

PEEL 2023–25

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of Sussex Police

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Overall summary

Our judgments

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

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

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

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

We also assess the force's performance in a range of other areas and we report on these separately. We make graded judgments for some of these areas.

Data in this report

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

PEEL 2023–2025

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

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

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

Terminology in this report

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

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

HM Inspector's summary

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

Sussex Police serves its communities in a diverse and complex area, which includes the counties of East and West Sussex and the city of Brighton and Hove. The area has a resident population of approximately 1.65 million people, as well as millions of visitors.

The force operates in a geographically and operationally complex environment. Sussex includes 140 miles of coastline, the South Downs National Park, which spans 628 square miles, and Gatwick Airport, which handles about 39 million passengers a year.

Since our last inspection, the force has made significant efforts to address the concerns and areas for improvement we identified. In particular, it has enhanced the operation of its [force contact, command and control department](#), and has introduced an initial investigations team. These improvements are having a positive impact on the service the force provides to the public. To sustain this progress, it will be essential for the force to continue to focus and develop, so it consistently gives its communities a high standard of service.

However, the force needs to improve the quality of its crime investigations. We found that it doesn't always pursue relevant and proportionate lines of enquiry, and there is sometimes a lack of investigative supervision. In some long-term serious crime cases, we found that there wasn't enough momentum and direction.

In our review of [stop and search](#) practices, we found reasonable grounds in the majority of cases. [Officers](#) successfully found the item they were looking for in 30 percent of cases. This rate is higher than it is for most other forces, which shows that Sussex Police uses these powers effectively. The force should improve its understanding of use of force incidents by strengthening external scrutiny through an independently chaired panel.

I am pleased with the way the force works with local communities. It has a proactive approach to tackling [antisocial behaviour](#), and it prioritises those most at risk. However, the force needs to improve the way it records crimes when it receives reports of [antisocial behaviour personal](#). Failure to record these crimes may result in victims not receiving the protection and support they need.

The force manages registered sex offenders well. It makes effective use of [Stalking Protection Orders](#) and other ancillary measures to [safeguard](#) victims and deter offenders. However, its participation in [multi-agency risk assessment conferences \(MARACs\)](#) needs to improve. This is so it can make sure victims involved in [high-risk domestic abuse](#) cases receive prompt support and intervention.

It is also essential that all [first-line leaders](#) complete the force's Introduction to Leadership programme. At the time of our inspection, fewer than half had done so. Given the critical role these leaders play in managing teams, this training is vital.

The force is planning changes to its public protection model, and it is reviewing its neighbourhood policing structures. We hope these reforms will lead to further improvements to the way the force works and will help it better meet the public's needs. We will continue to monitor the force's progress closely.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Constabulary

Leadership

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

Sussex Police has strong, visible leadership. Senior leaders have clear plans and priorities, which they communicate well to [personnel](#). The force has an effective process for preparing its [force management statement](#).

The force invests in its leadership's ability to support the workforce and improve performance. Senior leaders are committed to developing leadership at all levels. The force has created and provided part one of its We are Sussex Leaders programme to first and second-line leaders, and it was well received.

But in our inspection, we found that not all first-line leaders had completed the Introduction to Leadership programme. This is crucial, as it gives them skills to support teams and manage performance.

The force carefully reviews data on leavers and joiners, and it has made progress in reducing the number of people who leave. When people are thinking about leaving the force, it uses [stay conversations](#) to find ways to support them to stay.

Since [our 2021/22 PEEL inspection](#), the force has used Operation Unify to make positive changes to its processes and structure. It has also achieved much better performance in its force contact, command and control department. At the time of our inspection, the force was in the top three forces in England and Wales for answering 999 calls quickly. We also found that the force's new initial investigations team – which carries out scheduled video appointments with victims of crime – gives the public an effective service.

The force has effective governance in place to manage its performance, but it needs to do more in some areas. These include solving crime and carrying out prompt and proportionate investigations to achieve better results for victims.

At the time of our inspection, the force was planning to change its public protection structure. In doing so, it should monitor and check that it has the right people in the right places to deal with demand effectively. We will monitor the progress of this work.

Senior leaders hold meetings throughout the force in which they talk directly to officers and [staff](#). These meetings are well attended. Senior leaders take the time to understand important issues that affect the workforce. The force shows that it is open to feedback, and it looks for opportunities to learn and improve.

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

Reducing crime assessment

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

Sussex Police handles calls for service from the public effectively, and it accurately assesses the risk to callers. It has a good understanding of the demand on its force contact, command and control department and its response teams.

The force uses [stop and search powers](#) effectively. Most of the recorded grounds for stop and search suggest that officers use this power in line with legislation.

The force's [neighbourhood policing teams](#) work well with partner agencies to share information and solve problems at joint intelligence meetings to reduce crime. But the force needs to improve the way it records, and shares across the organisation, problem-solving plans and information about what works.

We found that response teams manage incidents well. They complete relevant initial enquiries, safeguard victims and submit referrals to partner organisations.

The force needs to improve the way it participates in multi-agency risk assessment conferences for victims and their families involved in high-risk domestic abuse cases. This is to make sure they receive the support and intervention they need to reduce the risk of further harm.

The force doesn't always achieve acceptable outcomes for victims of crime. It solves a low number of crimes after investigations. One factor that contributes to this is the number of victim-based crimes the force closes with no suspect identified ([outcome 18](#)), which is higher than expected when compared with other forces in England and Wales. The force needs to understand this problem and work to achieve better outcomes for victims.

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

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

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

When a suspect has been identified, but the time limit for prosecution has expired.

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

The force answers emergency and non-emergency calls quickly, and it identifies repeat and vulnerable victims

The force answers emergency and non-emergency calls quickly. It has reduced the number of non-emergency calls that the caller abandons because the call isn't answered. Call handlers use a structured process to assess threat, harm, risk and vulnerability, and they identify repeat victims. This means they know the victim's circumstances when they consider how the force should respond. Call handlers act politely, appropriately and ethically. They also give victims advice on preventing crime and on how to preserve evidence.

The force doesn't always respond promptly to calls for service

The force responds to calls for service appropriately, but not always within set timescales. It doesn't always inform victims of delays, meaning the force doesn't always meet their expectations. This may cause victims to lose confidence and disengage from the process. The force carries out appropriate [risk assessments](#) for victims and others when it needs to.

The force's crime recording is of an adequate standard when it comes to making sure victims receive an appropriate level of service

The force's crime recording is adequate. But it should improve its processes to make sure it correctly and promptly records all reports of crimes that it receives.

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

The force doesn't always carry out effective investigations

In most cases, the force investigates crimes in a timely way, but it doesn't always complete relevant and proportionate lines of enquiry. The force doesn't always supervise investigations well, but it keeps victims regularly updated. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when they receive regular updates.

