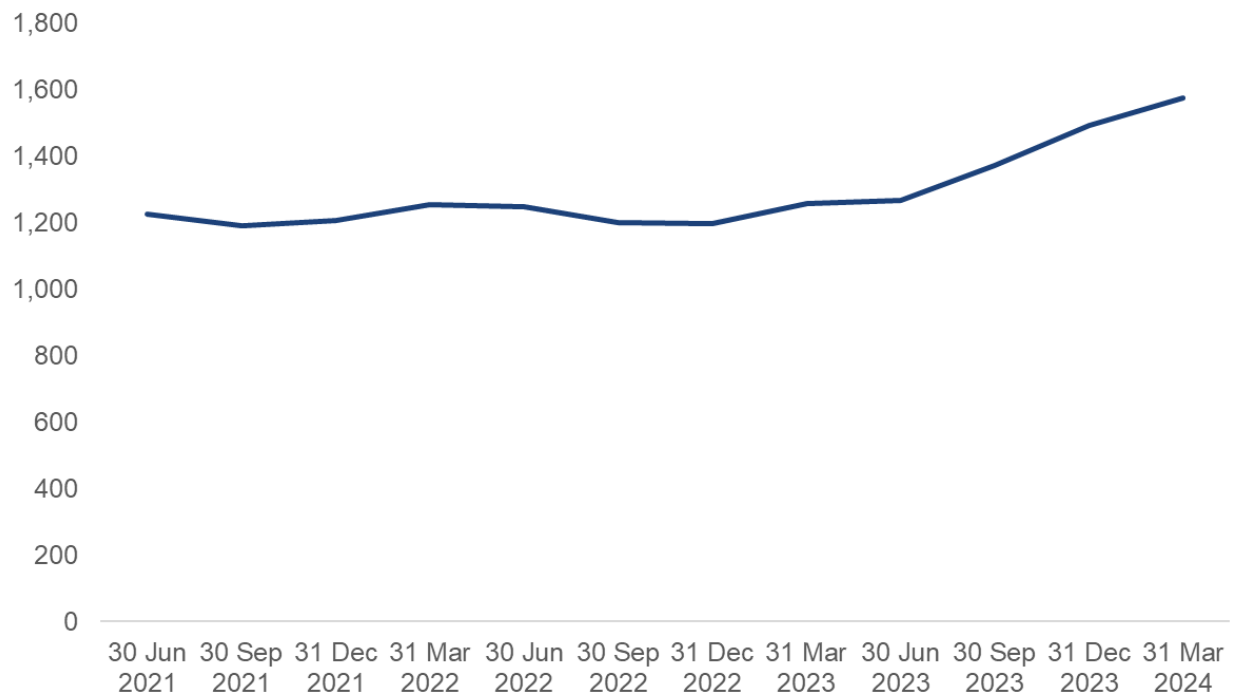
At a local level, the constabulary regularly holds local tasking meetings. A neighbourhood inspector or chief inspector chairs these. During our inspection, we observed several of these meetings. We found that they were well attended by neighbourhood officers of various ranks, police community support officers (PCSOs), and members of early intervention teams. Antisocial behaviour, intelligence and analytical specialists also attended. The meetings we saw focused on preventative work, repeat victims and offenders, vulnerability, and antisocial behaviour issues. Senior leaders can use the data and information available to direct resources to the areas where they are most needed.

We also saw evidence of other meetings and information-sharing forums that help the constabulary and its partners carry out activities to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour. These included local multi-agency meetings and meaningful contributions to local authority-led community safety partnership meetings.

The high harm scanning unit (HHSU) identifies vulnerable individuals and people who may be committing crimes against them. Local policing teams can then work with the HHSU to reduce or prevent offences. The constabulary gave us an example of this. The HHSU identified 11 boys committing drugs offences, and a group of older males who may have been exploiting the boys. Local officers worked with the HHSU to employ tactics to prevent any offending behaviour.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Avon and Somerset Constabulary recorded 1,576 knife and sharp instrument offences. There has been a steady increase in the number of these offences. They are up 25 percent compared to the year ending 31 March 2023, when there were 1,258 knife and sharp instrument offences.

Figure 2: Number of knife and sharp instrument offences recorded by the police for selected offences in Avon & Somerset, years ending 30 June 2021 to 31 March 2024



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

Note: The data shown in figure 2 is for selected knife and sharp instrument offences recorded by the police. The selected offences are:

- murder
- assault with injury
- assault with intent to cause serious harm
- threat to kill
- robbery
- rape
- sexual assault.

Therefore, the data may show a slight undercount of the true figures, as it doesn't include all crimes where a knife or sharp instrument was used.

We saw evidence of prevention activity targeting this key issue. For example, we saw a problem-solving plan addressing an increase in knife crime and youth-related violence in Taunton. This plan led to initiatives including the introduction of a youth hub and the installation of a knife angel sculpture in the town. The results were shared with other teams across the constabulary as best practice.

The constabulary uses primary, secondary and tertiary prevention initiatives to deter and tackle crime and antisocial behaviour

The constabulary has early intervention teams consisting of neighbourhood PCs, PCSOs and youth offending team officers. They work alongside the police and crime commissioner's violence reduction partnership. They use police and partnership data to identify children at risk of serious youth violence. They then share this information with partners and jointly consider interventions including:

- identifying hotspot locations and premises;
- disrupting offenders; and
- school and educational preventative work.

We found that antisocial behaviour is prioritised at a local level. Initial reports are well managed and supervised. The teams deal with ongoing antisocial behaviour issues appropriately. Locally based antisocial behaviour managers and antisocial behaviour officers liaise with neighbourhood officers and PCSOs. They provide guidance, assistance and suggestions about how to address ongoing and persistent problems. They also communicate with partner agencies such as housing associations and the local authority. And make sure that powers and legislation are used to full effect, such as community protection warnings and acceptable behaviour contracts.

The constabulary gave us several examples of prevention activity. One of these was from July 2024. Constabulary analysis of data suggested a peak in youth violence on Wednesday evenings, so local policing teams in Bath trialled a 'teachable moments engagement car'. A [police officer](#) and a youth worker staffed this. The activity allowed the constabulary to explore early intervention opportunities with young people at risk of becoming involved in crime.

Another example they gave us was from 2022. Data suggested that Glastonbury had disproportionately high levels of antisocial behaviour compared to other similar-sized towns. So, the constabulary created a problem-solving plan. The plan considered a range of factors, including effect on the community, locations of note, and the potential use of a [Public Spaces Protection Order](#).

Between 2022 and 2024, the constabulary carried out two years of targeted police activity, as well as partnership work with the owners of a frequented community space and the local town centre crime reduction advisory committee. When the constabulary evaluated the results, it found that reported crime and antisocial behaviour had reduced by 25 percent on a rolling 12-month basis since the activity started. It also found that public confidence in the police had increased.

The third example was from September 2023, when data suggested an increase in youth violence and knife crime in Bridgwater. This was connected to events such as the Bridgwater Fair and Bridgwater Carnival. The constabulary created a problem-solving plan. This led to appropriate agencies, including the police, youth offending teams and education providers, targeting key offenders. The constabulary told us that this activity lowered the risk associated with the area. It also resulted in convictions and civil injunctions.

The constabulary has training in place for its neighbourhood teams

Avon and Somerset Constabulary is one of the forces piloting the new [College of Policing neighbourhood policing training programme](#). At the time of our inspection, 100 neighbourhood officers and PCSOs from across the organisation had started the training. The first element of this is an online module. Later classroom-based modules cover topics such as antisocial behaviour, problem solving, and working with communities. Dedicated trainers run this programme. The College of Policing introduced the programme to professionalise the neighbourhood policing roles.

Neighbourhood officers and PCSOs receive skills training every six months. These one-day training events are repeated over eight days, to make sure as many people as possible attend. The training brings together officers and PCSOs from across the constabulary. It encourages participation by asking for contributions from attendees. We were told about an example that included sharing successful problem solving initiatives.

