

PEEL 2023–25

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Kent Police

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Overall summary

Our judgments

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

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

We also inspected how effective a service Kent Police gives to victims of crime. We don't make a graded judgment in this overall area.

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

Data in this report

For more information, please [view this report on our website](#) and select the 'About the data' section.

PEEL 2023–2025

In 2014, we introduced our police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections, which assess the performance of all 43 police forces in England and Wales. Since then, we have been continuously adapting our approach.

We have moved to a more [intelligence](#)-led, continual assessment approach, rather than the annual [PEEL inspections](#) we used in previous years. Forces are assessed against the characteristics of good performance, set out in the [PEEL Assessment Framework 2023–2025](#), and we more clearly link our judgments to [causes of concern](#) and [areas for improvement](#).

It isn't possible to make direct comparisons between the grades awarded in this PEEL inspection and those from the previous cycle of PEEL inspections. This is because we have increased our focus on making sure forces are achieving appropriate outcomes for the public, and in some cases we have changed the aspects of policing we inspect.

Terminology in this report

Our reports contain references to, among other things, 'national' definitions, priorities, policies, systems, responsibilities and processes.

In some instances, 'national' means applying to England or Wales, or England and Wales. In others, it means applying to England, Wales and Scotland, or the whole of the United Kingdom.

HM Inspector's summary

I am pleased with the performance of Kent Police in keeping people safe, reducing crime and giving [victims](#) an effective service. But in order to provide a consistently good service, it needs to improve in some areas.

It was pleasing to note that since our last PEEL inspection, the force has taken steps to improve how it communicates with communities to identify problems and gather intelligence. It also continues to work effectively in partnership with a wide range of other organisations on problem-solving, crime prevention and early intervention.

I was also pleased to find that since our last PEEL inspection, the force has worked hard to improve the quality of its investigations. The force has effective governance arrangements for investigative standards. This results in thorough and well-supervised investigations. Investigators look for opportunities to bring offenders to justice even when victims are unwilling to proceed. They use [bail](#) effectively to protect vulnerable victims and reduce further crime. But these improvements haven't yet resulted in more positive outcomes for victims.

Since our last PEEL inspection, the force has also improved the way it records information about children or vulnerable adults to better support multi-agency risk assessments. The number and quality of referrals have increased, which allow the force and partners to intervene more effectively to protect those at risk.

Kent Police has an average level of funding per 1,000 population in England and Wales. But the use of this funding doesn't always result in a good service for the public in some important areas, such as its initial response to calls. The force doesn't always answer emergency and non-emergency calls in a timely way. And it doesn't always attend calls for service as quickly as it should. The force has tried to address these problems by increasing the number of call handlers and by improving the range of alternative ways to contact the force. But it needs to do more to meet the public's needs.

The force had a change in leadership in the year leading up to our inspection, with the appointment of a new chief constable and deputy chief constable. The new leadership team has reviewed the force's operating model and how it uses its funding. This has resulted in changes to the way it provides [neighbourhood policing](#). But at the time of our inspection, the force had only just made these changes, so they weren't fully developed. It will take time to have the effect the leadership wants.

We hope the changes to the way the force operates result in further improvements that help it meet the public's needs. We will be monitoring its progress closely.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Constabulary

Leadership

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

The force is benefiting from a new chief constable and deputy chief constable who have a pragmatic yet innovative approach to improving performance. There has been a strong focus on responding to the areas for improvement identified in the force's [2021/22 PEEL assessment](#). Of note is the way the force has improved the quality of investigations through strong governance supported by a rigorous quality assurance framework. In addition, bespoke training for first and second-line leaders has enhanced their ability to oversee and direct investigations to achieve improved outcomes for victims. There is still more work to be done to improve outcomes for victims, but there is good progress.

The [chief officer](#) team is committed to balancing current operational needs with longer-term change management activities designed to make sure that the force can respond to future challenges. For example, the force has successfully introduced a new neighbourhood policing model, albeit with a temporary reduction in planned officer numbers. This has allowed it to release neighbourhood officers into the force control and incident room (FCIR) to support [police staff](#) shortages.

Senior leaders have been innovative in their use of technology. The migration of the force's data centre to a remote facility has improved security and resilience to system failure or cyberattack. Equally, the implementation of a platform solution to incorporate [body-worn video \(BWV\)](#), digital interviews, public upload and CCTV has revolutionised the force's approach to digital asset management.

The chief officer team is committed to developing leadership at all ranks. There is a culture that expects leaders of all ranks to drive improvements. Enhanced leadership training supports this process, as does the accessibility and attitude of senior leaders who obtain and respond to feedback from [police officers](#) and staff to positively shape the direction of the force.

Consideration of the well-being of police officers and staff runs through all leadership training. Recent positive changes include support for those in investigative posts linked to trauma-based crime and the addition of a separate well-being element to the professional developmental review (PDR) process. These are a testament to the force improving its well-being provision from an already high level.

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

Reducing crime assessment

The reducing crime assessment sets out what Kent Police is doing to reduce crime and how effective this action is. This assessment doesn't include police-recorded crime figures. This is because they can be affected by variations and changes in recording policy and practice, which makes it difficult to make comparisons over time.

Officers receive scenario-based training to support their use of [stop and search](#). They use it effectively and respectfully. The overwhelming majority of recorded grounds for stop and search are reasonable. The force can demonstrate above national average positive outcome rates for its use. This helps the force reduce crime.

The force prioritises the prevention of crime, [antisocial behaviour](#) and vulnerability. It has restructured its neighbourhood policing model to maximise engagement with communities to identify local problems and gather intelligence. It works with a wide range of other organisations on problem-solving, crime prevention and early intervention activity.

To help reduce crime, the force has effective governance arrangements for investigative standards. This results in thorough and well-supervised investigations. Investigators will look for opportunities to bring offenders to justice even when victims are unwilling to proceed. The force uses bail well to protect vulnerable victims and reduce further crime.

The force has highly effective multi-agency [safeguarding](#) arrangements, with good working relationships with partners. The force listens to victims, partner organisations and independent members of communities to improve its service and help prevent further crime. It intervenes effectively to reduce repeat victimisation and curtail offenders and prioritises action against those who pose the highest risk.

More detail on what Kent Police is doing to reduce crime is included in the main body of the report.

Providing a service to victims of crime

Victim service assessment

This section describes our assessment of the service Kent Police provides to victims. This is from the point of reporting a crime and throughout the investigation. As part of this assessment, we reviewed 116 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 116 cases to review, including at least 20 that the force had closed with the following outcome:

Further investigation, resulting from the crime report, which could provide evidence sufficient to support formal action being taken against the named suspect, isn't in the public interest – police decision (outcome 21).

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

The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency and non-emergency calls. The force identifies repeat and vulnerable victims

The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls. It needs to reduce the number of non-emergency calls that the caller abandons before getting an answer. When the force answers calls, it uses a structured process that considers threat, harm, risk and vulnerability. Call handlers are polite and professional but don't always give victims advice on crime prevention and how to preserve evidence.

In some cases, the force responds promptly to calls for service

On some occasions, the force responds to calls for service appropriately. But it doesn't always inform victims of delays. Therefore, victims' expectations aren't always met. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage from the process.

The force conducts effective and timely investigations

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

A thorough investigation increases the likelihood of identifying perpetrators and arresting them, which is a positive result for the victim. In all cases, the force took victim personal statements. This gives victims the opportunity to describe how the crime has affected their lives.

When a victim withdrew support for an investigation, the force considered progressing the case without the victim's support. This can be an important method of safeguarding the victim and preventing further offences. In some cases, the force didn't record whether it considered using orders designed to protect victims, such as a [domestic violence protection notice](#) or [domestic violence protection order](#).

The [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime \(the Victims' Code\)](#) requires forces to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage. This determines whether victims need additional support. The force doesn't always carry out this assessment or record the request for additional support.

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

The force isn't consistently providing a level of service that achieves appropriate outcomes for victims of crime. The force doesn't always close crimes with the appropriate outcome type. It doesn't always record a clear rationale for using a certain outcome. In several cases, the choice of outcome type wasn't effectively supervised. On most occasions, the force sought the victim's views when deciding which outcome type to assign to a closed investigation. The force didn't always get an auditable record of the victim's wishes. The force, on most occasions, informed the victim of the investigation's outcome code.

Police powers and treating the public fairly and respectfully

Good

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

Main findings

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

The workforce understands why and how it should treat the public with fairness and respect

Police officers and staff have a sound understanding of what constitutes unfair behaviour towards the public and how to challenge poor behaviour. The force's effective communication programme provides new recruits with knowledge, skills and understanding of human interaction. This includes non-verbal communication and how attitude affects behaviour. Annual personal safety training for all frontline officers includes effective communication skills and use of the LEAPS (listen, empathise, ask, paraphrase, summarise) de-escalation model. The training is scenario based and aims to assess officers in situations similar to those they will face in real life.