A thorough investigation increases the likelihood of perpetrators being identified and arrested, providing a positive result for the victim. The force doesn't always take victim personal statements, which give victims the opportunity to describe how that crime has affected their lives.

When victims withdraw support for an investigation, the force considers progressing the case without the victim's support. This can be an important way of safeguarding the victim and preventing further offences from being committed. The force always records whether it considers using orders designed to protect victims, such as a [Domestic Violence Protection Notice](#) or a [Domestic Violence Protection Order](#).

The [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) requires forces to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage to determine whether victims need additional support. The force doesn't always carry out these assessments or record all requests for additional support.

The force assigns the right outcome type to investigations, and it considers victims' wishes

The force closes crimes with the appropriate outcome type. It records a clear rationale for using a certain outcome, but this isn't always effectively supervised. It asks for victims' views when deciding which outcome type to assign to a closed investigation. When appropriate, the force isn't always able to provide an auditable record of the victim's wishes. The force informs victims of what outcome code has been assigned to the investigation.

Crime data integrity

Adequate

Sussex Police is adequate at recording crime.

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

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

In our 2021/22 inspection report, we graded Sussex Police as inadequate at recording crime. Although the percentages in this report can't be statistically compared with those from 2021/22, we can see there have been improvements in how the force records crime. However, there is still more to do. When victims report crimes, the force should continue to focus on making sure it records them accurately.

We estimate that Sussex Police is recording 92.0 percent (+/- 2.6 percentage points) of all reported crime (excluding fraud).

We estimate that the force is recording 90.6 percent (+/- 4.3 percentage points) of violent offences.

We estimate that the force is recording 98.1 percent (+/- 2.5 percentage points) of sexual offences.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to improve the way it records crime when it receives a report of antisocial behaviour personal

Sussex Police is failing to record enough crimes and tackle problems when [victims](#) report [antisocial behaviour](#). We examined 49 [antisocial behaviour personal](#) incidents. Of these, the force should have recorded 20 crimes, but it only recorded 8.

During [our 2021/22 inspection](#), when we examined 50 similar incidents of antisocial behaviour personal, we found that the force should have recorded 34 crimes, but it only recorded 21.

The force needs to take steps to improve the way it records crimes when it receives a report of antisocial behaviour personal. Failing to record crimes and provide an effective service to tackle antisocial behaviour can mean victims live in fear in their own homes while being subjected to long-term abuse and torment by people living next door or elsewhere in the local community.

The force needs to improve the way it records reported incidents of rape

We found that Sussex Police needs to improve the way it records reported incidents of rape ([Home Office classification N100](#)). In our audit, we identified 11 N100s that the force should have recorded, but it had only recorded 2.

During our [2021/22 inspection](#), we identified 15 N100s that the force should have recorded, but it had only recorded 6.

The force should improve its recording practices to make sure it quickly and correctly records reported incidents of rape.

The force needs to improve the way it records equality data

Sussex Police's data for [victims](#) of crime shows that it records age and gender well, but not ethnicity or other [protected characteristics](#). The force should be collecting this information to understand:

- the extent to which each protected group is affected by crime;
- how this differs from those without the protected characteristics; and
- whether it needs to provide a different response for these victims.

Main findings

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

The force records rape offences effectively

The force records rape crimes correctly, but it needs to improve how quickly it does so. In our audit, we found 41 rape crimes that should have been recorded, and the force had recorded all 41 of them. However, for almost half of rape crimes, the force took over a week to record them. In some cases, it took more than a month.

The force should make sure it records rape crimes at the earliest opportunity and, in all cases, within 24 hours of the incident being reported to the police.

Police powers and treating the public fairly and respectfully

Adequate

Sussex Police is adequate at using police powers and treating people fairly and respectfully.

Area for improvement

The force needs to strengthen the external scrutiny of its use of force

Sussex Police has an external use of force panel, which meets quarterly. It is chaired by a senior [police officer](#), rather than by an independent chairperson.

At each meeting, the panel reviews a use of force theme. Themes have included the use of force on [children](#), and the use of de-escalation techniques. During the meeting, the panel reviews up to four [body-worn video](#) recordings on the chosen theme.

This number of recordings is too low for an independent overview of this activity across the whole force. The external panel should review more use of force incidents – chosen at random – to allow for truly independent scrutiny. The panel could then identify themes and learning so the force can make improvements.

At the time of our inspection, the force was advertising for people to join an independent use of force scrutiny panel, with a view to re-starting it in September 2025. The force should continue with these plans, include an independent chairperson, and make sure members of the panel are from diverse backgrounds.

Main findings

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

The force has strong internal oversight of its use of force practices, but it may not be recording all use of force incidents

The force uses regular monthly reviews and governance processes to maintain strong internal oversight of officers' use of force. Each month, supervisors review 80 to 100 cases, including body-worn video (BWV) footage. They review every instance in which an officer uses a Taser, as well as instances in which an officer draws but doesn't use a Taser. They share data and insights across several internal governance boards to support continuous learning and accountability.

By examining how many arrests a force has made, we can estimate how many use of force incidents there are likely to be. Arrests usually count as a use of force – for example, due to the use of handcuffs.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Sussex Police recorded 19,187 use of force incidents, which is 5,516 lower than the number we estimated. This means the force may not be recording all use of force incidents.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds account for 9.0 percent of the Sussex population, yet we found that they account for 13.0 percent of use of force incidents. This could mean that people from ethnic minority backgrounds may be subject to use of force more frequently than other people.

The force is improving its understanding of [disproportionality](#), and senior leaders closely scrutinise performance in this area. This is helping the force to improve public confidence in policing.

The force has a good understanding of stop and search powers, and it is working to improve disproportionality

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Sussex Police carried out 6,689 stop and searches. This was an increase of 21.9 percent when compared with the previous year. Over the same period, the number of stop and searches carried out by all forces in England and Wales decreased by 2.9 percent.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Sussex Police found the item it was looking for in 30.0 percent of the stop and searches it carried out. This is higher than the average rate of 25.1 percent for forces in England and Wales, and it shows that the force's use of stop and search is effective.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Black people were 6.1 times more likely than White people to be the subject of a stop and search by Sussex Police. This is higher than the average across England and Wales, where Black people are 3.6 times more likely than White people to be the subject of a stop and search. For Sussex Police, this is an improvement from the previous year, when Black people were 6.4 times more likely than White people to be the subject of a stop and search. These rates are calculated using population data from the [2021 census](#).

The force is aware of this disproportionality, and monitors it through its culture board.

Every time an officer stops and searches a Black person in Sussex Police's area, a senior officer reviews the decision to make sure there were reasonable grounds. The force is also revising officer training, and it is devising scenario-based virtual reality training with incidents involving both Black and White people. This work aims to increase understanding and bring about improvements so the force can make sure it uses its powers fairly and appropriately.

