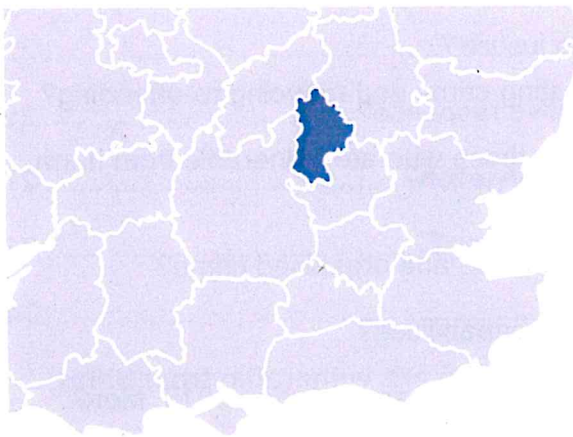




Promoting improvements
in policing to make
everyone safer

PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016

An inspection of Bedfordshire Police



March 2017

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Introduction

As part of our annual inspections of police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) assesses the effectiveness of police forces across England and Wales.

What is police effectiveness and why is it important?

An effective police force is one which keeps people safe and reduces crime. These are the most important responsibilities for a police force, and the principal measures by which the public judge the performance of their force and policing as a whole.

To reach a judgment on the extent of each force's effectiveness, our inspection answered the following overall question:

- How effective is the force at keeping people safe and reducing crime?

To answer this question HMIC explores five 'core' questions, which reflect those areas of policing that we consider to be of particular interest and concern to the public:¹

1. How effective is the force at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe?
2. How effective is the force at investigating crime and reducing re-offending?
3. How effective is the force at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm, and supporting victims?
4. How effective is the force at tackling serious and organised crime?
5. How effective are the force's specialist capabilities?

HMIC's effectiveness inspection assessed all of these areas during 2016. More information on how we inspect and grade forces as part of this wide-ranging inspection is available on the HMIC website (www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/peel-assessments/how-we-inspect/). This report sets out our findings for Bedfordshire Police.

Reports on the force's efficiency, legitimacy and leadership inspections are available on the HMIC website (www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/peel-assessments/peel-2016/bedfordshire/).

¹ HMIC assessed forces against these questions between September and December 2016, except for Kent Police – our pilot force – which we inspected in June 2016.

Force in numbers



Calls for assistance

Calls for assistance per 1,000 population 12 months to 30 June 2016

Bedfordshire Police

England and Wales

197

240



Crime (excluding fraud)

Crimes recorded per 1,000 population 12 months to 30 June 2016

Bedfordshire Police

England and Wales

62

68

Change in recorded crime 12 months to 30 June 2015 against 12 months to 30 June 2016

Bedfordshire Police

England and Wales

+3.0%

+7.8%

Change in recorded crime for the 5 years to the 12 months to 30 June 2016

Bedfordshire Police

England and Wales

-6.3%

-3.4%



Crime outcomes*

Charged/summonsed

Bedfordshire Police

England and Wales

11.0%

12.1%

Evidential difficulties: suspect identified but victim does not support action

Bedfordshire Police

England and Wales

10.7%

10.6%

Investigation completed but no suspect identified

Bedfordshire Police

England and Wales

48.1%

47.4%

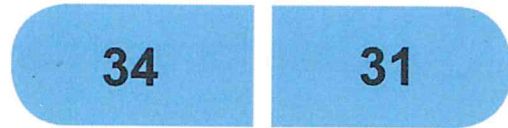
*Figures are shown as proportions of outcomes assigned to offences recorded in the 12 months to 30 June 2016.