The force understands how to use stop and search powers fairly and respectfully

During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 165 stop and search records from 1 January to 31 December 2022. On the basis of this sample, we estimate that 88.5 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.8 percent) of all stop and searches by the force during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. This is broadly unchanged compared to our review in 2020 when we estimated that 87.5 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.8 percent) of stop and searches had reasonable grounds recorded. Of the records we reviewed for stop and searches on people from ethnic minorities, 22 of 24 had reasonable grounds recorded.

Officers are confident in their use of stop and search and use it correctly and effectively. Following a decline in the number of stop and search encounters for the year ending 31 March 2022 compared to the previous year, the force is now seeing an increase in its use.

The force told us it is also seeing correspondingly high positive outcome rates against those who were searched with action taken, including arrests, warnings and penalty notices.

More significantly, the force has an above-average rate of linked outcomes for stop and searches. A linked outcome is when officers find a stolen or prohibited item that is linked to the reason for the search. In the year ending 31 March 2022, 28.7 percent of stop and searches in Kent had linked outcomes. This is higher than the linked outcome rate across all forces in England and Wales of 22.2 percent.

All police officers have initial training in using stop and search powers, which is refreshed in annual personal safety training. The force requires stop and search interactions to be recorded on [body-worn video \(BWV\)](#). It is achieving good levels of compliance. The force has recently added a reassurance element to its stop and search procedures. This makes sure that officers end any encounter in a manner that aims to defuse potential conflict. Officers are encouraged to ask the person if they have any concerns or comments about the way they have been stopped. As part of our inspection, we viewed BWV footage of ten stop and search encounters and found officers' behaviour and use of powers to be exemplary. They treated those stopped with dignity and respect, sometimes in challenging situations.

The force has good internal and external oversight of stop and search

The force makes sure that there is effective oversight of stop and search. Its policing powers oversight board and policing powers tactical board meet every three months. Together these make sure that effective policies lead to effective practice. They are supported by nominated stop search leads at inspector level for all three geographic divisions of the force and for specialist operations. These lead officers each review 20 stop and search and 20 use of force forms every month, selected at random. The leads address failings by individual officers directly. And they feed thematic issues back to learning and development as potential training points.

The force uses an external scrutiny panel to monitor its use of stop and search. The panel has diverse representation. Its terms of reference include the review of BWV footage. The chair of the strategic [independent advisory group](#) also chairs this panel. It engages well with the police. The panel has provided good feedback, but it could be improved with more focused terms of reference, minutes and actions. This would improve the panel's ability to hold the police to account. Equally, provision and presentation of data to the group could also be better. This would make sure that the panel has a greater understanding of key issues, such as disproportionality.

The force has recently improved the stop and search information on its website. It now contains easy-to-understand infographics that give a breakdown of stop and search across datasets, such as ethnicity, gender and age. The addition of a description to support analysis of the data would further improve understanding of this information.

Kent Police understands how to use force fairly and appropriately. But the force needs to improve its recording of use of force incidents

Officers have good awareness of prioritising tactical communications over the use of force. When force is used, officers must complete a digital form. This goes automatically to the line manager for supervision. Uniformed officers are confident that they always complete the form and that supervisors review BWV footage to make sure this is happening. However, the force has seen a decrease in recorded use of force in some departments, such as the crime command. This may indicate under-recording.

The force recorded 12,891 use of force incidents in the year ending 31 March 2022. This was a 12.3 percent decrease compared with the previous year. Based on the number of arrests, we estimate Kent Police under-recorded use of force by at least 14,854 incidents. The force has recently taken steps to improve compliance. A concentrated internal campaign emphasises the need to justify and record use of force. Annual personal safety training reinforces good practice. [Dip sampling](#) of forms by local lead officers also aims to improve recording rates.

The force uses data effectively to scrutinise use of force but needs to improve how it presents use of force data on its website

The force statistically breaks down use of force activity. It can demonstrate how many times use of force was employed by officers with a certain length of service or by different divisions or departments. This helps it to quickly identify potential good or poor practice. The force recently overlaid the data with data on injuries sustained by officers while on duty. This is to ascertain if an increase in the number injured could be linked to poor use of force tactics. The results are inconclusive at this stage.

Kent Police effectively monitors its use of force in a similar way to stop and search through its internal policing powers boards and externally via its independent scrutiny group. As part of its review process, the external group examines randomly selected BWV footage of use of force, including deployment of Taser. The force has also recently improved the presentation of use of force data on its website. But there is limited description to explain its significance. And there is no information on the force's website on the external scrutiny process.

Preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behaviour, and reducing vulnerability

Good

Kent Police is good at prevention and deterrence.

Promising practice

The force has a proactive approach to managing mental health demand, which sees it working closely with partner agencies

Officers responding to people in mental health crisis have access to advice and guidance from specialist medical practitioners through a dedicated helpline. This allows the force to provide prompt support and intervention. It often reduces the need to resort to police powers under [section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983](#) to detain people for their own safety. The process is supported by the Kent and Medway safe havens. These offer out-of-hours mental health support to those in crisis.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, Kent Police detained 1,136 people under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983, compared to 1,745 in the previous year. The force estimates that between April 2019 and January 2021, use of section 136 from the point of detention to handover to mental health services required 16,725 hours of policing. The figure from April 2022 to January 2023 stands at only 7,083 hours.

Area for improvement

The force needs to improve how it stores its problem-solving plans and shares good practice

Operational units within Kent Police are using a range of different processes to store and operate their problem-solving plans. The result is that the force struggles to consistently identify and record best practice. A single effective system for recording problem-solving activities would help the force to understand what works well and to make improvements.

Kent Police has recently implemented a force-wide process for the creation and storage of problem-solving plans on its crime-recording system. [Officers](#) and [staff](#) have received training on the new process. They are migrating their own systems to the required standardised approach. However, the process is at an early stage. The force still lacks a central storage system that contains examples of best practice to support and improve problem-solving activity.

Main findings

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

The force has restructured its neighbourhood policing model to guarantee focus on community engagement, problem-solving and targeted activity

Following engagement with the public and partner agencies, Kent Police recently restructured its neighbourhood policing model.

It has created 210 beat officer posts held by warranted police officers who focus on engagement, problem-solving and targeted activity at local ward level. Beat officers don't take on crime investigations nor are they ordinarily called away from their core duties. Therefore, they can maintain visibility and focus on local policing issues.

Working with its local authorities and other partners, including voluntary organisations, the force has expanded the use of multi-agency task forces to all its districts. This recognises that the three original task forces covering Maidstone, Margate and Medway proved very effective at tackling crime and antisocial behaviour and safeguarding [vulnerable people](#).

The force has established divisional prevention hubs. These support neighbourhood policing by providing experts in licencing, tackling antisocial behaviour, designing secure buildings, drug liaison, offender management and community engagement.

It has set up [child](#)-centred policing teams. Working with partners and various police departments, they tackle crime, antisocial behaviour and vulnerability linked to children and young people. These teams emphasise early intervention.

Before the new neighbourhood policing model went live, all police officers and staff received a three-day training course on community engagement and problem-solving. The force also provides [continuing professional development](#) training activities to support learning.

The force prioritises the prevention and deterrence of crime, antisocial behaviour, harm and vulnerability

The force benefits from additional funding from the Home Office's 'Grip' violence fund. This supports high-visibility, targeted police patrols in areas where data analysis shows there is a risk of serious violence. The force also uses data from local hospital accident and emergency departments. It has overlaid this on its hotspot data to further understand where violence happens. It has 29 hotspots, all of which have bespoke problem-solving plans. It assigns officers to these hotspots to complete 15 minutes of visible policing at peak times. The force told us that there have been around 3,500 deployments since July 2022. This has contributed to a reduction in violence and antisocial behaviour in these areas.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, Kent Police recorded 32,676 incidents of antisocial behaviour. In the previous year, it recorded 57,007 incidents of antisocial behaviour, which shows an approximate 42.6 percent decrease in recorded antisocial behaviour incidents.

Kent Police's Operation Engage addresses the high volume of repeat calls from [vulnerable people](#). A central co-ordinator in the FCIR monitors and collates the repeat calls. Then multi-agency vulnerability panels in each district support the callers by, for example, making referrals to drug and alcohol or mental health services. Enforcement action may also be taken if support measures are unsuccessful. Each caller is the subject of a plan owned locally by the neighbourhood policing team. The force produces a monthly briefing for local units that highlights the most frequent callers.

The force has an effective preventative approach to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) and uses data to identify VAWG hotspots. It runs regular 'walk and talk' events, which bring police and the community together to identify improvements that will make areas safer. Examples of improvements include enhanced lighting and CCTV. In 2022, Kent Police, working with its local authorities, introduced [Best Bar None](#) (a national scheme that aims to improve standards in the nighttime economy) to its 13 districts. It offers free training to the staff of licenced premises, which includes combating VAWG and drink spiking. It also advises owners of licenced premises on improving their operating standards. The county of Kent was the national winner of the best new Best Bar None scheme for 2022.