The force gives officers training on effective communication and de-escalation skills, including scenario-based training. The force also provides training on awareness of [unconscious bias](#). This aims to make sure officers can recognise their own biases and improve their communication skills. The force also gives this training to new recruits. We found that officers and staff had a good understanding of this subject. Officers can book themselves on to other online cultural awareness courses through the force's training platform, Totara.

Officers understand and use stop and search powers fairly and appropriately

During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 160 stop and search records from 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024. Based on this sample, we estimate that 86.9 percent (+/- 5.2 percentage points) of all stop and searches carried out by the force during this period had reasonable grounds. This is broadly unchanged when compared with the findings from our previous review of records from 1 January to 31 December 2021, when we found that 88.0 percent (+/- 4.9 percentage points) of all stop and searches carried out by the force had reasonable grounds. Of the records we reviewed for stop and searches on people who self-identified as from an ethnic minority background, 34 out of 38 had reasonable grounds.

Sergeants review all stop and searches. During our inspection, sergeants told us they had time to complete the reviews, which include watching BWV and giving feedback to the officers involved.

The force also has a stop and search internal scrutiny panel and a stop and search quality assurance process. Through this process, randomly selected stop and search records and the associated BWV recordings are sent to supervisors, up to the rank of deputy chief constable, to review. Supervisors consider the stop and search and the quality of the sergeant's review. This gives the force assurance about the appropriate use of stop and search powers.

We examined BWV recordings of ten incidents in which officers had used stop and search powers. Most interactions were of a good standard. In all ten interactions, officers were respectful of the person they were searching.

The force has a policy on when officers should use BWV

The force has a clear policy on how and when officers should use BWV. They must take footage of all incidents, as early as possible, before they arrive or as they arrive. This should include stop and searches, and incidents in which officers use force on a person.

Officers upload relevant video to the NiCE investigation platform. Footage that the force deems irrelevant is deleted after 30 days.

Preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behaviour, and reducing vulnerability

Adequate

Sussex Police is adequate at prevention and deterrence.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to consistently record and evaluate problem-solving activity so it can monitor performance more effectively

We found that Sussex Police doesn't always use problem-solving plans to record and evaluate activity, or to share learning across the force. This makes it harder to promote consistency and to effectively measure performance across [neighbourhood policing teams](#).

The force uses problem-solving plans for large-scale crime prevention operations. Some of this positive work is listed in the [main findings section of this chapter](#). But the force doesn't consistently use the problem-solving framework to prevent crime and [antisocial behaviour](#) in local communities. It doesn't oversee problem-solving plans across the county, which prevents it from evaluating activity and sharing best practice. This reduces how effectively it manages neighbourhood crime and antisocial behaviour.

The force should make sure it has regular and structured governance processes to monitor the performance of neighbourhood policing activity

To make sure [neighbourhood policing](#) is effective and accountable, Sussex Police should put in place regular and structured governance processes to actively monitor and evaluate performance.

At the time of our inspection, we found that the force didn't always consistently record or review problem-solving plans. Without consistency, it is hard for the force to know what is working, what isn't, and where it needs to make improvements.

We found evidence of positive and proactive work at a local level, but at the time of our inspection, there was no strategic co-ordination. Without a central governance structure, good practice may go unrecognised, and underperformance may not be addressed promptly or systematically.

This lack of strategic oversight has wider implications for performance monitoring. It limits how well forces can make informed decisions, allocate resources and show their communities the value of neighbourhood policing.

Establishing a robust governance framework would support more consistent and effective problem-solving, make sure neighbourhood policing activity aligns with organisational priorities and result in positive outcomes for the force's communities.

The force knows about this problem and is taking steps to improve it. During our inspection, it confirmed that its newly formed problem-solving working group would help bring more structure and consistency in this area. We will continue to monitor its progress.

Innovative practice

Volunteer police cadets are raising awareness in school communities about violence against women and girls

Volunteer police cadets in rural Sussex are raising awareness of violence against women and girls. Initiatives to tackle violence against women and girls often centre on the night-time economy in towns and cities. But this initiative recognises that violence against women and girls takes place everywhere.

The police cadets have prepared a six-minute presentation which they give in schools. It is designed for [children](#) aged 15 and 16, who are the same age as the cadets. The presentation includes information on the vital role men and boys play by challenging others' behaviour, speaking out and supporting people who may become [victims](#). Sussex Police told us the cadets had shown the presentation to 760 students.

The students also receive information packs, which contain leaflets about [domestic abuse](#), [stalking](#), sexual offences, sextortion, drink spiking and the [Ask for Angela](#) campaign. They also receive two drinking glass covers and a reusable bottle topper to prevent drink spiking, as well as a keyring personal attack alarm.

The force told us it has received positive feedback from students and schools. The police cadets received the runner-up award in the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) Violence Against Women and Girls and Operation Soteria Recognition Awards 2024.

Promising practice

The force uses drones to prevent crime by identifying vulnerable individuals and deterring criminal activity

Sussex Police uses a drone, equipped with a high-resolution thermal-imaging camera, spotlights and a loudspeaker, to improve public safety in Brighton at night. This initiative follows the successful deployment of similar drones in West Sussex.

The drone mainly operates on Friday and Saturday nights along the beach, where it helps identify [vulnerable people](#) and monitor criminal behaviour. It also gathers evidence when necessary. Two trained operators control the device, and they collaborate with [officers](#) to respond to incidents the drone detects.

The goal is to prevent crime by identifying vulnerable people and deterring criminal activity. The force told us of several incidents in which this has happened. It also told us about two cases in which the drone operators spotted serious sexual offences taking place on the beach. Officers [safeguarded](#) the [victims](#) and arrested the offenders.

The force uses volunteers to reduce the repeat victimisation of fraud victims

Sussex Police's fraud prevention programme has a team of 16 volunteers, who are responsible for contacting fraud [victims](#) across Sussex. Fraud now accounts for almost half of all reported crime in England and Wales.

The force told us the team reduces the risk of repeat victimisation and the lasting impact fraud has on its victims. This reduces demand on the force.

The team is integrated into [neighbourhood policing teams](#), working collectively with victims. The force told us the team supports more than 600 fraud victims a month.

Feedback from victims is positive. Survey results show the team protects, educates and [safeguards](#) victims, minimising financial loss and preventing repeat victimisation.

Main findings

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

Neighbourhood policing teams and district engagement officers use ward profiles and engagement plans

The force produces individual profiles for each ward, which include demographic information. Ward profiles include maps with boundaries, details on population, languages spoken, schools, notable people and stakeholders, and priorities for the [neighbourhood policing team \(NPT\)](#). Local police community support officers (PCSOs) are responsible for keeping ward profiles and engagement plans for working with the community up to date, with oversight from sergeants.