Monthly continuous professional development days are also available to neighbourhood teams. These cover topics such as modern slavery and investigative standards.

The constabulary shows its commitment to problem-solving and evidence-based policing

In our inspection we found that problem-solving plans are in place across the constabulary. They cover a variety of themes, including antisocial behaviour, burglary, and violence against women and girls. We found the constabulary effectively supervises the plans.

A dedicated team is in place to provide support, guidance, and training to those managing the plans. The team also publishes extensive online guidance on the constabulary's intranet. And it offers one-to-one meetings to help officers and staff progress their plans. We found evidence of the team monitoring individual plans and suggesting tactics. It also signposted users to other examples of problem solving and to evidence-based solutions from a variety of sources.

The constabulary also has 'problem-solving champions' in place across its neighbourhood teams. These champions promote best practice. The constabulary is working to make sure that all neighbourhood sergeants carry out this role in future. It has also provided online resources for those working on problem solving. These include a search facility across all its open and closed plans, and a 'tried and tested' page that gives examples of successful past problem solving. The constabulary provides officers and staff with links to external resources such as:

- academic papers;
- the [College of Policing's What Works Centre for Crime Reduction](#);
- the [National Police Library](#);
- the [Society of Evidence Based Policing](#); and
- the [Police Knowledge Hub](#).

The constabulary works well with its communities and involves them in policing

In our inspection we found evidence of effective communication with communities across Avon and Somerset. We found neighbourhood teams regularly meet with local councillors. They also attend schools, youth clubs and 'come and meet us' events, which are publicised on the constabulary website and on social media.

We found the constabulary uses social media for communication at local and constabulary-wide levels. For example, in June 2023, a PCSO in Bath spent a day communicating with the public on the online forum Reddit, under the title 'Ask Me Anything'. The constabulary told us that internet users viewed this forum page more than 14,000 times. It received 55 comments and 18 direct questions, which the PCSO answered. This approach has since been repeated in other local policing areas within the constabulary.

We also heard about how, on the evening of 31 October 2023 (Halloween), the constabulary's control room shared information on social media. This gave the public a rare insight into call demand on a busy night of the year.

The constabulary also has an established network of [independent advisory groups](#). These cover both specific geographical areas and particular demographics, such as youths aged 16 to 24, and women. They help the constabulary to understand and communicate with specific communities. During [the public disorder in summer 2024](#), the constabulary invited group members and leaders of other communities into the control room to observe the police response.

At the time of our inspection, the constabulary was reviewing its community engagement strategy with the aim of improving consistency.

The constabulary also has an established Citizens in Policing Programme. It told us this includes special constables, police cadets, mini police, and over 160 police support volunteers in a variety of roles. These roles include drivers, community speed-watch operators, and cyber-crime investigators.

The constabulary has an established neighbourhood policing team, but team members can't always concentrate on their core roles

Neighbourhood policing teams are central to prevention, problem solving and effective communication with communities. But during times of increased demand on police resources, the constabulary regularly moved neighbourhood police officers away from this important role. It usually moves them to cover emergency incidents, particularly in more rural areas. This is called abstraction.

Abstraction is planned during the summer months. The constabulary predicts where and when it will need extra officers. But we also found that the constabulary abstracts neighbourhood teams on an ad hoc basis as well.

One example of this was neighbourhood officers regularly being sent to incidents that should be dealt with by response teams. This is often due to a lack of personnel on the response teams or because officers are based so far away they can't always respond in a timely manner.

Another example was neighbourhood officers retaining the crime investigations they began during their summer abstraction. This is despite the investigations not being in any way linked to the officers' neighbourhood roles. Sometimes the incident under investigation didn't take place in the area in which the officers routinely work either.

We also found that crime investigations were sometimes allocated to neighbourhood officers and PCSOs, despite not being linked to their core role. These included investigations such as assaults, and dwelling and non-dwelling burglaries.

As well as this, the control room sometimes sent PCSOs to attend incidents that were beyond their role description and training. These incidents included missing people and road traffic collisions.

When combined with neighbourhood police officer vacancies and a freeze in PCSO recruitment, abstracting neighbourhood teams can lead to less prevention and community work being carried out. At the time of our inspection though, the constabulary had taken steps to minimise disruption to neighbourhood teams by only abstracting 50 percent of neighbourhood officers at any one time.

Responding to the public

Requires improvement

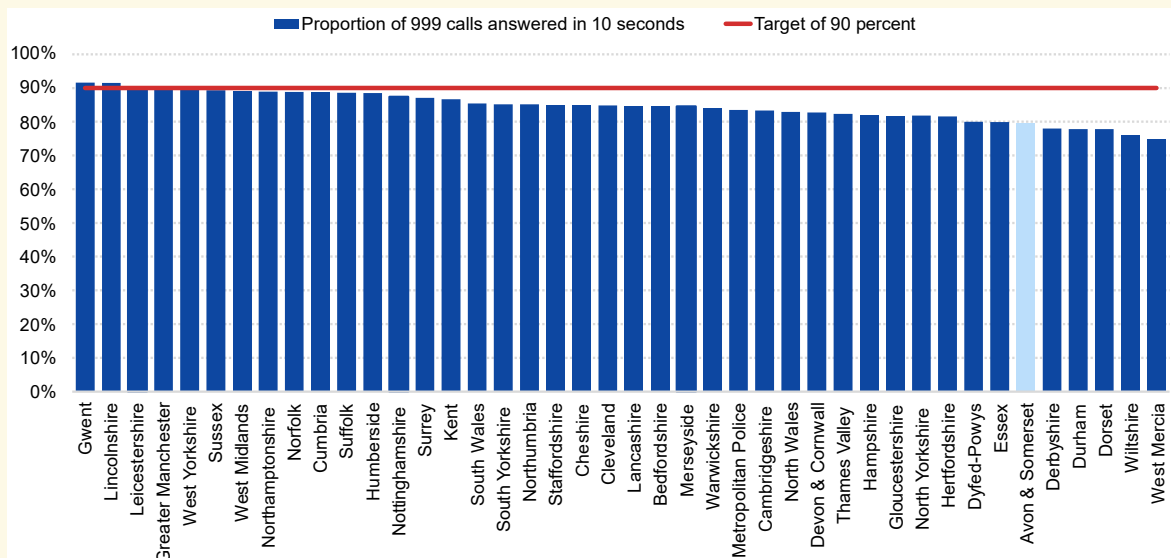
Avon and Somerset Constabulary requires improvement at responding to the public.

Areas for improvement

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

In the year ending 31 July 2024, the constabulary answered 79.5 percent of its 999 calls within 10 seconds. This is lower than the expected standard of forces in England and Wales, which is to answer 90 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds.

Figure 3: Proportion of 999 calls answered within ten seconds by forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 July 2024



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

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

During our inspection we found that the constabulary is taking steps to improve its performance in this area. These include:

- a new approach to recruiting call handlers;
- easily seen boards in the control room showing performance information; and
- direct and meaningful supervision and feedback provided to call handlers while they are working.

[Data on the police.uk website](#) shows that the constabulary's performance in this area has been improving since the year ending 31 July 2024. But it should sustain these improvements. If the constabulary doesn't promptly answer calls for service, police officers may not attend incidents quickly enough to protect victims. Failure to answer calls promptly can also lead to investigative opportunities being missed and a loss of public confidence.

The constabulary needs to reduce the number of non-emergency calls abandoned by callers because they aren't answered

In the year ending 31 August 2024, the constabulary told us that callers abandoned 23.9 percent of calls to its non-emergency [101](#) facility before staff answered the calls. However, as set out in the 2020 national contact management strategy principles and guidance, forces with a switchboard should aim to have an abandonment rate of less than 5 percent.

The data from the constabulary suggests that the abandonment rate has reduced in recent months. It should aim to sustain this.