The Kent and Medway [violence reduction unit](#) is a partnership between Kent Police, local councils, health service providers and other key agencies to reduce serious violence. It uses data to identify offenders, locations and victims repeatedly linked to violence. It commissions community-based services in response. And it feeds back what works well. In particular, the unit has achieved notable success in reducing youth violence linked to gangs, especially within communities that traditionally distrust the police. It offers support, such as training courses and leisure activities. It can also help individual young people return to education.

The force is effective at problem-solving with partners

The force can demonstrate a range of effective problem-solving activity with partners, including local authorities, charities, health and education. Equally, it doesn't treat problem-solving as the responsibility of just the neighbourhood policing teams. During our inspection, different operational units provided good examples of evidence-based problem-solving activity that had led to notable reductions in crime and antisocial behaviour. All units we inspected were proficient at using the OSARA model (objective, scanning, analysis, response, assessment) to identify and address issues in communities.

The force has used problem-solving effectively to reduce theft and burglary. Both its victim-based crime teams and local divisional crime squads provided excellent examples of tackling prolific offenders through intelligence-led, proactive and often complex investigations. One recent operation related to high-value thefts from motor vehicles. The divisional victim-based crime team worked closely with force analysts to link the offences and identify those responsible. It used evidence from phones, CCTV and automatic number plate recognition. Subsequent arrests led to the recovery of valuable property. The suspects were charged with conspiracy and theft offences. They were subsequently found guilty and received significant prison sentences.

The force uses two-way community engagement to address local, force and national priorities

The force is improving its approach to community engagement to better identify the issues that are important to local communities. This also helps it give more targeted crime prevention advice.

It has recently set up [My Community Voice](#), a two-way, online personal messaging system. Subscribers determine what type of messages they receive, and the force can send messages relevant to specific locations. It can also get feedback. The force is actively promoting this service by encouraging people to download the app. It publicises the new service via community, council and school newsletters and via social media. The force told us that over 10,000 households – around 1.5 percent – have signed up to the service. It hopes to expand this number significantly through its ongoing engagement work.

The force is a strong user of social media with 24 X (formerly Twitter) accounts – including 13 district accounts – and over 400,000 followers. The force encourages officers to post content that is educational, operational and relevant to local issues. This includes [missing persons](#) appeals and information about public safety events. It has improved training on social media use following some inappropriate commentary by officers and staff. The force also told us it has over 200,000 Facebook followers and 25,000 followers on Instagram. Therefore, it engages with a broad range of different groups. The force aims to respond to everyone who posts a valid enquiry on social media. It has a dedicated ‘digital desk’ team in the FCIR. This lets it provide a consistent response to posts and identify safeguarding concerns at the earliest opportunity.

The force has a team of dedicated police community liaison officers who focus on engagement with minority communities. They attend events that support the key engagement priorities of tackling VAWG and [hate crime](#) as well as the force’s race action plan. Their role is seen as essential to support recruitment from diverse communities and to build community confidence and cohesion. Recently, for example, the force was positively involved in supporting the important Sikh festival of Vaisakhi, which officers were invited to attend.

Responding to the public

Requires
improvement

Kent Police requires improvement at responding to the public.

Innovative practice

The force has improved its response to calls linked to domestic abuse

The force has a dedicated [domestic abuse](#) hub within its force control and incident room. It uses remote video recording technology to improve the effectiveness of its response to domestic abuse incidents that don't require immediate attendance. Callers, with their agreement, while still on the line, are sent an online link that launches a video conversation with a [police officer](#) trained in domestic abuse investigations. The officer works with the [victim](#) to complete an initial [safeguarding risk assessment](#), considers preservation of evidence and offers safeguarding advice.

The process always considers the voice of the [child](#). It has been found that children will often converse easily online. Victims are asked to scan the room with their phone so that their environment can be gauged to make sure that they aren't at immediate risk. This also allows the force to better assess their level of need. This process has proved particularly effective in capturing evidence of criminal damage.

The domestic abuse hub manages all reported incidents linked to domestic abuse where it has been initially assessed that a crime hasn't been committed. It reviews each again for potential crimes and offers signposting to support agencies.

Officers in the hub review all domestic abuse investigations assessed as standard risk. This makes sure appropriate risk assessments, referrals and safeguarding actions are completed. Where possible, they also complete initial investigations. They then allocate those cases that require more in-depth investigation to the domestic abuse vulnerability investigation teams.

The force told us that the hub retains and concludes approximately 30 percent of the standard risk domestic abuse investigations. This significantly reduces workloads in its domestic abuse vulnerability investigation teams.

The force reviewed the new process at nine months in February 2023. It told us that initial results were extremely positive. On average, it responded to 350 non-emergency domestic abuse calls in under two hours compared to an average of only 100 calls previously. The force also told us that it achieved 20 percent higher conviction rates for investigations instigated by the hub during the same period.

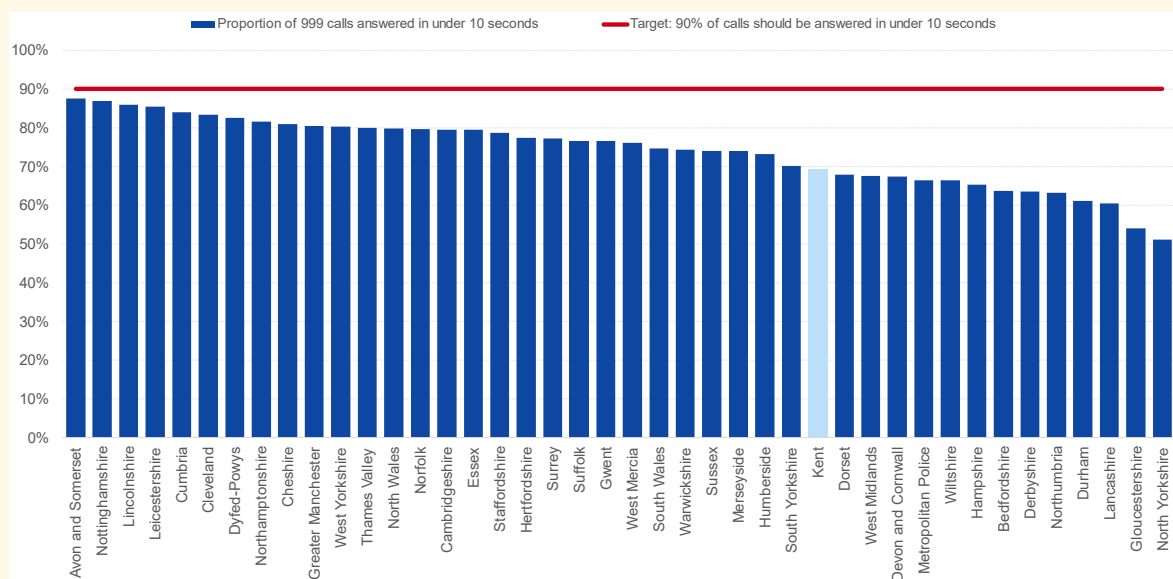
Areas for improvement

The force doesn't always answer emergency calls quickly enough

In the year ending 31 March 2023, Kent Police received 165 calls to 999 per 1,000 population. This was in line with other forces in England and Wales.

Call answering time is the time taken for a call to transfer to a force, plus the time taken by that force to answer it. In the year ending 31 March 2023, the force answered 69.4 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds. This was lower than the standard expected of forces in England and Wales. The expected standard is to answer 90 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds. Failing to answer calls quickly enough can mean losing both public confidence and investigative opportunities.

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



The force needs to reduce the number of non-emergency calls the caller abandons because they aren't answered

In the year ending 31 March 2023, the force told us that 33.4 percent of calls to its non-emergency [101](#) facility were abandoned. This abandonment rate is far higher than the 2020 national contact management strategy principles and guidance that forces with a switchboard should aim to have an abandonment rate lower than 5 percent.

Performance has been adversely affected by significant shortages of [police staff](#) call handlers in the force control and incident room. Therefore, the force has decided to temporarily move 35 [officers](#) from its neighbourhood policing command into the force control and incident room to improve resilience. It has also undertaken an innovative and successful campaign to recruit more call-handling staff using social media and local radio. As a result, performance is steadily improving. We will continue to monitor the force to make sure there is continuing positive progress.

The force needs to improve how it monitors and reassesses outstanding calls for service linked to vulnerability that require a high-priority level of response

Police officers and staff within the force control and incident room are fully aware of vulnerability and use the [THRIVE](#) assessment model effectively at the initial point of contact to prioritise calls. The next level of call response grading below an immediate or emergency grading is high. These calls may relate to vulnerable people and require prompt attendance. On several occasions, we found high-priority calls linked to children or vulnerable adults that remained unattended for too long where the risk clearly remained.

The force acknowledges it needs to improve performance in this area. It is actively taking steps to improve workforce resilience and improve training. We will continue to monitor this to ensure ongoing improvement.

The force needs to make sure that call handlers give appropriate advice on the preservation of evidence and crime prevention

Sometimes crime prevention or scene preservation advice isn't given when required. Giving crime prevention advice can support [victims](#), and scene preservation advice improves any investigation. As part of our victim service assessment audit, we found that call handlers gave appropriate advice on preservation of evidence in 18 of 30 relevant cases we reviewed. They gave appropriate advice on crime prevention in 33 of 46 relevant cases we reviewed.