We reviewed a small sample of the ward profiles and engagement plans. They were up to date and had been reviewed by a sergeant. Each plan included an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to help the team focus on its policing and engagement priorities.

The profiles help the force compare areas and identify communities in which it needs to strengthen the way it works with the public. The ward profiles are stored on the force case management system, which means officers and staff in other parts of the force can access them.

The force told us it had eight district engagement officers (DEOs), who work with NPTs to communicate with the public. Local NPT inspectors line manage the DEOs, and they have close links to the centralised force corporate communications team. This means DEOs can highlight emerging matters that may need a force-wide perspective.

The DEOs work alongside PCSOs and officers, and attend events with the public. They also manage the local NPT social media accounts and Sussex Alerts, an interactive service that allows two-way communication between the force and members of the public. The DEOs provide alerts on witness appeals, crime updates, crime prevention advice and news.

The force has developed an antisocial behaviour scoring matrix to identify those most at risk

The force uses HARA ([hate crime](#) and antisocial behaviour risk assessment), which is a question set and scoring matrix for reports of antisocial behaviour personal. Any case assessed as medium-risk must be reviewed by a supervisor within 24 hours. Cases assessed as high-risk are reviewed by a duty inspector by the end of the shift.

The local NPT inspector oversees high-risk cases and discusses them at the daily management meeting to make sure the force takes all possible immediate action to reduce the risk. These cases are then discussed at a multi-agency meeting, where risk-reducing action plans are put in place.

The force uses antisocial behaviour legislation to tackle emerging patterns and prevent recurring trends

In the year ending 31 March 2024, the force recorded 22,290 antisocial behaviour incidents and issued 418 antisocial behaviour orders. These include [Criminal Behaviour Orders](#), Community Protection Notices, civil injunctions and dispersal powers under section 34 of the [Anti-social Behaviour and Crime and Policing Act 2014](#).

The force issued antisocial behaviour orders in 1.9 percent of recorded antisocial behaviour incidents. This rate is in the normal range when compared with other forces in England and Wales.

The force uses data to identify emerging trends, and it works well with partner agencies to deter crime and antisocial behaviour

The force showed us many examples of the ways it tracks antisocial behaviour and crime data to highlight emerging trends. These trends are discussed at weekly hub intelligence meetings with representatives from partner agencies. Together, they put plans in place to deter or investigate the people involved.

The force uses data to identify children who come to its attention regularly for reasons related to antisocial behaviour, violence, theft and going missing. This means it can put in place intervention and deterrence processes.

The force told us about the Targeted Kicks programme, which is a partnership between Sussex Police and the Brighton and Hove Albion Foundation. The force can refer children who regularly come to police attention. The programme helps children to spend time with other people and improve their behaviour and lifestyle. During sessions, children play football and take part in deterrence activities such as virtual reality workshops about knife crime. The Brighton and Hove Albion coach also carries out mentoring activities with the children.

Using the [Cambridge Crime Harm Index](#), the force monitors the risk score of each child involved in Targeted Kicks, both before and after the programme. This allows it to assess the programme's success. The force told us there is a 95 percent reduction in risk to the children as suspects, and a 90 percent reduction as victims.

Unfortunately, the uptake for Targeted Kicks isn't as good as it could be. During our inspection, we were told that in parts of Sussex, the programme has limited attendance. As a result, the programme has stopped running in some of its trial areas.

The force's Reboot programme is an established diversionary pathway for children aged between 11 and 17 who are at risk of becoming involved in crime. The programme offers a wide range of activities and support to these children and their families. The force told us that in the year ending 31 March 2025, the programme supported 107 young people.

The force has a repeat caller co-ordinator, who identifies prolific callers and puts in place partnership work with other agencies to provide support. Often, these other agencies also receive prolific calls from the same people.

The force told us that the top caller to its contact centre in 2024 made more than 1,800 [101](#) and 999 calls. Joint working between the local NPT and social services resulted in this prolific vulnerable caller receiving a hospital order. The NPT and partner agencies have put together an acceptable behaviour plan, and they have planned multi-agency review meetings. This is to make sure ongoing support is in place for when the person leaves hospital, and to prevent reoccurrences.

The force is reviewing its neighbourhood policing model to prioritise local prevention and deterrence of crime

The force told us it was in the process of reviewing its neighbourhood policing model to assess the way it works with communities and the service it needs to provide in different locations. This is positive. At the time of our inspection, although we found examples of neighbourhood policing and problem-solving across the force's area, there was a lack of central governance and strategic direction.

To inform this review, the force has introduced an app that each NPT officer and PCSO uses to record their level of community interaction during each shift. The data the force collects through the app helps it understand how it interacts with the public. It also helps it identify opportunities to communicate with different communities and people from different faiths.

At the time of our inspection, the force planned to introduce the new neighbourhood policing model in July 2025.

The force has an active citizens in policing programme, where volunteers work in a range of functions and departments

The [citizens in policing](#) programme supports members of the public to volunteer in different policing roles. In the year ending 31 March 2024, Sussex Police had 84 special constables and 213 police support volunteers. The force told us it had 190 volunteer police cadets. It also has numerous police staff volunteers, who support the work of various departments across the force. Some special constables are specially trained to work alongside specialist teams, such as road policing units, licensing and tactical enforcement.

The force has a superintendent strategic lead for its special constabulary and a chief inspector strategic lead for its volunteer police cadets. It also employs a chaplain, who manages a force-wide team of voluntary chaplains who give well-being support to officers and staff.

For special constables and other volunteers who have completed several years of service, the force shows its appreciation by rewarding them with tie pins and badges that denote the length of time they have served. The force also values their contributions by nominating them for the national Lord Ferrers Awards, which recognise outstanding contributions to volunteering in policing. Some of the force's volunteers have won or been runners-up in various award categories. The force also gives awards for Special Constable of the Year and Volunteer of the Year.

At the time of our inspection, the force told us that over the past year, only one person had been co-ordinating its citizens in policing. Although we were impressed by what they had achieved, additional staff capacity would mean the force could be more ambitious with recruiting, supporting and retaining special constables and volunteers.

Responding to the public

Good

Sussex Police is good at responding to the public.

Promising practice

Large-scale change under Operation Unify has improved the force's initial approach to investigations

In [our 2021/22 PEEL inspection](#) report, we identified areas in which Sussex Police needed to improve its initial response when it receives calls from the public. As a result, the force created an initial investigations team (IIT) as part of a broader improvement plan, which is called Operation Unify. The goal was to provide faster, more effective investigations and better outcomes for [victims](#).