As with 999 calls, the constabulary has made changes in its control room which should allow continuous improvement to take place. In terms of non-emergency calls, this includes an evaluation as to why and when callers abandon their calls.

High abandonment rates for non-emergencies may lead to callers making inappropriate calls to the 999 system. It also means the constabulary isn't addressing aspects of unknown risk. This is an area we highlighted as requiring improvement [in our previous 2021/22 PEEL report](#).

The constabulary needs to attend calls for service in line with its published attendance times, make sure there is effective supervision of deployment decisions, and make sure that callers are updated if there are delays

The constabulary doesn't always respond to calls for service within its target timescales. In our victim service assessment, we found that attendance was within the required time in 37 of the 58 cases we examined. The constabulary updated callers about delays in attendance in 11 of 23 relevant cases. We also found that effective supervision of response and deployment was in place in 21 of the 40 cases we reviewed.

If the constabulary isn't attending incidents within its target times and isn't informing victims about delays, victims could lose confidence in the police and disengage from the process. Delayed responses can also result in the constabulary missing opportunities to safeguard victims or collect evidence.

The constabulary has a capacity and demand plan. This outlines the additional resources available should the number of reported incidents requiring attendance exceed certain levels. Options include using officers from other teams and using overtime to increase staffing levels. The constabulary should make sure it uses this to provide a better service to the public. This is an area we highlighted as requiring improvement [in our previous 2021/22 PEEL report](#).

Main findings

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

The constabulary should better manage how incidents are allocated to patrol teams to make sure the service to callers isn't affected

We found that incident logs held on the STORM command and control system transfer to the records management system after eight days. These logs then become the responsibility of sergeants or inspectors on patrol teams. They are no longer the control room's responsibility.

Although supervisors review these incident logs, and the logs are generally low risk, it shows the control rooms and patrol teams face complex demands. It also potentially leaves callers waiting longer than necessary for the constabulary's services.

Despite this, officers told us that they were confident about securing evidence and the [golden hour principle](#) of crime scene management. They said they knew they could rely on their supervisors for advice, either remotely or in person. They can also contact detectives for advice.

But we also heard that the quality of initial investigations handed over to detectives or those dealing with prisoners varies. The main reason officers gave for this was lack of time to take the necessary steps to gather the required evidence. We were told this was due to officers arriving late at the incident or being called away to another.

Missing opportunities to seize evidence can reduce the chances of positive outcomes for investigations. This can then undermine victims' confidence. The constabulary should make sure that attending officers have enough time to effectively manage crime scenes and make the most of early evidence opportunities.

The constabulary doesn't always advise callers and victims on how to preserve evidence, but regularly provides general crime prevention advice

In our victim service assessment, we found that in 21 of the 30 cases we reviewed, call handlers gave appropriate advice on preserving evidence. But call handlers gave general crime prevention advice in 32 of 37 relevant cases.

Call handlers have access to call scripts. These give them all the information needed to provide a good service to people waiting for a police officer. This includes information about preserving evidence and general crime prevention advice.

Supervisors [dip sample](#) calls received by control room staff. This includes reviewing whether staff gave crime prevention advice and advice on how evidence should be preserved. But there is no easy way for supervisors to observe whether this is done at the time a call is taken, or to review calls as a data set.

When call handlers give callers advice about preserving evidence, it gives officers a greater chance of securing evidence when they attend an incident. This can lead to more positive outcomes for victims.

The control room has effective leadership and management in place and looks after its officers and staff

We found that the constabulary's control room leadership was effective and supportive. Managers are always available to monitor performance, move resources and provide real-time feedback to staff.

At the time of our inspection, the control room had recently benefitted from the deployment of a number of police officers into the team. This has added experience and knowledge to a relatively young workforce.

Control room staff are encouraged to give ideas, feedback and suggestions to managers. They can do this anonymously. The constabulary also regularly surveys staff and discusses the outcomes of these surveys at weekly management meetings. This helps staff feel more involved. It has helped the constabulary to make positive changes, such as opening a second base for call handlers in Bridgwater and improving flexible working arrangements.

Call handlers carry out a structured initial triage and risk assessment, and identify repeat and vulnerable victims

The constabulary's control room staff use a risk-assessment process called [threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement \(THRIVE\)](#). In our victim service assessment, we found that call handlers used THRIVE to assess risk and consider the needs of the caller in 52 of the 58 cases we reviewed. We found the THRIVE record was an accurate and meaningful reflection of the circumstances in 50 of the 52 times that call handlers used it.

Repeat and vulnerable victims of crime can be at the most risk of harm. This means that early identification of them is important. We found evidence of a check to identify repeat victims in 55 of 64 cases and checks to identify vulnerable people in 56 of 64 cases.

We also found that the call handlers' initial grading of a reported incident was appropriate in 78 of 85 cases.

This is an improvement from the findings of our previous 2021/22 PEEL inspection, particularly in identifying repeat and vulnerable callers. Overall, the constabulary now better understands the risks involved in a call, so it can better safeguard victims and reduce repeat victimisation.

Investigating crime

Requires
improvement

Avon and Somerset Constabulary requires improvement at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should carry out timely investigations into all reported crimes, and make sure that officers take all investigative opportunities

During our inspection, we found evidence of delays in crime investigations being allocated to investigators. Supervisors were doing this to relieve the pressure on their teams and to make sure investigators had manageable workloads. We found supervisors in specialist rape investigation teams and the criminal investigation department were themselves managing between 80 and 170 unallocated crimes, some of which had been unallocated for a number of months.

In our victim service assessment, we found that 45 out of 57 investigations had an investigation plan that met national standards. When an investigation plan (of any standard) was in place, the plan was followed and updated in 42 of 45 cases.

We also found evidence of effective supervision in 64 of 82 cases. Investigators took appropriate and proportionate investigative opportunities from the onset and throughout the investigation in 71 of 96 cases.

Some of our findings relating to allocating investigations and to creating and supervising investigation plans were present when we last inspected the constabulary in 2022.

Without the timely allocation of investigations, creating investigation plans, and proper supervision, the constabulary can't provide an appropriate service to victims of crime.

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

The constabulary doesn't always record the outcomes of crimes correctly. As part of our victim service assessment, we found that the constabulary assigned the correct crime classification outcome in 59 out of 91 relevant cases. Although we found that victims were consulted in 59 of 70 cases, their views were only taken into account in 31 of 48 relevant cases. The constabulary informed them of the outcome in 61 of 73 relevant cases.

We found that when an outcome was assigned, a clear rationale for it was recorded in 62 of 88 cases. Also, crime finalisation had effective and appropriate supervision in 72 of 93 cases.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Avon and Somerset Constabulary recorded 127,384 victim-based crimes. Of these recorded offences, 1.5 percent were assigned outcome 10 (formal action against the offender isn't in the public interest - police decision). This was higher than expected compared to other forces in England and Wales. Similarly, 1.7 percent of offences were assigned outcome 21 (further investigation against the suspect isn't in the public interest - police decision). This is also higher than expected compared to other forces in England and Wales.

As part of our victim service assessment, we audited 20 cases the constabulary had finalised as outcome 10. The audit found all 20 were incorrectly finalised:

- eight of the audited crimes should have been closed using outcome 21;
- six shouldn't have been finalised with reasonable enquiries outstanding;
- three should have been closed using [outcome 16](#); and
- three cases should have been closed using outcomes 18, 20, and 22, respectively.

The constabulary needs to understand why it is misusing certain outcomes, in particular outcome types 10 and 21. Incorrect recording of crime and outcomes can reduce the public's confidence in policing.

The constabulary should make sure that it consistently achieves appropriate outcomes for victims

The constabulary isn't always achieving acceptable outcomes for victims of crime. It needs to understand the issue and work to achieve better outcomes for victims.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Avon and Somerset Constabulary recorded 127,384 victim-based crimes. Of these recorded offences, 8.4 percent were assigned 'offences brought to justice' outcomes. This was within the normal range compared to other forces in England and Wales. But despite this, the percentage of cases where Avon and Somerset Constabulary achieved a satisfactory outcome for the victim was low. The constabulary should try to improve this and focus on bringing offenders to justice.