Main findings

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

The force is effective at assessing the level of risk and type of response required to calls for service. But it needs to improve its response to high-graded calls

All contact management staff in the FCIR are trained in applying the structured [THRIVE risk assessment](#) to assess the needs of a caller. In our victim service assessment, we found that they used this approach in all 48 cases we reviewed. In 46 of these cases, the risk assessment was an accurate reflection of the circumstances of the call.

We also found that the initial prioritisation grading of the call was appropriate in all 70 cases reviewed. The graded tier of response below an immediate or emergency response is high and still requires prompt attendance by police. The force doesn't have target times for attendance at high-graded calls. Instead, it relies on individual call assessments in its FCIR to govern the speed of its response. For the majority of calls, this process works well. But in 6 of the 23 cases we reviewed, we found that the required attendance time wasn't met. The force doesn't always inform victims of delays. This may cause them to lose confidence and disengage from the process.

The force has taken steps to improve the identification of vulnerability and repeat victimisation at the first point of contact. It has added an interactive element to its incident recording system. This helps call handlers to assess whether the caller is vulnerable or subject to repeat victimisation. In our victim service assessment, we found that there was evidence of a check for a vulnerable victim in 60 of 67 relevant cases we reviewed. The force has improved the assessment of repeat victimisation since our last inspection, but there is still work to do. We found evidence of a check for repeat victimisation in only 46 of the 61 relevant cases we reviewed.

The public can contact the force through appropriate, accessible and monitored channels

The force recognises that it has capacity issues in its FCIR but has successfully moved some call demand to online services. Members of the public can now report crimes using the force's website. They can communicate via its live chat service, which is intended for non-emergency enquiries. All operators are trained in THRIVE to help provide appropriate risk management and safeguarding. The force has been effective in increasing awareness of its online services via targeted campaigns across different media, including social media. The force has a dedicated digital desk in its FCIR that monitors all online reports and activity on its social media accounts. This makes sure that vulnerability is identified at the earliest opportunity.

Local policing response teams possess sufficient resources to manage demand

Local policing teams (LPTs) have enough capacity and capability to respond to calls, despite the relative inexperience of many officers. LPTs have benefited from an increase in police officers as part of the national [Police Uplift Programme](#).

LPT senior leaders work closely with human resources to make sure that the force provides sufficient places on key training courses across all divisions and districts to maintain operational resilience. For example, it makes sure that LPTs have enough fully trained immediate response drivers so that they can respond effectively to calls for service.

The number of officers in response teams also remains high as fewer are now required on rotation to support shortages in the force's [domestic abuse](#) vulnerability investigation teams (VITs) as these vacancies are now being filled with officers seeking to become accredited detectives. Equally, the number of calls linked to domestic abuse that require attendance has significantly reduced with the introduction of the domestic abuse hub and its ability to respond to some calls by video, which further reduces demand on LPTs.

Officers provide an effective service to victims when attending incidents and have a good awareness of vulnerability

LPT response officers report that they can carry out their enquiries at the scene without undue pressure from the FCIR to move on to the next call. Supervisors support them in this. They will challenge FCIR decisions if they feel their officers still have outstanding enquiries for a call before a new deployment. Officers generally have a good knowledge of crime scene principles. Therefore, they make sure evidence is gathered and properly recorded and preserved.

Officers are clear on their responsibilities to safeguard vulnerable people and will look for and record signs of vulnerability when they attend incidents. These include children exposed to domestic abuse and any signs that an occupier is being criminally exploited. Officers responding to people in mental health crisis also have access to advice and guidance from specialist practitioners through a dedicated helpline. This often reduces the need to use police powers under [section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983](#) to detain people for their own safety.

Investigating crime

Requires
improvement

Kent Police requires improvement at investigating crime.

Innovative practice

The force provides innovative support to vulnerable victims of crime

An emotional support dog has been used in court by Kent Police for the first time in the UK to help a sexual assault [victim](#) give evidence against a couple who abused her as a [child](#). The force is already using these specially trained dogs to help vulnerable people during interviews and when they have been victims of serious crime.

The force has 12 volunteer therapy dogs and 3 in training. The force is working with the Crown Prosecution Service and victim support services to standardise the process for requesting a support dog and to raise awareness.

Areas for improvement

Kent Police doesn't consistently achieve appropriate outcomes for victims

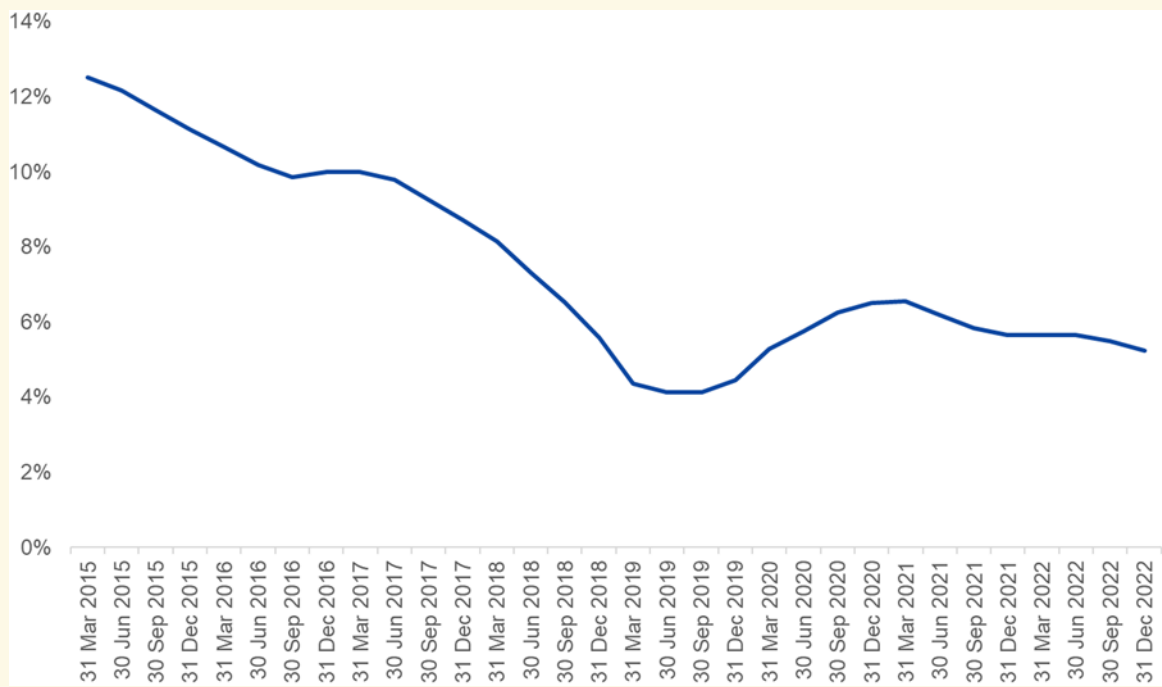
The force isn't always achieving acceptable outcomes for [victims](#) of crime. The number of crimes it solves following investigation is unacceptably low. The force needs to better understand the barriers to successfully bringing offenders to justice. It needs to achieve better outcomes for victims.

Figure 2: Proportion of victim-based crimes assigned specified crime outcomes by Kent Police compared to forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 December 2022

Outcome types	Kent rate	England and Wales rate
1: Charged/ summonsed	5.2%	4.6%
2 and 3: Caution – youths and adults	0.9%	0.7%
8: Community resolutions	1.2%	1.4%
9: Prosecution not in the public interest (Crown Prosecution Service decision)	0.0%	0.0%
10 and 21: Prosecution not in public interest (police decision) and further investigation to support formal action not in the public interest (police decision)	1.7%	0.8%
14: Evidential difficulties (suspect not identified; victim doesn't support further action)	7.5%	5.6%
15: Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)	14.6%	11.7%
16: Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim doesn't support further action)	25.4%	21.9%
17: Prosecution time limit expired	0.4%	0.3%
18: Investigation complete – no suspect identified	35.9%	40.9%
20: Responsibility for further investigation transferred to another body	2.6%	1.4%
22: Diversionary, education or intervention activity	0.1%	0.4%

Note: England and Wales excludes City of London data.

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



The force needs to improve its consistency in assigning the correct crime classification outcomes

In 31 of the 104 cases we reviewed as part of our victim service assessment, we found that the force hadn't assigned the correct crime classification outcome. This was particularly problematic in its use of outcome 21, where a suspect has been identified but it has been decided that it isn't in the public interest to prosecute. This outcome shouldn't have been assigned to any of the relevant cases we looked at.

The force has taken steps to address this. It has elevated authority to grant this outcome from sergeant to inspector and has provided enhanced training to improve compliance. We will continue to monitor this to ensure ongoing improvement.

The force needs to make sure it assesses the needs of all victims so they can be properly supported

Under the revised [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#), all victims of a criminal offence are entitled to a needs assessment. This assessment identifies at an early stage special measures that may be required to support them throughout the investigation and subsequent court case. The force is poor at recording victim needs assessments. Our victim service assessment found that a needs assessment was recorded in only 19 of the 64 relevant cases we examined.