After completing a risk assessment, the IIT carries out scheduled video appointments with victims of crime. The appointments take place at a convenient time for victims. As a result, response [officers](#) don't have to attend these incidents. This means more response officers are available to attend emergency calls for service and incidents that need police attendance.

Before introducing the IIT in February 2025, the force analysed demand in its [force contact, command and control department](#), and adjusted staffing to match. It introduced a new call-grading policy, and improved training has helped with the transition to new ways of working. The force has told us that since it introduced the IIT:

- the volumes of reported incidents that are waiting for a police response are now five times lower than the previous year;
- response teams have fewer crime allocations but have solved 20 percent more cases;
- it has handled more than 9,000 video calls, meeting 95 percent of appointment capacity;
- victims have more choice about when to give a statement to the police, at a time which is convenient to them; and
- public feedback shows improving victim satisfaction.

At the time of our inspection, the IIT had only been functioning for seven weeks, but we found it was working very well and improving services for the public.

Main findings

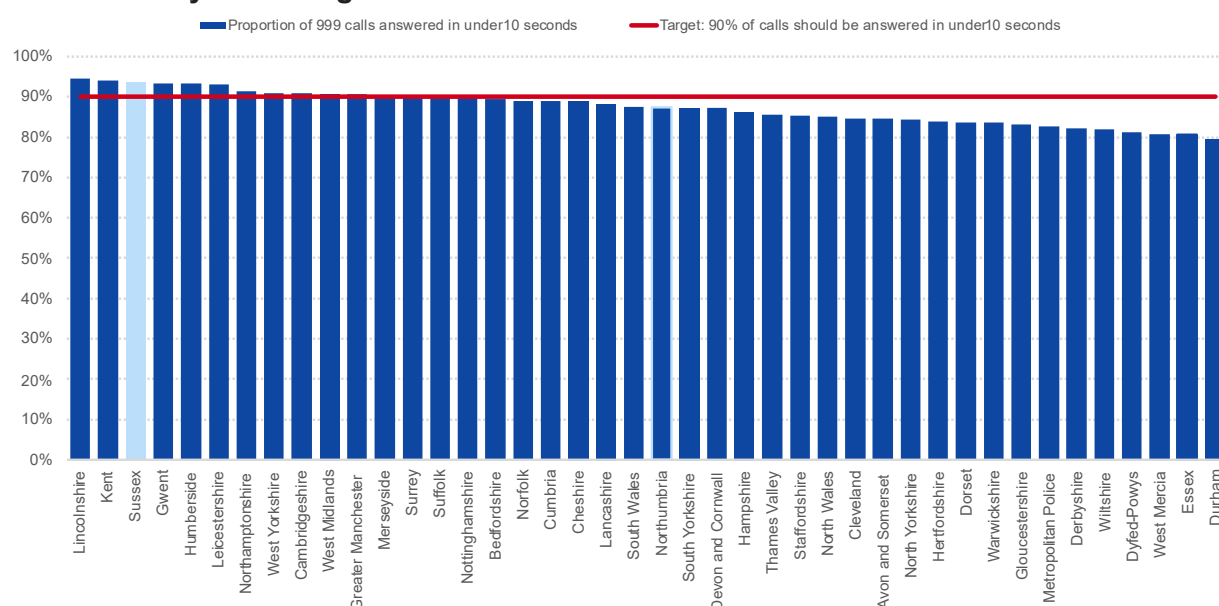
In this section we set out our main findings that relate to how well the force responds to the public.

The force consistently answers 999 calls within expected timescales

In May 2022, the Home Office started to publish data on 999 call answering times. Call answering time is the time taken for a call to be transferred from BT to a force, plus the time that force takes to answer it. In England and Wales, forces should aim to answer 90 percent of these calls within 10 seconds.

Since it introduced a new contact system in October 2023, the force has shown positive, sustained improvement in answering 999 calls. Between 1 November 2021 and 30 September 2022, the force answered 76.7 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds. In the year ending 31 December 2024, this performance had improved, with the force answering 93.5 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds.

Figure 1: Proportion of 999 calls answered within 10 seconds by forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 December 2024



Source: [999 performance data from BT](#)

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

The force has improved its performance in relation to non-emergency 101 calls

Calls to the 101 non-emergency service in Sussex are increasing but remain below the average number for England and Wales. The force has introduced a new telephony system, which allows the force contact, command and control department (FCCCD) to automatically distribute work more effectively. This has led to fewer 101 callers abandoning their calls. When callers abandon calls, they may not get the help they need, or they may look for help by inappropriately using the 999 emergency number.

However, the force doesn't have a process for gathering the contact details of people who abandon their calls. This means it doesn't understand who has looked for help elsewhere, and it can't support them by calling them back. At the time of our inspection, the force told us a system to do this was about to come online.

As set out in the 2020 national contact management strategy principles and guidance, forces with a switchboard should aim to have an abandonment rate lower than 5 percent. At the time of our inspection, the force told us that the year-to-date rolling abandonment rate was 7.4 percent. This is above the recommended level, but it is a big improvement since our last inspection.

The force uses structured risk assessments to assess risk and vulnerability

In our 2021/22 PEEL inspection, we found that the force frequently failed to use a structured approach to assess risk or vulnerability when contacted by the public. This meant the force might not have been meeting victims' needs.

In our latest victim service assessment, we found that the force used the [threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement \(THRIVE\)](#) model in 62 out of the 66 calls we reviewed. This is a substantial improvement from what we found in our last inspection, when only 25 out of the 61 cases we reviewed had been assessed using a structured risk assessment. Using this approach means the force considers callers' vulnerabilities and support needs, and it can act on them when it needs to.

In our victim service assessment, we also found that the force has improved its approach to identifying repeat victims. In 51 out of the 60 cases we reviewed, there was a check for a repeat victim. The information was effectively used in 27 out of 34 relevant cases. Repeat victims of crime can be at the highest risk of harm.

The force provides appropriate governance and performance management of the FCCCD, and of its response to incidents

In our victim service assessment, we reviewed cases that took place between July and September 2024. We found that the force didn't consistently meet targets for attending calls for service. It met the target in only 45 out of 71 relevant cases. We also found that callers weren't always told about delays. They received updates from the force in only 11 out of 28 relevant cases. There wasn't enough supervision of the initial response or deployment, with effective oversight recorded in only 10 out of 30 cases.

In October 2024, the force introduced a new call-grading policy and a service level agreement. Since the force put these changes in place, we have seen significant improvements in performance, and in the quality of service the force gives to the public.

The FCCCD, which deploys resources to incidents, has strong performance oversight. Senior officers regularly scrutinise FCCCD operations during force-wide performance meetings, which are chaired by the deputy chief constable. These meetings cover important metrics such as call handling, staffing levels and response times.