Anti-social behaviour

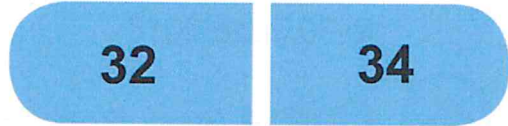
Anti-social behaviour incidents per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2016

Bedfordshire Police England and Wales



Anti-social behaviour incidents per 1,000 population 12 months to 31 March 2015

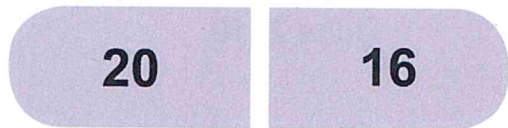
Bedfordshire Police England and Wales



Domestic abuse

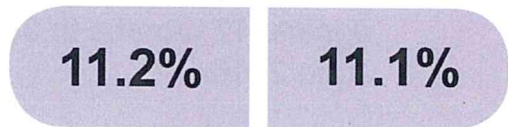
Domestic abuse calls for assistance per 1,000 population 12 months to 30 June 2016

Bedfordshire Police England and Wales



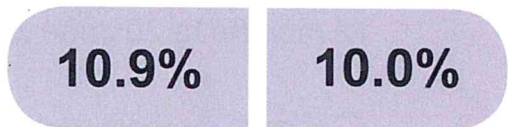
Domestic abuse as a percentage of all recorded crime (excluding fraud) 12 months to 30 June 2016

Bedfordshire Police England and Wales



Domestic abuse as a percentage of all recorded crime (excluding fraud) 12 months to 31 March 2015

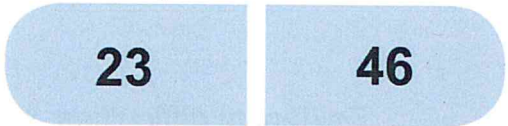
Bedfordshire Police England and Wales



Organised crime groups

Organised crime groups per million population as at 1 July 2016

Bedfordshire Police England and Wales



Victim satisfaction rate

Victim satisfaction with the overall service provided by the police 12 months to 30 June 2016

Bedfordshire Police England and Wales



For further information about the data in this graphic please see annex A

Overview – How effective is the force at keeping people safe and reducing crime?

Overall judgment²



Inadequate

Bedfordshire Police is inadequate in respect of its effectiveness at keeping people safe and reducing crime. The way the force prevents crime, tackles anti-social behaviour, keeps people safe and protects vulnerable people,³ is inadequate. The force's initial investigation of crime and how it tackles serious and organised crime need to improve. Our overall judgment is a deterioration on last year, when we judged the force to require improvement.

Overall summary

How effective is the force at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe?



Inadequate

How effective is the force at investigating crime and reducing re-offending?



Requires improvement

How effective is the force at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm, and supporting victims?



Inadequate

How effective is the force at tackling serious and organised crime?



Requires improvement

How effective are the force's specialist capabilities?

Ungraded

Overall, Bedfordshire Police's effectiveness at keeping people safe and reducing crime is inadequate.

² HMIC judgments are outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

³ A vulnerable person is someone who needs special care, support or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect.

Bedfordshire Police's effectiveness at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe is inadequate. The force introduced a new policing model in 2015, which aimed to improve crime prevention and problem-solving activities through new community teams. However, HMIC found that, beyond isolated pockets of good practice, such as the established community cohesion team, the force still does not have enough police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) to provide effective community engagement and visible targeted foot patrols across the county, or to work consistently with partner organisations (such as local authorities, or health and education services). As a result, the force cannot take the early intervention activity necessary to help prevent crime and anti-social behaviour happening in the first place.

The context within which the force operates is particularly difficult. Bedfordshire Police faces a more acute financial challenge than most other forces and in Luton the complexity and high volume of crime represent a significant operational challenge for a small force with very stretched resources. The overall inadequate grading should not be seen as a reflection on the commitment and hard work of the police officers and staff in Bedfordshire Police who, day to day, are doing their best, with very limited resources, and often under extreme pressure, to keep the public safe. However, once again HMIC has found that in rightly focusing resources to protect its most vulnerable members of the community, the force has exposed its inability to maintain a preventative policing presence across Bedfordshire. However understandable the reasons for this might be, the consequence is that the people of Bedfordshire are not being well served by their police force. The force does not plan to resource its community teams fully until August 2018, three years after they were initially planned. This is unacceptable.

The force has centralised its intelligence teams to provide more focus on vulnerable people, guns and gangs, serious acquisitive crime, and communities, and has devised a plan to address intelligence gaps, but it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of this work. The force needs to review how it records anti-social behaviour so that it has accurate information on which to base a problem-solving approach. Although the force has improved the way it shares knowledge of 'what works' among its workforce, it does not yet routinely record and assess local initiatives and needs to do more to evaluate tactics and share effective practice.