Main findings

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

The force has an effective management structure that provides appropriate oversight of investigations

The force runs a monthly crime management and investigative quality board chaired at chief officer level to improve the effectiveness of crime management and investigation. There is a strong focus on data and auditing to ensure compliance across a range of performance indicators. It emphasises improving the quality of investigation plans, supervisory reviews and compliance with the Victims' Code. All crimes must be reviewed by an inspector after three months and by a chief inspector at six months. To support the process, inspectors are required to dip sample 15 crimes per month and feed key findings back to the crime management and investigative quality board. In addition, all sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors have received training on the force's investigation policy, the use of the crime-recording system and maximising evidential opportunities.

Strategic oversight of the criminal justice process is achieved through the monthly Criminal Justice Board chaired by the head of criminal justice. While the board oversees all aspects of the progression of cases to court, there is emphasis on making sure that officers comply with the Victims' Code. This focuses on victims' rights and sets out the minimum standard of service that the police must provide to victims of crime. In practice, this means making sure that officers have issued a victim care card and are providing regular updates.

The force aims to make sure that officers have sufficient skills to undertake quality investigations

The force recognises it faces a challenge in bridging the gap between the number of accredited detectives and the number of investigative posts that are currently not filled by detectives. The force told us that as of May 2023, the number of detective posts filled by qualified detectives stood at 97 percent at chief inspector rank, 87 percent at inspector rank, 88 percent at sergeant rank and 59 percent at constable rank.

The force has an effective detective resilience plan overseen by the crime management and investigative quality board. It emphasises the retention and recruitment of officers. The plan has led to an increase in those on the pathway to becoming a detective. The number of trainee investigators now exceeds forecasted detective vacancies.

It is noteworthy that the force has successfully increased the number of officers seeking detective accreditation in its VITs and is on track to achieve full detective capacity.

In our previous report, we commented that the force lacked sufficient detective resilience. It is encouraging to see the improvements. The force has also invested in further coaches and assessors for its existing detective development team to support officers and staff working towards accreditation.

The force consistently carries out thorough investigations with effective supervisory oversight

Officers are confident in their ability to investigate crime. They are well-trained and have good knowledge of the range of investigative opportunities available, with particular emphasis on maximising digital evidential opportunities. Of the 100 crime investigations we reviewed during our victim service assessment, 84 were judged to be effective. There was evidence of an appropriate investigation plan in 70 of 77 relevant cases.

Crime workloads are manageable, and the progress of investigations is helped by an effective supervisory process. Sergeants understand that they need to add value to an investigation. They complete investigation plans, undertake regular reviews and focus their teams on solving the solvable. They weed out those cases with no viable investigative leads while making sure that victims' expectations are properly managed. We found effective supervision for investigations in 32 of the 36 cases we examined.

The force achieves good results for victims by pursuing evidence-led investigations when appropriate

If a victim decides not to support a prosecution, police and prosecutors should consider whether it is possible to still bring a case to court. This is called evidence-led prosecution. Force policy requires that officers must show they have considered an evidence-led prosecution before closing a crime. We found that officers considered progressing or tried to progress cases without the support of victims in 21 of the 23 relevant cases we examined. It is noteworthy that officers have achieved several successful evidence-led prosecutions in domestic abuse cases. In these, BWV footage was invaluable in capturing admissions or early complaints. It also recorded injuries, damage and the behaviour of suspects and victims at the scene.

The force communicates effectively with victims of crime and offers good ongoing support for those going through the criminal justice process

Officers are aware of their responsibilities under the Victims' Code in terms of initial and subsequent contact. Initially, they provide the victim with a care card as the basis of a victim contract. This provides officer contact details and safeguarding information. Case officers are required to provide regular updates according to the victim's needs or wishes and no later than every 28 days. There is strict oversight by supervisors, who receive digital updates of overdue cases, which allows for timely intervention. During our victim service assessment, we found that the force provided a good level of contact in line with the Victims' Code in 89 of the 99 cases we examined. Victim contracts were adhered to in 65 of 71 relevant cases.

The force has a dedicated victim and witness care unit, which supports victims going through the criminal justice process. The team works with independent domestic violence advocates, the courts, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Office of [Police and Crime Commissioner](#) to maximise opportunities to support victims of crime. The Police and Crime Commissioner recently held the first commissioned services day for officers, staff and partner agencies to improve awareness of Kent's victim support services and increase the number of victim referrals made by officers.

The force needs to improve how it records why victims withdraw their support for investigations

The force has published a detailed standard operating procedure on taking victim statements, which includes how officers should respond if a victim wishes to withdraw an allegation of crime. It outlines that any withdrawal statement, especially those relating to domestic abuse, should include detailed reasons for the withdrawal, such as delays in the investigation or whether the victim has been influenced by the suspect or others.

The reasons for a victim withdrawing were recorded in 47 of the 50 relevant cases we reviewed. However, we found that there was an auditable record of the victim's wishes, such as a signed statement, in only 10 of the relevant 32 cases we reviewed. This evidence is important for understanding why a victim doesn't support a prosecution.

Protecting vulnerable people

Good

Kent Police is good at protecting vulnerable people.

Area for improvement

The force should make sure that orders protecting victims of domestic abuse are considered in all appropriate cases

We found limited evidence of preventative measures such as [domestic violence prevention notices](#) and [domestic violence prevention orders](#) being implemented or even considered in the cases we reviewed. In particular, the force acknowledges it needs to do more to record the reason why a domestic violence protection notice hasn't been considered or why authorisation has been refused. The force is fully aware of the benefits of obtaining protective orders. It has a dedicated team of [officers](#) who actively target offenders subject to orders. The team identifies breaches and makes swift arrests when needed.

In the year ending 30 September 2022, Kent Police applied for 7.9 domestic violence protection orders per 1,000 [domestic abuse](#)-related crimes recorded by the force. This was lower than the average across all forces in England and Wales of 12.2 applications per 1,000 recorded domestic abuse-related crimes.

Not considering domestic violence protection notices in all cases may mean [victims](#) remain at risk, offenders escape justice and the force misses opportunities to reduce demand on its services through early intervention.

Main findings

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

The force understands the nature and scale of vulnerability

The force has introduced the national vulnerability action plan framework. It aims to improve activity linked to all types of vulnerability-related crime, such as early intervention, prevention, safeguarding and managing risk. It has appointed expert leads at chief inspector level for the different types of crime. These leads meet regularly to make sure the force has a consistent approach. Five tactical boards focus on operational improvement in the force's investigation of domestic abuse, child and vulnerable adult protection, VAWG, offender management and rape.

The force has set out its operational priorities via a [control strategy](#) and has placed VAWG and child-centred policing at its heart:

- The force's VAWG strategy focuses on holding offenders to account, supporting victims, keeping people safe, raising standards of professional behaviour and strengthening systems of governance and partnerships.
- The force's child-centred policing plan sets the direction for supporting children and young people. There is a focus on early intervention, engagement and enforcement. For example, it supports the voluntary use of smart tags that electronically track young people who feel at risk of exploitation.

The force actively seeks feedback to enhance and improve its services to protect vulnerable people. For example, the force's VAWG objectives have been shaped by collating feedback from community engagements. This includes 'walk and talk' events that help the force to find out about the challenges and threats women face in the areas where they live, work and socialise. The force also seeks feedback from its district [independent advisory groups](#) and more widely via its online two-way messaging service, My Community Voice. The force has effective processes to obtain feedback from victims of hate crime, domestic abuse and rape. The survey responses are overwhelmingly positive. The force acknowledges it would benefit from widening the range of victims it surveys but is confident that the changes recently implemented to its neighbourhood policing model should provide greater opportunities to obtain feedback.

The force safeguards and supports vulnerable people

The force has recently introduced a new child and vulnerable adult risk assessment process. This maximises opportunities to identify and intervene to support those at risk. AWARE is the force-developed mnemonic that helps officers to identify those who are vulnerable and to record their details. The mnemonic reminds them to focus on the person's appearance, words, actions, relationship dynamics and environment. Officers submit forms electronically to the central referral unit. This fulfils a similar function to a [multi-agency safeguarding hub](#) and covers all of Kent except the unitary authority of Medway, which has its own hub.

The force's new risk assessment process automatically incorporates [Operation Encompass](#), a nationally recognised set of professional standards to make sure that police officers notify schools about domestic abuse incidents. The force's own Operation Encompass Plus process has enhanced the approach. It sends alerts to schools for other incidents affecting children, such as [missing](#) episodes and child exploitation concerns. The force has seen an increase in the number of forms submitted. It has had a positive response from the agencies it works with and cites an improvement in the quality of submissions. While the central referral unit often faces challenges in managing demand, the backlog in referrals that require triage before submission to partner agencies is maintained at a low level. A digital tool supports the process by flagging referrals assessed as high risk so that they are prioritised for review.