FCCCD officers and staff told us they now manage demand better, and that senior leaders actively work with the department. Supervisors told us they have enough resources to provide an effective and efficient service. They also said that the situation has improved when compared with previous years. Changes to the force's grading policy and shift patterns mean they can assess risk and meet demand more effectively.

Using real-time data visualisation tools in the FCCCD has further strengthened the way the force monitors performance. These tools allow supervisors to track incidents as they unfold, prioritise high-risk cases and make sure vulnerable people receive timely support.

As a result of these improvements, we have recognised the force's work in this area as [promising practice](#). The force was invited to present its progress at a [College of Policing](#) knowledge-sharing event, offering other forces the chance to learn from its experience.

Investigating crime

Requires
improvement

Sussex Police requires improvement at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The force doesn't consistently achieve acceptable outcomes for victims

Sussex Police doesn't achieve acceptable outcomes for [victims](#) of crime. The number of victim-based crimes it solves after investigations is low. The force needs to better understand this problem and work to achieve better outcomes for victims.

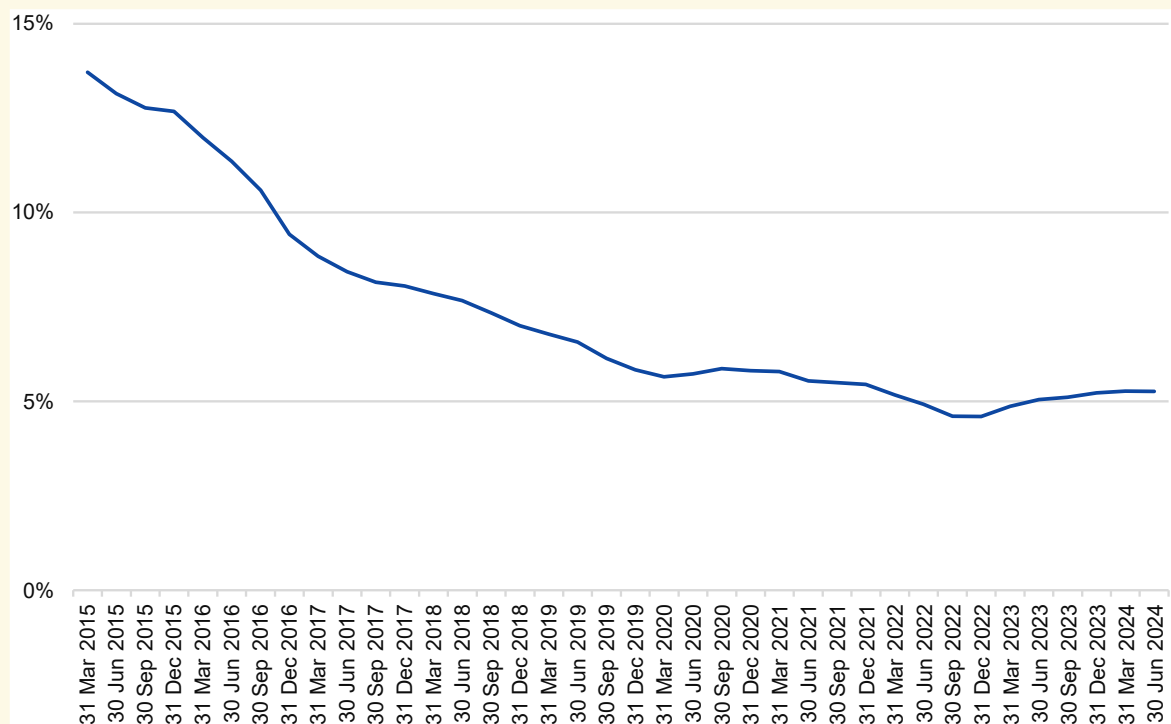
In the year ending 30 June 2024, the force recorded 115,643 victim-based crimes. Of these recorded offences, 9.2 percent were assigned an 'offences brought to justice' outcome. This is within the normal range when compared with other forces in England and Wales.

Figure 2: Percentage of victim-based crime recorded by Sussex Police and all forces in England and Wales by selected outcome types in the year ending 30 June 2024

Outcome types	Force outcome rate	England and Wales outcome rate
1 – Charged/summonsed	5.3%	6.3%
2 & 3 – Caution – youths & adults	0.9%	0.7%
8 – Community resolutions	2.5%	1.7%
9 – Prosecution not in the public interest (Crown Prosecution Service decision)	0.0%	0.0%
10 & 21 – Prosecution not in the public interest (police decision)	0.6%	0.8%
14 – Evidential difficulties (suspect not identified but the victim declines or is unable to support)	2.8%	5.8%
15 – Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports police action)	8.9%	13.1%
16 – Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim doesn't support or withdraws support)	23.4%	21.3%
17 – Prosecution time limit expired	0.6%	0.3%
18 – Investigation complete – no suspect identified	48.3%	43.3%
20 – Action undertaken by another body/ agency	1.1%	1.5%
22 – Diversionary, educational or intervention activity	0.4%	0.4%

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

Figure 3: Proportion of victim-based crimes assigned a ‘charged/summonsed’ outcome (outcome 1) by Sussex Police between the year ending 31 March 2015 and the year ending 30 June 2024



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

In the year ending 30 June 2024, Sussex Police assigned 5.3 percent of victim-based crimes a ‘charged/summonsed’ outcome (outcome 1). This is lower than expected when compared with other forces in England and Wales. Despite this, a ‘charged/summonsed’ outcome is just one of the outcomes that makes up ‘offences brought to justice’, and the force is within the normal range in this area when compared with other forces in England and Wales.

Between 30 June 2023 and 30 June 2024, the proportion of victim-based crimes assigned [outcome 15](#) (evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports police action)) by Sussex Police decreased from 10.7 percent to 8.9 percent. Both these values are lower than expected when compared with other forces in England and Wales.

In the year ending 30 June 2024, Sussex Police assigned 48.3 percent of victim-based crimes outcome 18 (investigation complete – no suspect identified). This is higher than expected when compared with other forces in England and Wales.

The force needs to make sure it carries out proportionate and timely investigations into reported crimes

During our inspection, we found a large number of open serious crime investigations. Sussex Police doesn't have enough capacity to make sure it progresses these investigations promptly to an appropriate outcome.

For example, members of the [safeguarding](#) investigation unit told us the unit's investigators were managing about 1,300 active investigations that were more than 12 months old. This was as well as managing investigations that were less than 12 months old.

We carried out a random [dip sample](#) review of 14 investigations that were more than 12 months old. In most cases, we found the initial response and investigative and safeguarding actions were proportionate and timely. In general, we found that the force had interviewed [victims](#), and located, arrested and processed suspects appropriately.