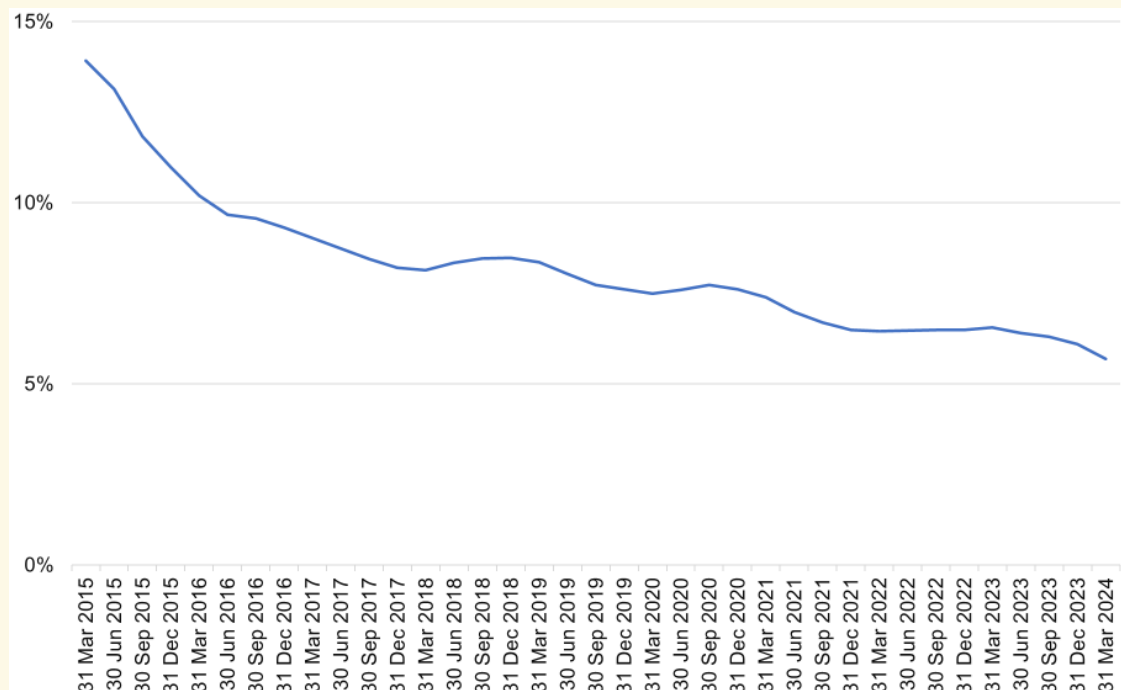
Figure 4: Percentage of victim-based crime recorded by Avon and Somerset Police and all forces in England and Wales by selected outcome types, in the year ending 31 March 2024

Outcome types	Constabulary outcome rate	England and Wales outcome rate
1 – Charged/summonsed	5.7%	6.1%
2 and 3 – Caution – youths & adults	0.7%	0.7%
8 – Community resolutions	1.1%	1.7%
9 – Prosecution not in the public interest (Crown Prosecution Service decision)	0.1%	0%
10 and 21 – Prosecution not in the public interest (police decision) and further investigation to support formal action not in the public interest (police decision)	3.2%	0.8%
14 – Evidential difficulties (suspect not identified; victim doesn't support further action)	6.9%	5.6%
15 – Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports further action)	12.3%	13.5%
16 – Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim doesn't support further action)	23.5%	21.5%
17 – Prosecution time limit expired	0.2%	0.3%
18 – Investigation complete – no suspect identified	40.4%	43.4%
20 – Responsibility for further investigation passed to another body	1.1%	1.5%
22 – Diversionary, educational or intervention activity	0.6%	0.4%

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

Note: Presented data comes from the July 2024 data release and may have been revised since. British Transport Police and City of London data are excluded from the England and Wales rate. Total police-recorded crime includes all crime (except fraud). For a full commentary and explanation of crime and outcome types please see the [Home Office statistics](#).

Figure 5: Proportion of victim-based crimes assigned a ‘charged/summonsed’ (outcome 1) by Avon and Somerset Constabulary between the year ending 31 March 2015 and the year ending 31 March 2024



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

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

Main findings

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

The constabulary's management structure doesn't always help officers and staff to complete quality investigations that lead to the right outcome for victims

During our inspection we found that the constabulary's senior leaders oversee all aspects of crime recording, allocation and investigation. This takes place at the investigative standards forum and the Operation Holmes meeting. These meetings are used to oversee investigative standards and include analysis of relevant data. This gives leaders the ability to effectively scrutinise performance.

However, this oversight and scrutiny hasn't helped the constabulary to sufficiently improve its service to victims. We found delays in allocating crimes and a lack of investigation plans and supervision. We also found incorrectly applied crime outcomes and a low proportion of offences brought to justice.

Governance of crime management should take account of relevant data and information. It should allow the constabulary to help its officers and staff to achieve better outcomes for victims of crime.

Investigations aren't delayed more than necessary by digital examinations or other specialist enquiries

In our victim service assessment we found that there were unjustified delays to investigations due to [digital forensics](#) and digital examinations in just one of ten cases we reviewed. We found there were no unjustified delays or failures to get forensic samples examined in any of the six relevant cases we looked at. Overall, we found unjustified delays to investigations in 10 of 100 cases.

Using experts to examine the increasing number of digital devices seized as evidence is a vital part of any investigation. So is the proper examination of forensic samples. Delays in these areas can prevent timely investigations. They can impede offenders being brought to justice and lead to a poorer service for victims.

The constabulary maintains victim and witness confidence by providing a quality service

In our inspection we found that the constabulary has systems and processes in place to make sure that its officers and staff provide an appropriate service to victims and keep them updated on the progress of their investigations.

Call handlers complete an initial victim needs assessment at the first point of contact. Victims identified as requiring an enhanced level of service are signposted to the appropriate vulnerability or safeguarding team.

When an investigation begins, the [Niche](#) police records management system automatically reminds case officers to update their victims on how their investigation is progressing. Whether or not this is being done can be easily monitored by those officers and their supervisors, using the constabulary's Qlik application. Qlik is a data visualisation tool that shows data to officers and staff in an easily understandable form.

In our victim service assessment, we found that victim needs assessments were recorded in 42 of 52 relevant cases. Where a victim was entitled to an enhanced service, this was properly recorded in 33 of 41 cases. Agreed victim contracts were adhered to in 32 of 34 relevant cases. The victim's personal statement was considered in all six of the relevant cases we reviewed.

When a victim chose not to support an investigation, this was supported by reasoning in 28 of 32 cases reviewed. It was documented in 26 of 29 cases. We found evidence that the constabulary considered progressing or attempting to progress cases without the support of the victim, in 15 of 18 relevant cases. This shows that the constabulary is, when appropriate, taking into account the harm caused by perpetrators, even when victims are reluctant to assist with investigations.

When a referral for a victim to a specialist partner organisation was required, such as a victim support service, this was found in 50 of 56 cases.

Protecting vulnerable people

Requires
improvement

Avon and Somerset Constabulary requires improvement at protecting vulnerable people.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should make sure that it properly documents, supervises, quality assures and monitors compliance of its vulnerability risk assessments

The constabulary continues to use a risk assessment tool called BRAG (which stands for 'blue, red, amber, green') to identify vulnerability and safeguarding needs for adults, children, and suspects. This allows prompt referrals to partnership organisations such as social services and education providers. It also uses the [domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence \(DASH\) assessment tool](#) in appropriate circumstances.

But we found cases where key information was missing. For example, the [voice of the child](#). We also found BRAG cases missing DASH forms where they were required. We found that when information was missing, safeguarding officers didn't make enough effort to get it. And supervisors carrying out initial reviews of referrals did so inconsistently and with limited training and experience.