Kent Police uses the domestic abuse risk assessment tool to optimise the effectiveness of its response at the first point of contact. Critically, the assessment process makes sure there is focus on stalking, [harassment](#) and controlling and coercive behaviour. We reviewed risk assessment forms and saw that officers were proactively identifying patterns of behaviour linked to these types of offending. This helps in the identification of crimes that otherwise may have gone unreported. Therefore, the force is maximising opportunities to safeguard victims and bring perpetrators to justice.

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

The force works effectively with partner agencies across a range of different multi-agency panels to maximise opportunities to successfully support and protect those who are repeatedly at serious risk of harm from domestic abuse. It aims in equal measure to reduce the probability that perpetrators will continue to offend. We saw strong interconnectivity between the different processes. This aims to achieve permanent solutions to often entrenched cycles of offending and victimisation.

[Multi-agency risk assessment conference](#) processes within the county are effective. They bring together partner agencies to share intelligence and to jointly support individual agencies in solutions aimed at reducing risk. For example, they provide evidence to support evidence-led prosecutions or assist victims in obtaining civil injunctions. At the same time, the force and partners acknowledge that these processes need to be run more efficiently, especially in the face of increasing demand. They are introducing a new model that will enable more timely intelligence sharing and earlier intervention to support victims. This should reduce the number of case conferences needed.

For domestic abuse and other types of offending that involve stalking behaviours, the force has established the multi-agency stalking intervention panel. This enables investigators working on high-risk stalking cases to get legal advice on obtaining [stalking protection orders \(SPOs\)](#) to curtail the behaviour of offenders.

Kent Police continues to achieve a high rate of SPOs granted at court relative to the number of stalking crimes recorded by the force. In the year ending 31 March 2022, the force had 28 full and 29 interim SPOs granted at court. This equated to 5.3 full and 5.5 interim SPOs granted per 1,000 stalking offences. These numbers represent large increases compared to the previous year when the force had 14 full and 6 interim SPOs granted at court, which equated to 2.7 full and 1.2 interim SPOs granted per 1,000 stalking offences.

The force has an effective multi-agency tasking and co-ordination programme to which perpetrators can be referred for active multi-agency management. They can also be referred to a perpetrator programme. Cases involving non-engaging perpetrators can be referred for intensive disruption or enforcement action. Attendance by partner agencies is less comprehensive than for the multi-agency risk assessment conference process, and the force is taking steps to increase involvement to guarantee a more comprehensive range of intervention options. Nevertheless, the process is often effective in breaking the cycle of offending.

The [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#), also known as Clare's Law, allows the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about previous abusive or violent offending. The force has set up a weekly multi-agency panel to discuss [disclosures](#). A joint decision is made as to whether disclosure is appropriate and how to inform the victim. The force told us that 90 percent of disclosures are made by video link. Face-to-face disclosure will occur if necessary for safeguarding or other reasons such as communication difficulties. The force told us that it deals with around 111 disclosures per month and that 93 percent are disclosed within the required time limits. Delays are predominantly down to the victim not being contactable. Prompt notification lets victims consider their position at an earlier point. The force also believes that the greater accessibility of the video process has led to victims making more disclosures, often of serious offending. This increases the opportunities to provide support and to take action against offenders.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

Kent Police is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Promising practice

The force has effective processes to make sure suspects are apprehended at the earliest opportunity

The force can identify its outstanding suspects and has an effective governance structure to manage and prioritise their apprehension. The force uses a predictive analytical product, the Cambridge high harm index, to classify offenders into red, amber and green categories according to the level of identified risk. It prioritises action against those suspects who pose the highest risk. Many are wanted for offences linked to [domestic abuse](#). The force makes effective use of its dedicated domestic abuse proactive teams to locate and arrest them.

The force can also demonstrate good management of suspects who continue to evade arrest. It has strict time limits before a suspect must be circulated as wanted on the [Police National Computer](#). These limits vary according to the risk category: 72 hours for red; 28 days for amber; and when the [officer](#) and supervisor on the case consider that all possible enquiries to locate the person have been completed for green. Regardless of risk level, at the point that enquiries have been exhausted, the suspect becomes the responsibility of the wanted persons' bureau. The bureau must review cases every 3 months for red offenders, 6 months for amber and 12 months for green. The force told us that it is seeing a decline in the number of wanted offenders because of its rigorous processes.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to improve its supervisory processes that make sure that it completes active risk management system assessments at the earliest opportunity

The force has dedicated offender managers who are specially trained in the [management of sexual or violent offenders](#). Each offender has a personalised risk management plan to reduce the risk they pose to the public. As part of the plan, offender managers use [active risk management system \(ARMS\)](#), a structured risk assessment process. It is intended to provide police and probation services with information to help manage convicted sex offenders in the community.

We found that the force doesn't monitor overdue ARMS assessments. The force's mitigation is that it believes that any that are overdue will be found during its supervisory reviews of risk management plans, which will prompt their completion. We didn't find any overdue ARMS assessments during our audit. But the force told us there is a backlog of 253 unsupervised risk management plans with the oldest being over three months old.

Without a formal monitoring process, it isn't possible for the force to reassure itself that there are no delayed ARMS assessments hidden in the supervisory backlog. This poses an inherent risk.

The force needs to make sure that it has sufficient digital forensic capacity and capability to properly support investigations into online child abuse

Currently, the force's [digital forensic](#) unit can't meet the demand for examination of digital devices submitted by the [paedophile online investigation teams](#).

Examinations often take significantly longer than service level agreements dictate. This can lead to delays in uncovering potential online [child](#) abuse images, which may increase the risk to yet-to-be-identified [victims](#) who need [safeguarding](#). Delays can also affect the well-being of suspects who are kept longer on [bail](#), often with restrictions on their personal lives.

The force acknowledges the challenges it faces. It is restructuring its digital forensic services to improve performance. The issue remains on the force risk register pending improvements.

Main findings

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

The force manages bail effectively and monitors its use of released under investigation and voluntary interview provisions to make sure they are appropriate

The force has been effective in encouraging officers to use pre-charge bail where it is necessary and proportionate in line with the changes to bail introduced under the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#). In particular, the force understands the importance of bail and the use of conditions as a safeguarding tool. We examined a sample of case files for offences linked to domestic abuse where a suspect had been arrested. We found that cases were investigated effectively and promptly during the initial period in custody. Often the force aimed to get enough evidence to charge and remand to court those offenders who had committed serious or repeat offences or who were particularly dangerous. When suspects were released pending further enquiries, it was reassuring to see officers using conditional bail and imposing effective conditions designed to keep vulnerable victims safe.

The force has an effective tracking system that makes sure daily that bail periods don't expire before further action is taken. This prevents suspects from reverting from being on bail to being [released under investigation](#), with the loss of the safeguarding conditions that bail brings. The force has a dedicated bail management team that administers changes to bail conditions. But it acknowledges this team is under-resourced. The force is increasing officer numbers in the team to provide additional resilience, especially as the use of bail is increasing significantly under the new legislation.

A [voluntary](#) police interview occurs when a suspect is spoken to about a criminal offence but isn't arrested. While the interview is still conducted under [caution](#), from a police perspective, the use of voluntary interviews reduces the ability to gather evidence. This is because many of the search and seizure powers under the [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984](#) don't apply. The number of voluntary interviews the force conducts has remained consistent over the past two years. Their use is subject to scrutiny. This is to make sure that it is the most appropriate course and that it isn't being used because officers have unnecessarily delayed making an arrest until it is difficult to justify.

The force has improved the consistency of its approach to the management of registered sex offenders

Responsibility for the [management of registered sex offenders](#) in Kent is divided into two parts. A central team holds responsibility for reviewing the [violent and sexual offender register](#) and maintains standards of policy and procedure in the management of offenders. At the same time, three divisional teams manage registered sexual offenders on a day-to-day basis. The force has improved the consistency and level of performance of the three separate divisional teams. It has done this with regular meetings between central and divisional senior leaders. It has also created a learning panel which regularly dip sample risk management plans (RMPs) and violent and sexual offender register records to identify areas for improvement. Of note is the introduction of a standardised RMP template. This aims for consistency in the quality of RMPs across all the teams.

We dip sampled RMPs and incorporated [active risk management system](#) risk assessments. We found them to be well-structured and that they captured risk and identified actions needed to ensure the effective management of the offenders.

We found that home visits were compliant with [authorised professional practice](#). There is good use of the [Police National Database](#) to support risk assessments and effective use of polygraph machines, which are often used to support [sexual harm prevention orders](#).

Officers also have access to computer monitoring and triage digital equipment. This can establish if suspects and offenders are looking at indecent images of children. Some officers told us that they need more enhanced training to properly understand how to maximise their use.

It is also reassuring to see that the force now flags both addresses and phone numbers of registered sex offenders on its command-and-control system. Therefore, it can better inform risk assessments if officers are dispatched to an incident linked to either.