Delays start to happen as investigations enter the secondary investigation phase, which involves further investigative enquiries. Investigators don't have enough time to do these enquiries, review third-party material, and address file quality and Crown Prosecution Service action plans. We found that investigations often stagnate as operational focus shifts back to daily demand – to the new crimes and safeguarding activity that need attention.

Investigations are often re-allocated to new investigators. We found that many investigations passed through several investigators. We also found that progress updates on the investigations lacked detail and direction. Overall, the review reinforced our existing observations and showed that investigators were overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of open investigations.

[Chief officers](#) are overseeing this problem, and plans are in place to reduce the high-workload pressure on investigators. At the time of our inspection, the force was planning to restructure the safeguarding investigation unit in May 2025. This should also help to free up time for secondary investigations.

It is important that the force gives victims the appropriate level of service and prevents further offending by carrying out timely investigations and bringing offenders to justice.

The force needs to comply with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

We found that Sussex Police is failing to follow some requirements of the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) ('the Victims' Code').

The Victims' Code requires forces to carry out a needs assessment at an early stage to determine whether [victims](#) need additional support. We found that the force rarely carried out this assessment and it didn't always record the request for additional support.

In our victim service assessment, we found that the force had recorded clear and appropriate victim needs assessments in only 23 out of 58 relevant cases. When a victim was entitled to an enhanced service, the force recorded this in 22 out of 39 relevant cases.

This means the force isn't always identifying the support victims are entitled to. It should be giving enhanced support to:

- victims who are [vulnerable](#) or intimidated;
- victims who are persistently targeted; and
- victims of the most serious crimes, as they are more likely to need specialist help.

Some victims may be in more than one of these categories.

This support may include:

- offering a referral to a specialist support service;
- contacting the victim sooner than usual after making decisions; and
- arranging special measures for giving evidence in court.

Main findings

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

The force doesn't always make sure officers and staff create investigation plans when necessary

In our victim service assessment, we found appropriate investigation plans, in line with the College of Policing [authorised professional practice](#), in 46 out of 57 relevant cases. When investigation plans were present, they were followed and updated in 45 out of 46 cases. Without appropriate investigation plans, the force is missing investigative opportunities. This could contribute to fewer positive outcomes for victims.

The force should make sure officers and staff create investigation plans in line with authorised professional practice. It should also make sure these plans have effective supervisory oversight.

In our victim service assessment, we found effective supervision of investigations in 64 out of 78 relevant cases. In 66 out of 83 relevant cases, we found evidence that the force had taken all appropriate and proportionate investigative opportunities from the outset and throughout the investigation.

When there is effective supervision, with clear directives, there is more likely to be an appropriate and proportionate investigation. This means the force is more likely to achieve better outcomes for victims.

The force progresses cases when the victim doesn't support an investigation, and it considers applying for ancillary orders when appropriate

When the victim doesn't want to pursue a prosecution, the police should consider if there is enough evidence to secure a conviction in court. This is called an evidence-led prosecution. During our inspection, we found that investigators routinely considered using evidence-led prosecutions as a tool to keep victims safe. This was the case in all crimes, not just domestic abuse cases, in which it is standard practice.

Our victim service assessment supported this finding. It showed that investigators considered evidence-led prosecutions in all of the 13 relevant cases we reviewed.

The force also considered whether to apply for an ancillary order, such as a Domestic Violence Protection Notice or a Stalking Protection Order, in all 14 relevant cases. This shows that the force focuses on protecting victims and deterring offenders.

In most cases, the force adheres to victim contact arrangements

Police investigators must discuss and agree with the victim how often the victim will receive updates. They should also ask how victims would like to receive this information. This is known as a victim contract.

In our victim service assessment, we found that the force adhered to the agreed victim contract in 49 out of 53 relevant cases.

By speaking to victims and letting them decide how and when they want updates, the force helps victims feel included. When officers adhere to this contract, they give victims better support. This should improve victims' confidence in the force.

Protecting vulnerable people

Adequate

Sussex Police is adequate at protecting vulnerable people.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to improve the way it participates in multi-agency risk assessment conferences

Sussex Police is inconsistent in the way it refers cases to [multi-agency risk assessment conferences \(MARACs\)](#). This may lead to [victims](#) not receiving the right support or intervention, which would prevent or reduce the risk of future harm.

[SafeLives](#) recommends that, based on the size of the local population, the force should discuss 2,920 MARAC cases a year. In the year ending 30 September 2024, Sussex Police discussed 3,460 MARAC cases. This is an increase from 3,372 cases in the previous year. However, during our inspection, we learned that this number should be higher.

The force attends MARACs with three local authorities. In East Sussex, a MARAC triage pilot has been operating for two years. At this meeting, a decision is made as to whether the case is heard at a full MARAC, or whether it becomes the responsibility of a designated lead agency to co-ordinate risk-reducing actions.

We observed one of the MARAC triage meetings. We found that three of the unreferral high-risk cases would have benefited from being discussed at a MARAC.

In other areas of the force, there is no MARAC triage with partner agencies. MARAC administration staff told us they are responsible for using their professional judgement in referring cases involving several incidents to the MARAC. They told us their decision-making for unreferral cases isn't subject to further review.

The force needs to make sure it gives all victims who meet the MARAC criteria access to the full range of interventions a MARAC can offer. It should satisfy itself that [officers](#) and [staff](#) involved in the referral decision-making process fully understand the MARAC criteria. And it should consider how it monitors the quality of decision-making in this area.

Of the eight MARAC cases we observed, there was a clear focus on the safety of victims, [children](#) and any other potential victims, and on the actions that could be taken to [safeguard](#) them. However, there was little consideration of managing perpetrators and taking action to reduce their offending. Managing perpetrators is an important factor in reducing risk.

If the force doesn't make improvements in this area, victims may be at risk of further harm.

The force needs to make sure all officers and staff in multi-agency safeguarding roles have the right training

[Safeguarding vulnerable people](#) of any age can be complex. It is important that the relevant [officers](#) and [staff](#) have the skills, training and knowledge they need to provide high-quality safeguarding. They must be able to correctly identify and reduce risk, give appropriate support, and carry out the right safeguarding actions.

During our inspection, we spoke to many committed and knowledgeable officers and staff. They routinely work with partner agencies to safeguard vulnerable [children](#) and adults, and to reduce offending by people who have committed crimes. However, we found no formal training plan for some officers and staff in specialist roles.

Most officers and staff we spoke to had completed [Domestic Abuse Matters training](#). But there wasn't a training plan for some roles, or milestones for showing competency.

[Domestic abuse](#) caseworkers – who administer [multi-agency risk assessment conferences](#) and support domestic abuse victims – told us new officers and staff learn from those who are more experienced. But they acknowledged that sometimes those people haven't been in the role for long themselves.

Domestic abuse offender managers – who visit [high-risk domestic abuse](#) perpetrators – haven't had specific training for the role.