The constabulary intends to move to a new system of risk assessment in 2025. Since our inspection, it has put processes in place to better understand all stages of the vulnerability risk assessment process. But these aren't yet comprehensive. So, the constabulary may be missing opportunities to safeguard vulnerable people until the new systems and processes are in place.

The constabulary should make sure that it trains its frontline personnel and supervisors to better assess vulnerability at the first point of contact. It should make sure the referral process is comprehensive and offers the best opportunity to prevent future harm. This is an area [we highlighted in our previous inspection of the constabulary in 2022](#).

The constabulary needs to make sure it has sufficiently trained personnel and the resources to make sure the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme complies with the required legislative processes and timescales

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

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Avon and Somerset Constabulary recorded 51 'right to know' applications. This equated to 2.9 applications per 100,000 population. This was lower than expected compared to other forces across England and Wales. The average across all forces was 42.8 applications per 100,000 population.

Additionally, in the year ending 31 March 2024, Avon and Somerset Constabulary recorded 19 'right to know' disclosures. This equated to 1.1 disclosures per 100,000 population. This was lower than expected compared to other forces across England and Wales. The average across 42 forces was 18.5 disclosures per 100,000 population.

During our inspection, we found DVDS records that had been started several years ago that remained open. These were later found to be an administrative error. We also found a backlog of cases that the constabulary weren't assessing within the statutory 28-day limit. The risk in these cases wasn't being reviewed while they were delayed. And untrained personnel were making assessments and decisions with limited multi-agency involvement or support. We raised these issues with the constabulary at the time, to help it address any immediate safeguarding concerns.

During our inspection, the constabulary started taking steps to improve in this area. It has increased resources and oversight and has managed to reduce its backlog of cases. However, this was an area we highlighted for improvement in our last inspection in 2022.

The constabulary should make sure it has sustainable resources, processes and leadership in place to make the best use of the DVDS scheme, to protect the public from domestic abuse offenders.

Innovative practice

The constabulary has advocates to support officers and staff who report any internal sexual misconduct or inappropriate sexual behaviour

The constabulary commissioned an external company that specialises in sexual violence and safeguarding to carry out a review of its internal culture in relation to violence against women and girls.

As a result of this review, it has introduced the role of a sexual misconduct liaison officer. This officer co-ordinates the activity of 20 sexual misconduct advocates. These are volunteers in the constabulary who are asked to provide advice, support and guidance to any officers or staff who report inappropriate sexual behaviour or misconduct in the organisation.

The constabulary hopes that by supporting its colleagues in this way it will demonstrate to the public that it takes the issue of inappropriate sexual behaviour and sexual violence seriously. It hopes this will help build trust and confidence with its communities and encourage them to report any such incidents.

Main findings

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

The constabulary has governance in place for vulnerability, but should make sure this promotes sufficient improvement

The constabulary oversees vulnerability issues through a series of meetings and committees. These include the confidence and legitimacy committee, a vulnerability and violence against women and girls meeting, and the child portfolios group. Each attendee receives data and analysis from the performance and insight team. Key performance indicators allow them to measure the constabulary's performance. There are also senior leaders with responsibility for separate areas of vulnerability, such as domestic abuse or [forced marriage](#).

The constabulary doesn't have its own overall vulnerability strategy. But it has aligned its governance structure with the [National Vulnerability Action Plan](#), which is produced by the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme. Under the title 'Programme Two', the constabulary is also reviewing its overall approach to vulnerability, with a focus on being suspect-focused and victim-led. It also has a protecting vulnerable people improvement plan.

But this governance hasn't led to sufficient improvements in the areas we highlighted in our last report. Or that we highlighted in other reports such as our July–August 2023 [Avon and Somerset – national child protection inspection](#) and our May 2024 [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to serious youth violence in Somerset](#). In both these inspections, we found weaknesses in how the constabulary makes safeguarding referrals and records the voice of the child.

The constabulary's governance should help it to make improvements where needed, so that it can protect vulnerable people.

The constabulary makes use of ancillary orders but could improve its understanding of how and when it uses them

The constabulary provides training and guidance to its officers and staff in relation to ancillary orders, including the use of DVPNs and DVPOs.

During our inspection we found that frontline officers understood the purpose of these orders. But the constabulary's understanding of each stage of the DVPN and DVPO process could improve. Particularly in relation to missed opportunities to pursue orders when an incident is first reported. The constabulary has recognised this. It has carried out dip sampling of cases by both supervisors and members of its legal services department.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Avon and Somerset Constabulary applied for 191 DVPOs in court. This equated to 10.7 applications per 100,000 population. This was at the low end of the typical range compared to other forces in England and Wales. This also meant that the constabulary only made DVPO applications in 0.8 percent of recorded domestic abuse related crimes. This was within the typical range compared to other forces in England and Wales but was one of the lowest rates across forces.

In the same period, the constabulary had 180 DVPO applications granted at court. This equated to 10.1 applications granted per 100,000 population. It recorded 39 DVPO breaches, which equated to 2.2 breaches per 100,000 population. These DVPO rates were within the typical range compared to other forces in England and Wales.

To best protect victims and potential victims of domestic abuse, the constabulary should take steps to understand each stage of the DVPN and DVPO processes. It should identify areas in which it can improve. It should then make the necessary changes and make sure that they contribute to victim safety.

The constabulary works with partner agencies to improve the service it provides to vulnerable people, but needs to make sure it understands how referrals are prioritised

The constabulary contributes to multi-agency safeguarding hub and [multi-agency risk assessment conference \(MARAC\)](#) processes. These cover each of the five local authority areas in Avon and Somerset. These have appropriate information-sharing agreements in place to make sure that all contributors understand their role.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Avon and Somerset Constabulary discussed 1,703 cases at the MARAC. This was below the number (2,920) recommended by [SafeLives](#) based on the size of the local population.

In the year ending 31 December 2023, Avon and Somerset Constabulary discussed 1,818 cases at the MARAC. This was below the 2,920 recommended by SafeLives.

Also, in the year ending 30 September 2023, it discussed 1,984 cases at the MARAC. This was below the 2,950 recommended by SafeLives. And in the year ending 30 June 2023, it discussed 1,995 cases at the MARAC. This was also below the 2,920 recommended by SafeLives.

These figures show that the constabulary is discussing fewer cases at MARAC meetings. We found evidence suggesting that the multi-agency leadership of MARAC processes and their varying thresholds for risk might mean that cases are being rejected prior to MARAC discussions taking place. This may be leading to the decline in the number of cases discussed.

The constabulary should make sure that it understands the volume and appropriateness of its referrals into multi-agency arrangements. It should voice any concerns about how referrals are prioritised through channels, such as MARAC steering groups. This will make sure that it works at its best within partnership arrangements led by other agencies to safeguard vulnerable people.

The constabulary collates feedback in a variety of ways and uses this to improve how it protects vulnerable people

The constabulary obtains feedback from victims in a variety of ways. It uses this to enhance its services for vulnerable people.

Responses to online surveys by people who have used the constabulary's 'lighthouse safeguarding units' (police teams that focus on supporting vulnerable victims) are included as part of performance data. Victims of rape and other serious sexual assaults receive similar surveys. These contribute to the constabulary's approach to [Operation Soteria Bluestone](#).

The constabulary holds a regular 'No further action' scrutiny panel with partners including the Crown Prosecution Service and representatives of independent domestic violence adviser schemes. At these meetings, attendees discuss in detail cases where no further action was taken. The cases discussed are of rape, serious sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking and harassment. Attendees are encouraged to give their view on specific investigations and decisions and the panel record learning outcomes.

By listening to victims and reviewing cases that involved vulnerable people and weren't pursued, the constabulary can consider its approach and improve the service it provides.