The force's paedophile online investigation team effectively investigates online child abuse and identifies and protects victims

The force's paedophile online investigation team oversees all elements of child abuse image investigation. We found [positive action](#) against suspects occurred within the required Kent internet risk assessment tool time frames in most cases we examined. We found investigations to be of a good standard with regular supervisory reviews. There is effective use of police and partner agency databases to make sure that all information is available before the force takes action against offenders. However, when action against suspects is delayed, the force needs to make sure subsequent reassessments are of equal depth. This includes making sure it completes checks on the Police National Database.

We were also reassured to find that the force had tightened procedures to make sure that investigators notify children's social services when they identify a potential offender, rather than at arrest. Therefore, any children linked to the suspect can be properly safeguarded at the earliest opportunity.

The force uses the national [child abuse image database](#), which helps police detect, highlight and analyse illegal digital images. It is the responsibility of the victim identification team to upload graded images. Where possible, the team will develop intelligence to try to identify the child.

The force has responded to our initial concerns about backlogs in image uploads to the child abuse image database and has significantly reduced the number. Part of the challenge stems from the force's reliance on one specialist identification officer, who co-ordinates the identification process. The force is looking to recruit a second officer to improve its resilience. Equally, the force acknowledges that it doesn't have enough computer terminals. This is negatively affecting performance. While it has no short-term solution to the problem, a planned move to a new office will increase available terminals.

Disrupting serious organised crime

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

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

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

Good

Kent Police is good at managing serious and organised crime. [You can access the regional report on our website.](#)

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Good

Kent Police is good at building and developing its workforce.

Promising practice

The force has significantly enhanced its support to members of the workforce in high-risk roles

The force has responded effectively to a gap in the well-being support offered to [officers](#) and [staff](#) involved in investigations and those concerned with protecting [vulnerable people](#).

In particular, the force has improved understanding of its psychological screening processes. This has improved confidence that it is used as a supportive measure rather than as a performance management tool. The force has extended its application to all vulnerability investigation teams and has seen an encouraging rate of uptake of the online process, which allows for further engagement with the support options.

In addition, the force has created a dedicated investigator well-being area on its internal website. This includes a care and well-being package for investigators and regular online sessions, including advice on caseload management, trauma exposure and self-support strategies. Supervisory awareness has also been improved with the introduction of a mandatory leaders' well-being course bespoke to investigator roles.

Main findings

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

The force provides comprehensive well-being support to officers and staff

The force has further increased its provision of well-being support from an existing good level of service. Officers and staff benefit from a range of online well-being support, including virtual well-being sessions and a financial well-being hub in recognition of the financial challenges that many are facing. The force has its own in-house counselling services and has invested in an employee assistance programme, which provides 24-hour access to a range of health and well-being information. The force has adopted a proactive approach to all-staff engagement. Its occupational health unit practitioners regularly base themselves in different departments and areas of the force to improve the take-up of the services.

The force has a positive approach to supporting officers and staff who have been assaulted. It adheres to the nationally recognised [Operation Hampshire](#) protocols. It reviews every assault at the weekly chief officers' board meeting, which aims to ensure appropriate intervention to support officers and staff. The force has obtained the services of a third-party medical provider to secure medical evidence within a target time of 24 hours. Results are often received within two hours, which means that the force can consider early charges. And it sends out a clear message that the force doesn't tolerate assaults on its workforce.

The force needed to do more to support police officers and staff affected by the recent changes to its neighbourhood policing model

While well-being support for officers and staff is generally good, some members of the workforce told us that the force has failed to fully recognise and mitigate the well-being concerns arising from its new neighbourhood policing model. The force has implemented several initiatives to support the well-being of the workforce affected by this change. But some feel that initial communications provided online about the new model were insensitive, especially as there were job loss implications for police community support officers. This contributed to a general feeling that the views of the workforce affected didn't really count. At the same time, sergeants who manage police community support officers feel they could have been better supported. They told us that they have spent significant amounts of time in recent months dealing with welfare issues.

The force effectively supports its new recruits to progress and remain within Kent Police

The force understands the challenges faced by new police officers, especially those coming from under-represented groups. It has used the findings of a targeted survey to improve its recruitment, development and retention of new officers. The force told us that there are currently 111 trained recruitment ambassadors across the force who attend recruitment events to make sure the realities of frontline policing are made clear to potential applicants. The force has also produced a series of online video diaries from student constables to improve awareness of what the training to become a police officer entails.

Student officers receive the support of a dedicated police tutor during their probationary period. Many tutors are also relatively new, but they receive training to support them in their role. Sergeants are proactive in supporting new officers and hold regular one-to-one meetings alone or with tutors to maximise feedback. Equally, there are regular meetings with inspectors.

The process is supported by a professional development unit based in each division. It makes sure that student officers have additional welfare and support. A monthly attendance management meeting looks at probationer absence rates to allow early intervention when officers are struggling.

The force is near London, and this increases the challenges of retaining officers and staff due to higher salaries on offer in other forces or in the private sector. The force's 'keep it Kent' initiative highlights the positive aspects of the force. And its 'posting exchange' initiative gives people the opportunity to propose mutual job swaps.

Those intending to leave are given the opportunity to explore with a senior officer how the force can retain their services. The force indicates that it has achieved some level of success, with one in five withdrawing their leaving notification at this point.

The force has also introduced a 'thinking of leaving' contact point on its internal website. This is aimed particularly at those unwilling to discuss their concerns with line managers. For confirmed leavers, there is an option of an exit interview with a senior officer so that the force can gather feedback.

To improve how the force retains officers and staff, a monthly leaver and retention meeting is held to help better understand why people are leaving.

The force aims to balance the academic needs of new students with operational policing requirements

The force has made sure that supervisors on LPTs understand and support the protected learning time for new officers. This is required under the Policing Education Qualifications Framework process. The force has developed a modular approach to protected learning time in collaboration with its higher education institution to make sure the time, content, length and position are appropriate. It also supports new officers from an academic, operational and welfare perspective. The first intake of officers under the new process experienced some timetabling challenges. But the force responded positively to feedback and quickly improved matters.

The force is effectively developing its first-line leaders and workforce but should make sure key training is provided for all during working hours

The force provides a comprehensive initial training programme to newly promoted sergeants. This recognises that they fulfil a critical role in ensuring effective daily supervision, guidance and support. All operational sergeants also receive a three-day investigative core professional development course. This covers crime investigation, managing [critical incidents](#), well-being, crime classification and unsatisfactory performance. Acting sergeants also now have to complete the three-day course. Previously these officers were often in post without any supervisory training.

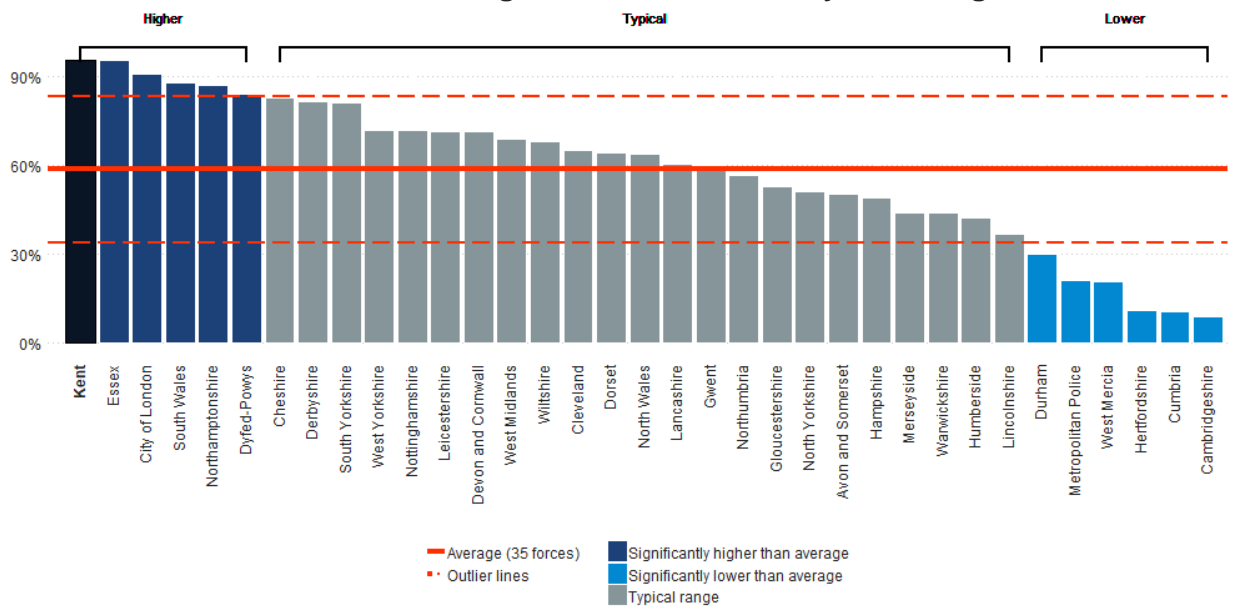
The force prioritises continuing professional development for all areas of its workforce. Those performing investigative roles benefit from training opportunities and materials via its crime academy. FCIR [personnel](#) also benefit from in-house training, and active involvement makes sure that lessons learned from incidents are fed back into training. While many departments have training sessions woven into their shift patterns, others, especially investigative units, don't. This may lead to missed opportunities to keep up to date with professional development in the face of competing operational demands.