The force lacks a full understanding of the communities it serves, although it is now recruiting more officers to increase engagement with local people. The force is involved in some good work with partner organisations to protect communities, but this needs to be consistent across the force area.

Bedfordshire Police's effectiveness at investigating crime and reducing re-offending requires improvement. The quality of initial investigations needs to improve, as well as of subsequent investigations in cases of stalking and harassment. This is partly

due to the high proportion of new recruits in the force and the lack of sufficient supervisors to provide the support they need.

A significant backlog remains in the forensic examination of digital devices, which means there are unacceptable delays in investigating crime and supporting victims. This was due in part because a number of staff were needed to support a national project. However, the force does ensure that high-risk cases, such as those involving vulnerable children and adults, are prioritised.

The force is good at protecting the public from the most prolific, serious and dangerous offenders. It has a robust and effective system for actively managing and reviewing outstanding suspects, those not yet apprehended, prioritising those who pose the greatest risk. A well-managed integrated offender management scheme now includes a focus on offenders who cause the most harm. We found good work in place to tackle serious youth violence, to reduce re-offending and to divert young people from first-time offending.

Bedfordshire Police's effectiveness at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm and supporting victims is also inadequate. In particular, HMIC continues to have serious concerns about the force's overall response to missing children and young people, not just the force control room response. The process of assessing calls about missing children is poor, and the review of the initial risk assessment determining whether the case requires a 'missing' or 'absent' police response is inconsistent. In addition the force has poor intelligence on those children who repeatedly go missing from care homes, which makes the difficulties in locating them when they go missing, and the time spent doing so, even worse. Some of the most vulnerable children and young people are being left at risk of severe harm as a result of systemic failings in this important area of policing.

The force has made progress in its understanding of vulnerability in its local areas, but gaps remain. It is improving its ability to identify vulnerable people at the first point of contact, people who are vulnerable through their age, disability, or because they have been subjected to repeated offences, or are at high risk of abuse, for example.

On a much more positive note, the force recognises that it is important to respond quickly to victims of domestic abuse and it has a mandatory attendance policy. This means that all domestic abuse incidents will receive an immediate attendance from an officer. The force has worked very hard to improve services and support for victims of domestic abuse and there are some important structural changes that have been put in place over the last year that HMIC would expect, over time, to lead to tangible improvements in the service the force provides to victims of domestic abuse. However, the arrest rate at domestic abuse incidents has fallen by 13 percent, despite an increase in cases identified as domestic abuse. The force also

needs to understand why fewer victims support police action than in many other force areas.

Bedfordshire Police requires improvement in its effectiveness at identifying and tackling serious and organised crime. The force does not yet have a clear understanding of the threat and risk across Bedfordshire and it is therefore poorly placed to tackle it effectively. It has identified a very low number of organised crime groups, and HMIC is concerned that it is not identifying and mapping all groups that are active in the force area. With insufficient resources in community policing, early identification of organised crime groups is less likely.

We found examples of the force working effectively with partner organisations to disrupt organised crime groups. The force is doing good work with schools, communities and families to prevent young people from being drawn into organised crime. However, its approach to managing serious and organised criminals is limited; it does not currently have a clearly defined approach to managing offenders to minimise the risk they pose to local communities.

Bedfordshire Police has the necessary arrangements to ensure that it can fulfil its national policing responsibilities. The force is well prepared to respond to an attack requiring an armed response and is part of a strategic alliance with other forces, which regularly conducts terrorist firearms exercises.

In summary, Bedfordshire Police faces significant challenges because it has low levels of funding compared with other forces, but unusually high levels of serious threats and criminality that are not normally dealt with by a force of its size. The force has had to change its plans over the last year to address risk in the area of vulnerability and has therefore lost its promised focus on crime prevention. However, the force acknowledges the problems that exist and is determined to improve. HMIC is hopeful that the commitment of the new police and crime commissioner to a focus on community policing and crime prevention, and the determination of chief officers and the continued hard work of frontline officers and staff to make improvements, will lead to the changes needed.