Managing offenders and suspects

Requires
improvement

Avon and Somerset Constabulary requires improvement at managing offenders and suspects.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should improve its governance and approach to managing suspects and wanted people

During our inspection we found that officers and supervisors generally understood how to manage offenders and suspects. And they generally understood the requirements of the new [bail](#) legislation under the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#).

But we also found that there was little oversight of wanted people at a constabulary-wide level. Or of the risks that these people posed to the public. We found that the way in which wanted people were prioritised for arrest was unclear. It sometimes occurred before cases were at the most suitable stage for an arrest. We also found examples of people wanted for offences involving violence who had been wanted for some months with no apparent action being taken.

In the year ending 12 October 2021, there were 573 wanted suspects whose details had circulated on the [Police National Computer](#) for more than six months. In the year ending 1 March 2022, this increased to 628. In the year ending 5 June 2024, it increased to 737.

We also found that the constabulary was aware that the number of suspects it had on police bail and released under investigation was rising, and that there were inaccuracies in its record keeping. The constabulary told us that there were approximately 20 cases per month where suspects on police bail lapsed into being released under investigation, without any specific decision being made for this to happen. This suggests that processes, supervision and resources aren't in place to properly manage investigations that have suspects on police bail.

In our inspection we also found that cases in which suspects are dealt with through [voluntary attendance](#) could more consistently managed. The constabulary should make sure all officers take necessary forensic samples from suspects when they attend incidents.

The constabulary should make sure that it manages suspects and offenders properly. This would reduce the risk of them re-offending and harming the public.

The constabulary should make sure that it has processes and resources in place to visit registered sex offenders and manage the risk posed by them

During our initial inspection activities in May 2024, the constabulary told us that it had backlogs of 311 registered sex offender home visits and 129 [active risk management system](#) assessments. Home visits and risk assessments are carried out to accurately assess the risks posed by registered sex offenders.

Since that time, the constabulary has taken steps to reduce the backlogs. It has done this by using overtime and the assistance of other officers, including the constabulary's proactive Operation Remedy team.

Despite this, at the end of our inspection the constabulary told us that the backlogs were now 271 overdue visits and 231 overdue active risk management system assessments. Delays in visiting or risk assessing registered sex offenders means that the constabulary may be unaware of the risk these offenders pose. This restricts how well it can protect the public.

The constabulary should keep trying to reduce these backlogs. We highlighted this as an area for improvement [in our previous 2021/22 PEEL report](#).

The constabulary should make sure that its internet child abuse team can manage images of online child abuse in line with nationally recognised risk assessment timescales, and that supervisors regularly review officers' caseloads

The constabulary has two teams dealing with the investigations into images of online child abuse. During our inspection we found that one of these teams was understaffed. The other team had accommodation that wasn't suitable for the sensitive nature of the work it does. We found these things were contributing to delays and backlogs. And that officers felt overworked.

The [Kent internet risk assessment tool \(KIRAT\)](#) is used to identify the level of risk posed by those suspected of accessing indecent images of children. This assessment determines the timescale in which the constabulary should take action against a suspect, such as making an arrest or executing a search warrant. In September 2024, we found cases with backlogs that weren't within these timescales. This included:

- 63 cases for which the risk wasn't known that were being developed by external intelligence teams. The oldest of these was from April 2024.
- One outstanding high-risk case that was two weeks old.
- Three medium-risk cases dating back to March 2024.
- 34 outstanding low-risk cases, the oldest of which was more than a year old.

The KIRAT guidelines suggest timescales for enforcement should be seven days for high-risk cases, 14 days for medium-risk cases, and 30 days for low-risk cases.

We also found that internet child abuse team officers had active workloads averaging 14.2 cases each. When cases waiting for forensic or intelligence work were included, the average increased to 26 cases each.

The constabulary should better manage its efforts to reduce these backlogs. It should enforce cases involving images of online child abuse within KIRAT timescales. This will allow the constabulary to protect the public from the harm caused by those who access and share these images. This area was highlighted as an area for improvement [in our previous 2021/22 PEEL report](#). It was also [in our 2023 national child protection inspection of the constabulary](#).

The constabulary should make sure that it continually risk assesses any backlogs in online child abuse referrals and cases awaiting enforcement action, and that bail checks and intelligence refreshes take place following enforcement action

When cases of images of online child abuse are waiting for enforcement action, they should be regularly reviewed to check for any change in the risk a suspect poses. Following any enforcement action, the risk posed by offenders who are bailed should also be monitored.

Pre-enforcement check processes are in place. But we found officers weren't always doing them or they weren't always completing them. This was due to high workloads. We also found that, after enforcement action, checks of risks posed by offenders weren't happening. We also didn't find any evidence of checks in relation to any bail conditions.

People who access images of online child abuse pose a risk to the public. The constabulary should make sure that it takes all possible steps to reduce the risk of suspects causing further harm. This was an area we highlighted for improvement [in our previous 2021/22 PEEL report](#).

Main findings

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

The constabulary should improve its use of specialist software designed to support investigations

The constabulary has one person carrying out the role of the victim identification officer. They work with victims, identify first generation images, upload images to the [Child Abuse Image Database](#), and carry out safeguarding visits to children. The Child Abuse Image Database supports the investigation and prosecution of offenders and the identification of victims. The constabulary's current resourcing level means this process can be easily disrupted by the absence of this one person.

The constabulary should make sure that it has resilience for this role. It is vital to safeguard and support victims.

We also found that there weren't enough officers trained in the use of the [Violent and Sex Offender Register](#). This could limit the effectiveness and efficiency with which officers can record details of offenders. The constabulary has arranged further training for officers.

At the time of our inspection, the constabulary had 70 eSafe licences to assist with the monitoring of electronic devices held by registered sex offenders. But officers told us they weren't always confident in using the licences, and not all licences were used.

The constabulary should make sure that officers and staff are trained and supported to use all the specialist software and tools available to them.

The constabulary makes sure that safeguarding is in place for potential victims and suspects in cases of indecent images of children

During our inspection we examined cases involving offenders accessing indecent images of children. In most cases, we found that, at the outset of investigations, officers and staff routinely checked with relevant partner organisations, such as children's social care, to find out if any children were at risk. If they identified a child as being at risk during an investigation into online child abuse, they made appropriate referrals to children's services.

We also found that the constabulary uses discretion when enforcement action is taken against suspected offenders. Suspects are given access to mental health services and are signposted to other support agencies. They are also given replacement mobile telephones and family support packs. The constabulary checks on their welfare 48 hours after enforcement.

The constabulary follows authorised professional practice when managing registered sex offenders, using preventative and ancillary orders, and properly investigating any breaches

During our initial inspection in May 2024, we found that officers carrying out checks on registered sex offenders were doing this in ways that didn't follow the [College of Policing's authorised professional practice](#). These included single-crewed visits, no reviews of visiting officers' body-worn video footage, and visits to low-risk offenders taking place on an announced basis (meaning offenders were being told in advance that the police would be visiting them). Officers told us this was due to high levels of demand and not having enough officers to carry out the work. Officers also told us they found the constabulary's approach to and policies around crewing and visits difficult to understand.

But in later inspection activity, we found that the constabulary's [management of sexual offenders and violent offenders](#) teams followed authorised professional practice as a default position. [Any deviation from this guidance must be authorised by a senior officer, and any risk potentially posed to the visiting officers is mitigated.](#)

Management of sexual offenders and violent offenders teams also have clear guidance and working knowledge of preventative and ancillary orders, such as [Sexual Harm Prevention Orders](#) and [Sexual Risk Orders](#). Officers we spoke to were confident about applying for such orders, and properly recording and investigating any breaches.

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Adequate

Avon and Somerset Constabulary is adequate at building, supporting and protecting the workforce.

Area for improvement

The constabulary needs to make sure it implements the findings of its occupational health unit review quickly, so that its workforce can benefit from the improvements

The constabulary reviewed its occupational health unit in 2023. As a result, it changed its working model to be led by nurse practitioners. The constabulary found that this would improve how the unit looks after the needs of the workforce, as it would be better able to triage referrals. The constabulary also plans to introduce a new IT system in 2025. And it plans to gain further accreditations beyond its [Foundation Occupational Health Standards for Police Forces](#).