The force supports its workforce with an effective PDR process

The force has a comprehensive PDR process so that officers and staff receive regular feedback and support from their line managers on their operational performance and career development.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, Kent Police had put 95.7 percent of its overall workforce through annual performance assessments. This was higher than expected compared to other forces in England and Wales.

Figure 4: Percentage of overall workforce that completed an annual performance assessment across 35 forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2022



Note: Bedfordshire, Greater Manchester, Norfolk, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Sussex and Thames Valley have been removed from this chart due to missing data.

The force has mandated a separate well-being aspect to the PDR process where line managers check in with staff on a regular basis to make sure that they feel supported.

The force creates opportunities for officers and staff from under-represented groups to develop and progress through the organisation

A dedicated positive action team seeks to help members of the workforce from under-represented groups fulfil their potential through lateral development or promotion. The force aims to better understand barriers to progression. It has made use of the Home Office 'All Together Better' campaign to enhance how it raises the profile and importance of positive action. It has increased the number and diversity of both mentors and mentees on the force mentoring scheme. The mentoring process is aligned with the force's 'develop you' programme, which encourages workforce development through attachments to specialist units. This supports under-represented members of the workforce to feel more confident in applying for these opportunities.

The force has set up dedicated positive action pages on its internal website to promote development opportunities for staff from under-represented groups. Such opportunities include events about approaches to promotion processes and insights into accelerated promotion opportunities. It has also run a series of focus groups to discuss barriers to progression and fed back results to bring about improvement.

The force should consider a self-assessment process. This may give further insight to support workforce progression and retention in under-represented groups.

Vetting and counter-corruption

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

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

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

Adequate

Kent Police is adequate at vetting and counter-corruption. [You can access the report on our website.](#)

Leadership and force management

Good

Kent Police's leadership and management is good.

Main findings

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

The force has effective governance and performance management processes and uses relevant analysis and data to make sure performance objectives are aligned with its strategy

The force has an effective system of governance via its monthly force performance committee. This makes sure it scrutinises crime and charge rates at divisional and departmental levels to identify potential blockages in the investigative process.

It looks in detail at other performance areas, such as the FCIR, to make sure that it optimises its response to call demand while balancing the needs of vulnerable callers. The force also closely examines key performance objectives, such as rape or VAWG, to better understand the nature of offending and improve its investigative response. It uses a range of information, analysis and data to support its strategic assessment, and this is co-ordinated through a dedicated performance analysis team. And it uses partnership data to further understand demand.

The force has an inclusive and empowering approach to leadership

The new chief constable has introduced a personal pledge setting out his priorities for the force. He has developed the pledge using an inclusive approach. He sought feedback from all ranks and created a widely representative scrutiny group. There is consensus that, outwardly, the pledge is properly focused on supporting victims, relentlessly pursuing suspects and ensuring the highest standards of professionalism. Internally, the pledge gives equal focus to developing workforce strategies that maximise inclusivity, well-being and the use of technology to support operational activity.

Senior leaders are seen as approachable and empathic, and they engage effectively with the workforce. The chief constable has recently introduced online live 'ask the chief' sessions, which ensure honest and unscripted responses to often challenging

questions. Chief officer team visibility is a challenge, but team members regularly visit different areas of the force and take part in 'all out' days when those in strategic roles take on operational activities.

Students at Kent Police College appreciate the regular visits from members of the chief officer's team and their obvious desire to make sure that new officers are properly supported during training. Equally, divisional senior leaders are seen as visible and supportive. They regularly run informal engagement sessions that encourage honest feedback. This improves the force's ability to identify and overcome barriers to an effective service.

The force has seen considerable improvements in its service to the public, especially in its initial and subsequent investigative response to allegations of crime and its ability to safeguard vulnerable people. And the level of well-being support offered to officers and staff – especially those investigating crimes – has improved notably.

Effective supervision by line managers is the key to these improvements. It is clear that the force has developed a culture that both empowers and requires leaders at all levels to actively supervise, support and inspire their teams.

The force provides a good level of leadership training

The force provides effective leadership training. Officers can act as mentors or mentees via the 'develop you' programme. This helps to develop their skills to achieve promotion or lateral development into more specialist roles. The force also runs leadership courses at sergeant and inspector level. These cover a range of areas designed to improve leadership skills and include training sessions from senior officers and staff from across the organisation.

The force has also provided enhanced direction and guidance to all supervisory ranks involved in investigation. This takes the form of bespoke events led by the chief officer team. The process is actively supported by the force's crime academy, which is a dedicated small team of experienced detectives that provides core investigative professional development to supervisors.

The force makes sure that police officers and staff are given insight into how best to manage the demands of being leaders. Its award-winning 'feel well, live well' programme aims to build resilience to cope with the challenges of working within policing. The force also regularly runs a senior leaders' programme, which takes a more strategic view of well-being and how best to consider it in policy and practice changes.

From 14 February 2023 to 3 March 2023, we conducted a survey that was open to all Kent Police personnel, regardless of role. Of those who had line manager responsibilities, 75 percent (432 of 576 respondents) agreed that Kent Police equips them with sufficient training to carry out their line manager roles.

The force predominantly targets resources at its priorities

The force runs an effective monthly tactical and tasking co-ordination group meeting, chaired at chief officer level. We found that the meeting focused on the force's control strategy, which sets out and communicates the long-term operational priorities for the force in terms of crime prevention, enforcement and intelligence. We found that bids for additional funding or support for operational activities were detailed, and decisions on allocation of resources were based on the prioritisation of risk and harm, in line with the control strategy. At local level, daily resource deployment decisions generally reflect force priorities and are equally based on risk and harm. However, the force needs to improve the way it assigns tasks to neighbourhood officers. There is a lack of direction and prioritisation of their daily activity. An enhanced emphasis on local operational plans to combat differing crime and disorder issues at different times of the year should improve focus.

The force is effective at resource planning and change management

The force ensures effective strategic oversight of resource planning decisions via its monthly resourcing panel, which is chaired at chief officer level. The [force management statement](#) supports the panel as it gives a clear indication of future resourcing needs. New posts are agreed and personnel are moved based on operational priorities. The force is prepared to make difficult decisions. It responded to identified poor performance in its domestic abuse VIT with a rapid transfer of qualified detectives from other departments to improve both capacity and capability. The current strategic focus is on maintaining resilience in the VIT and bolstering LPTs.

The force has several ongoing change programmes that it manages via its strategic change board. There are often interdependencies between the different programmes, and the force is effective at prioritising the implementation of changes based on criticality. For example, the force recognised that proposed changes to the control room wouldn't happen quickly enough to stem a significant decline in its ability to answer non-emergency calls. Therefore, it moved officers from neighbourhood policing into the control room but was still able to implement a new neighbourhood policing model by using a phased approach that ensured sufficient resilience even with reduced resourcing.

The force makes the best use of its funding, and its plans are sustainable

The force has a clear plan to provide a balanced budget. Its current strategic change programme, known as zenith, encompasses a refocus on the force's estate strategy following the COVID-19 pandemic. It introduces the concept of 'smarter working' and seeks to use its estate more efficiently. As well as capital savings, the programme aims to make the force's business model more flexible and less reliant on capital assets.

Savings remain of high importance to the force. The forecasted funding doesn't match the anticipated increases in officer and staff salaries and non-pay inflation or essential capital investment to support growth. The five-year savings requirement is set at £42.3m. While medium-term financial forecasts beyond 2023/24 remain uncertain, the force has an effective internal and external audit supported by effective monitoring processes that make sure it has effective financial controls.

There are significant financial challenges facing Kent Police. But there is a strong framework of governance and plans to achieve the savings required. The force's reserves position is prudent and provides some resilience. Over the medium term, taking all the plans and provisions into account, total reserves are expected to remain constant at £20.4m.

The force makes the most of the benefits of working collaboratively

The force collaborates effectively with its primary partner, Essex Police. This brings about savings through economies of scale. For example, the digital transformation board, chaired jointly at chief officer level, enables the effective prioritisation and optimisation of IT projects across both forces. More widely, the regional seven-force collaboration has evolved into the eastern region innovation network, which formalises a shared approach to technology and best practice. Recent examples include the development and sharing of a self-service application process for hiring new officers, a digital work experience platform and the use of remote video recording technology to improve the service offered to victims of domestic abuse.

The force makes sure that it maximises opportunities to introduce digital improvements that support operational activities

The force has implemented a digital platform solution that allows officers to securely collect, store, search and share digital evidence with the Crown Prosecution Service and other criminal justice partners. Media that the force can share includes BWV, police interview recordings, social media and CCTV.

Response officers have also been issued with laptops so they can review and forward digital material at the time of reporting. And they can complete and send statements remotely, which speeds up the initial investigative process. To reduce demand on analysts, common data requirements are now available via the self-service data hub, which houses several departmental-specific reports. For example, individual officer investigative workloads are available for line managers to monitor, which improves performance management.

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