But waiting times between an initial referral to the unit and a first appointment remain high. We found that waiting times of over 40 days are common. The constabulary is struggling to recruit appropriately qualified nurses and counsellors to help it provide a timely and quality service. Without such support, those in need of help and assistance are more likely to be absent from work.

The constabulary should make sure it puts its plans into practice efficiently and effectively.

Main findings

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

The constabulary provides a good range of preventative and supportive measures, including enhanced support to those in high-risk roles

The majority of the constabulary's workforce we spoke to felt well looked after and knew how to access support should they need it. An intranet page dedicated to well-being issues provides details and links to guidance on a variety of topics. These include stress, financial well-being, bereavement, and reasonable adjustments in the workplace. It also gives guidance on the professional support available, including physiotherapy and the Employee Assistance Programme. The constabulary has a health and well-being passport system. This helps personnel to easily speak to their line managers about issues affecting their well-being such as disability, neurodivergence or mental health.

When a potentially traumatic incident happens, officers and staff feel that the constabulary supports them. One way the constabulary supports officer well-being is through [trauma risk management \(TRiM\)](#). TRiM is a trauma-focused peer support system aimed at helping those who have experienced traumatic events. The constabulary has 80 TRiM practitioners. The constabulary monitors how its workforce uses this service. To cope with rising demand, the constabulary is increasing the number of practitioners it has. In our PEEL workforce survey, we found that 81.8 percent (1,240 of 1,516 respondents) agreed that the constabulary provides counselling services after incidents.

But our survey also identified that only 42.7 percent (648 of 1,516 respondents) agreed that debrief and compression time was prioritised after such incidents. Among police and student officers this number was lower still at 30.9 percent (254 of 822 respondents).

The constabulary also identifies those officers and staff carrying out high-risk roles. These include specialist investigators and firearms officers. These officers and staff receive enhanced welfare support such as psychological screening, and annual welfare reviews and surveys. The constabulary reviews the roles included in these high-risk categories on a yearly basis, to make sure no one is missed.

If an officer, staff member or volunteer is assaulted or is subject to a [hate crime](#), then the constabulary instigates its 'seven-point promise' plan. This outlines the steps to be taken in areas including investigation, supervision, welfare referral, and compliance with the Victims Code of Practice. Details of this well-developed plan are available on the constabulary's intranet system. When an incident of this type happens, it is brought up in the constabulary's daily 'pacesetter' meetings. This makes sure senior managers know that the necessary steps are being taken.

The constabulary has processes in place to effectively support and retain its new recruits

Issues relating to the constabulary's recruitment of officers under the [Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship \(PCDA\)](#) and [Degree Holder Entry Programme \(DHEP\)](#) are discussed at the constabulary's PCDA and DHEP project board meeting.

The constabulary's 2024 retention strategy contains details of those leaving the organisation down to departmental level. It contains demographic information, including [protected characteristics](#). The strategy also records reasons for leaving, using data obtained from leaver surveys and exit interviews. The constabulary told us reasons for leaving included workloads, well-being, unsocial hours, management and culture. The strategy then covers the constabulary's priorities, which aim to increase retention.

At a fortnightly retention meeting leaders discuss recruits and student officers who are considering leaving. They consider ways to try to retain them. Issues often include concerns about attaining level two maths and English qualifications, and completing dissertations. The constabulary offers students dyscalculia, dyslexia and language tutors to help them overcome these difficulties.

The constabulary has an established programme to support its new recruits through the early stages of their careers as police officers. It has a strong partnership with the University of the West of England and has a sergeant at the university to make sure the programme runs smoothly. Pastoral care is in place for recruits in the PCDA programme. Regular meetings take place between the constabulary and the university to discuss the progress of individual students. Students who need extra support are discussed at meetings chaired by the deputy head of learning and attended by HR specialists.

The constabulary's First-Line Leadership programme supports officers and staff to develop, but not everyone eligible to attend has done so

In 2023, the constabulary introduced its First-Line Leadership programme. This includes courses aimed at making sure its leaders are effective. For example:

- a five-day first-line leader launchpad course aimed at new leaders, covering areas such as leading self and others, coaching and mentoring;
- a two-day future first-line leader course aimed at leaders of the future, covering areas such as familiarisation with the basics of leadership and the constabulary's expectations; and
- a three-day first-line leader accelerator course aimed at existing leaders, covering areas such as leading teams, culture and leading situations.

The constabulary's people committee monitors the attendance of supervisors on these courses. It also oversees planning to make sure all relevant supervisors attend.

The constabulary is also [piloting the College of Policing's Sergeant and Inspector Promotion and Progression](#) process. This focuses on development, selection and promotion, and provides specific leadership-based training.

In our PEEL workforce survey we found that 70.1 percent of line managers (329 of 469 respondents) agreed that the constabulary equipped them with enough training to carry out their role. However, the survey results also identified that 60.2 percent of line managers (281 of 467 respondents) weren't enrolled on any leadership courses, programmes, or workshops, run by either Avon and Somerset Constabulary or the College of Policing.

The constabulary is modifying its professional development review process

At the time of our inspection, the constabulary was carrying out a review of its professional development review process. The constabulary calls this an individual performance review (IPR). This is the tool that helps managers and personnel plan their career progression and professional development.

At the end of March 2024, the constabulary told us that their IPR completion rate was 77.7 percent. At the time of our inspection, 72.2 percent of IPR objectives had been set for the current IPR period of April 2024 onwards.

Guidance is available for officers and staff to help them through the IPR process, including a help desk and pages on the constabulary's intranet.

During our inspection, we found that officers and staff had mixed opinions about the value of the IPR system. Some told us that it was only useful for those wanting a promotion or another role. This was reflected in our PEEL workforce survey results, where we found that 46.7 percent (454 of 972 respondents) agreed that IPRs were an effective tool in their development, and that 57.7 percent (561 of 972 respondents) agreed that they value the process. But most people we spoke to valued the one-to-one development discussions they have with their line managers.

The constabulary creates opportunities for officers and staff from under-represented groups to develop and progress

The constabulary's leadership academy has produced a 'tube map' showing options for courses and development open to all levels of the organisation. Officers and staff can apply for or self-select the courses they wish to attend.

In addition to this, people from under-represented groups are supported in a variety of ways. The Aspirations programme supports those from under-represented groups through the recruitment process. The programme has had positive feedback from participants. It has led to an increase in candidates passing the recruit assessment centre stage of the process.

The constabulary also encourages officers and staff from under-represented groups to apply for external courses specifically aimed at them. These include courses such as the College of Policing's Aspire leadership development programme (aimed at senior officers and staff) and the 'Stepping Up' [positive action](#) leadership programme run by Bristol City Council.

The constabulary has used an external provider, [Creased Puddle](#), to provide neurodiversity training for personnel as well. This helps increase their understanding of what reasonable adjustments are possible within the workplace.

A working group for people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment is chaired by a senior officer. This group meets regularly to promote the needs of those affected by hearing loss or impairments.

The constabulary's Race Matters programme was also set up to tackle disproportionality in the local criminal justice system. This led to one-day training for all frontline officers, providing a safe space for them to discuss and ask questions about cultural issues.

The constabulary also has an Inclusion and Diversity Plan 2019–2024. This includes activities such as hate crime awareness workshops and a hate crime champions network. It also includes guidance on transgender and non-binary inclusion at work, for individuals and managers.

As well as this, the constabulary is a [Stonewall Diversity Champion](#) and a [Disability Confident Employer](#).

Leadership and force management

Requires improvement

Avon and Somerset Constabulary's leadership and management requires improvement.

Areas for improvement

The constabulary should use relevant data and analysis to make sure it is operating efficiently and effectively

The constabulary has a clear governance structure. Its management boards and committees have the right attendees to identify and make improvements. The constabulary also has access to a wide range of performance and management data. It uses the Qlik application to both receive and share this data. Qlik is a data visualisation tool that shows data to officers and staff in an easily understandable form.

But we found the constabulary wasn't effectively using this data to identify and improve productivity in all areas of the organisation. The way some data was presented was too complicated and not sufficiently linked to strategic aims. Leadership team members throughout the constabulary aren't being held to account for their own or their team's performance, as the data needed to identify opportunities to improve is lacking. This means that leaders don't have a clear understanding of what is expected of them, so can't carry out their roles effectively.

For example, we found teams with backlogs of work and without the capacity to deal with demand. The constabulary needs to improve its analysis and use of data in these areas so it can appropriately address these issues.

We also found evidence of teams working without regular contact with supervisors, and individuals sometimes working alone. And in some departments the constabulary is regularly using overtime and rest day working to reduce demand and backlogs. In our PEEL survey, we found that 68.5 percent of the workforce (1,038 of 1,516 respondents) agreed that overtime is often used to manage demand. This figure was higher for police and student officers only, with 80.7 percent (663 of 822 respondents) agreeing.

The constabulary should make sure it uses data and analysis effectively to monitor capacity and capability. It should identify improvements when performance isn't sufficient to meet demand effectively.

The constabulary needs to make sure that its senior leaders are more connected to its workforce

The constabulary's senior leaders are dedicated to providing a service to the communities of Avon and Somerset. The constabulary is working hard to improve its culture. It is providing thoughtful leadership training and has succession planning for future leaders.

But we found that too often there is a breakdown in communication between senior leaders and the officers and staff. Officers and staff told us that strategic decisions, organisational change programmes, and some operational decisions aren't always explained well enough. There are ways for personnel to ask senior leaders questions, but frontline officers and staff told us they often find answers are difficult to locate or unclear.

We saw evidence of senior officers communicating with officers and staff. But we didn't see corresponding evidence of leaders explaining decisions or understanding members of the workforce's feelings. And officers and staff told us they don't always feel that they are listened to.

The constabulary needs to improve its ability to communicate with and listen to its workforce. It should be clear about the reasons for its strategic decisions.

The constabulary needs to make sure its operating model helps its workforce to address priorities and current and future demand

The constabulary has a directorship operating model. Its workforce plan has a 'minimum service level' (a minimum number of staff and officers) to try to make sure it has the personnel in place to meet demand. But we found the desired service levels often aren't met, and it isn't always clear why certain service levels are chosen. For example, the constabulary has a minimum requirement of 105 response officers, but the reasons for this number aren't clear.

The constabulary's teams are often not sufficiently resourced. Also, there is a variety of capability and capacity within the teams, and they aren't always well balanced to meet demand. For example, the constabulary hasn't evenly distributed response drivers and Taser-trained officers.

The constabulary is also using inexperienced officers to investigate complex crimes that they aren't trained for. And we saw examples of neighbourhood officers attending response calls on a regular basis. If neighbourhood officers attend an incident that results in a crime being recorded, those officers retain the investigation. This is regardless of whether it relates to their role.

The constabulary needs to review its current operating model and its personnel's skills. It needs to make sure the right number of people with the right skills are dealing with the right work.

Innovative practice

The constabulary is using telematics to make better use of its vehicle fleet

The constabulary is using driver telematics effectively. Driver telematics tells the constabulary where and how its vehicles are used. Managers use various applications to decide where best to position vehicles and measure how well officers are driving the vehicles.

These allow the constabulary to allocate vehicles to the teams that need them, and for vehicles that aren't in use to be re-allocated. They also let managers monitor driving quality by examining recordings of 'harsh events' such as sharp acceleration and braking. This data is analysed and compared to police vehicle collision data. The constabulary can then identify any particularly skilled drivers and those who might benefit from re-training.

This has allowed the constabulary to better deploy its fleet to where it is needed. This means it can respond to the public more effectively. It can also reassure insurers that the fleet and its drivers are appropriately governed, leading to a reduction in insurance premiums.

Main findings

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

The constabulary has improved its governance structure and is thoughtful in its involvement with its communities, but needs to use its data better to inform governance at local command levels

The constabulary has a communication and engagement strategy that is supported by a programme of planned activity. The constabulary has recently employed a director of communications and engagement. This person has extensive experience of working with the media and the intention is for them to improve the constabulary's internal and external communications. The constabulary also works with local community groups such as the [Mwanzo Project](#) and [Growing Futures UK](#). The leaders of both of these groups are 'critical friends' who speak honestly about the constabulary's work.

The constabulary has created several committees to promote improvements. For example, the confidence and legitimacy committee, the people committee, and the operational improvement committee. However, we found that data doesn't always direct activity at a local level. And the constabulary's data and insight packs are too detailed for local management to use them effectively.

The constabulary is providing leadership training for its personnel, but senior leaders need to be more visible and accessible to the workforce

The constabulary has a leadership academy that provides leadership programmes to support its personnel. These include the First-Line Leadership programme and the planned mid-line leadership programme. The constabulary is also trying to understand capacity and capability by employing student officers equally across the constabulary's different departments and teams. The constabulary uses platforms such as Pocketbook, the constabulary's intranet, and leadership days where officers and staff can talk with leaders.

However, some personnel told us they are sceptical about some of the information shared by leaders, particularly about reduction in staff numbers. Some of the staff associations' members also told us they don't feel supported by the organisation.

The workforce also appears not to understand certain decisions around the constabulary's relationship with the media. Officers and staff from under-represented groups told us they didn't always feel the benefit of the constabulary's transparency within the workplace.

The constabulary is embracing artificial intelligence and is taking steps to improve its productivity

We found that the constabulary is developing its productivity. It has an information communication technology (ICT), fleet and estate strategy that should help make needed improvements. The constabulary has also invested in support to create the vehicle fleet and future fleet strategy. It uses driver telematics well. Its 'Fleet Optimisation' app provides assurance that the fleet is being used efficiently and effectively. The constabulary is developing its 'Learning Transformational Strategy and Cost-Conscious Organisation' programme. This includes a neighbourhood policing resourcing model review.

The constabulary is embracing artificial intelligence. It has developed a proof of concept for a new Söse data analysis product to enhance its investigative capability in the future. This tool allows personnel to rapidly search through digital evidence.

The constabulary collaborates well on ICT and digital programmes with other police forces in the region. It told us that regional savings through collaboration have been in the region of £6 million, with the constabulary saving £1.5 million against cost increase. The constabulary is also investing in [Right Care Right Person](#) with its own 'Right Service, Right Person, Right Time' programme. So far, it has placed a police mental health link officer in the South-Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust control room.

However, we did find that the constabulary has multiple ICT systems. These are for tasks such as:

- shift rostering;
- annual leave;
- rest days in lieu;
- time off in lieu; and
- skills and training levels.

Personnel have to transfer data between these systems manually. This process needs to be more efficient.

The constabulary understands its finances

In the financial year ending 31 March 2024, the constabulary received a total of £382.5 million in funding. This is £214,000 per 1,000 population. This is in line with expected levels compared to other forces in England and Wales. In the financial year ending 31 March 2024, 41.1 percent of the constabulary's total funding was through council tax precept. This was also in line with expected levels compared to other forces in England and Wales.

We found the constabulary shows effective financial management of the funds it has to provide efficient police services. There is a clear link to plans and priorities. This is reflected in the police and crime commissioner's plans.

The constabulary's mid-term financial plan shows that the 2024/25 and 2025/26 revenue budgets are balanced after accounting for savings already identified. The constabulary will need to find further savings to meet the current financial deficit of £12 million by 2029.

At the end of March 2023, useable reserve levels stood at £63.8 million. They were predicted to decrease to £52.9 million by March 2024. By the end of March 2029, the constabulary projects that useable reserves will stand at £23.8 million. This is a sensible amount of reserves.

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