Members of the [multi-agency safeguarding hub](#) have received some safeguarding training and are mentored in the role. But there isn't a specific plan for the role or competency milestones that can be signed off.

The force should make sure officers and staff responsible for [protecting vulnerable people](#) have enough training to carry out their roles effectively.

Promising practice

The force is improving the way it protects children who may be at risk of being exploited

Sussex Police has introduced Operation Swordfish to help protect [children](#) considered to be at risk of being exploited. Through this process, if a child at risk of being exploited is involved in a crime – either as a [victim](#), suspect or both – the force assigns a [professionalising investigations programme \(PIP\) 2](#) supervisor to keep track of them.

If the child comes to the police's attention again, the supervisor receives an alert. They then decide what actions to take to protect the child and investigate the people exploiting them. This approach means that there is one supervisor with a holistic view of all the events involving the child. That supervisor can target activity to [safeguard](#) the child and pursue the exploiters.

This is an effective way of making sure children at high risk of exploitation have the strategic focus of a police supervisor, rather than separate investigators dealing in isolation with each investigation involving the child. Operation Swordfish promotes joined-up activity to protect children and prosecute offenders.

The force told us that this work has led to it referring more suspected organised crime exploitation cases to the [South East Regional Organised Crime Unit](#).

Main findings

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

The force is improving its response to vulnerability

The force has a vulnerability board, which oversees the 14 strands of vulnerability. Each strand has a thematic portfolio lead officer. The board is chaired by an assistant chief constable, who oversees the improvement plan. The force is aligned to the [Operation Soteria national operating model](#), and has a designated lead superintendent and project manager for this.

At the time of our inspection, the force was carrying out a review of public protection, and it was planning to remodel its safeguarding investigation unit (SIU). During our inspection, and in our 2021/22 PEEL inspection, we observed the heavy workloads of these teams. We saw that these workloads led to some investigations lacking momentum. The force told us it was planning to introduce new specialist rape, child protection and adult protection teams, and to increase the number of officers and staff. This will help with individual workloads.

The force recognises that recruitment and retention into public protection is challenging. It has introduced a Try Before You Buy system, allowing officers an attachment period with a guarantee of return to their previous role if they don't like the role. These developments are promising, but this remains a critical area of change. We will continue to closely monitor the force's progress in this area, and we will assess the impact of these changes once the force has fully implemented them.

We found that officers and staff understand their responsibility to give safeguarding support to vulnerable people. Officers who attend incidents that involve vulnerable people carry out appropriate safeguarding actions and fill in relevant forms. In our victim service assessment, we found that in 38 of the 40 relevant incidents we reviewed, attending officers completed appropriate risk assessments. Officers told us they received regular training in identifying vulnerability, and that they were confident about completing risk assessments.

The force's systems automatically send completed risk assessment forms to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Members of the MASH review and quality assure the forms. This means other agencies promptly receive appropriate referrals, so they can help keep people safe and reduce risk of harm. When we inspected the MASH, we found that staff were knowledgeable and worked closely with colleagues in other agencies. Their workloads were manageable, and they made referrals in good time.

The force has introduced a [multi-agency tasking and co-ordination](#) process to safeguard adults and children at risk of harm from perpetrators of domestic abuse. The force keeps a matrix of domestic abuse perpetrators who it considers for inclusion in the process. Police and partner agencies then work with those offenders to reduce the risk they pose and to divert them from further offending.

The force is effective at considering, implementing and enforcing Stalking Prevention Orders

Officers send applications for Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) to the force's SPO application officer. The force uses a dedicated legal partner to support applications. The legal partner also gives training to a cohort of superintendents. This supports them with their decision-making.

The force also runs monthly stalking clinics, where multi-agency specialists consider four or five cases a month so they can give advice and direction in live police investigations. There are also 130 officers and staff throughout the force who give support and advice to investigators who deal with stalking cases. These officers have each received a day's training from a Sussex-based stalking advocacy service.

The force is effective in obtaining positive requirements for SPOs, such as wearing electronic monitoring tags. The SPO offender managers actively look for breaches, such as when offenders fail to update the force about a change of circumstance. At the time of our inspection, the force's three offender managers were monitoring a total of 92 offenders.

The force uses victims' feedback to improve its service to vulnerable people

The force uses recommendations from statutory reviews to improve its service to vulnerable victims. It keeps a tracker document to record recommendations from the reviews. Each police recommendation has an identified strategic owner (chief inspector or above). The document details monthly updates against each recommendation. These include training, changes to process and force-wide communications, all of which are aimed at further improving the service to vulnerable victims.

The force has a range of ways for victims to give feedback. Five telephone researchers carry out victim call-back surveys. The feedback is given to investigators and their supervisors. The force told us it requests feedback from advocate services that support victims. These include [Hersana](#), a commissioned service that supports Black female victims of domestic abuse. Following feedback about the barriers to completing [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#) applications, the force has removed Sussex Police branding from its media campaign and added a QR code. This has resulted in an increase in visits to the force's Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme webpage, which could lead to more applications and safeguarding disclosures.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

Sussex Police is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Areas for improvement

The force should help supervisors better manage suspects and wanted people

During our inspection, we found that Sussex Police had effective management and oversight of high-risk suspects, such as [high-risk domestic abuse](#) perpetrators. It discusses them at daily management meetings and team briefings, and it allocates police resources to make swift arrests.

However, at an operational team level, the force is inconsistent in the way it monitors other outstanding suspects and wanted people.

The force uses a Power BI dashboard to give senior leaders oversight of the number of outstanding and wanted suspects across the force's area.

However, supervisors told us that the Power BI dashboards don't allow them to filter information about the number of outstanding suspects and wanted people according to their teams. This inconsistency leads to varied, often time-consuming and ineffective management practices across the force.

The force should make sure supervisors have access to Power BI dashboards and understand how to use them to find out the number of outstanding and wanted suspects allocated to their teams. This will help supervisors prioritise those who pose the most risk to the public.

The force should make sure it uploads all indecent images of children to the Child Abuse Image Database

The [Child Abuse Image Database \(CAID\)](#), developed by the Home Office in collaboration with the police and industry partners, is crucial in combating online [child sexual exploitation](#) and abuse.

During our inspection, we found that not all images Sussex Police had identified during online child [sexual abuse](#) investigations had been uploaded to CAID. The force uses an external company to download devices, extract data and carry out grading. However, since this company isn't a law enforcement agency, it can't upload images to CAID. As a result, the force is missing opportunities to identify and [safeguard victims](#), and to identify offenders.

We found that the force [digital forensics](#) team lacked the resources to carry out this work. The force aims to expand its digital capabilities and to carry out all digital examinations that include [indecent images of children](#). This would then allow the images to be updated to CAID.

Promising practice

The force works with partner organisations to safeguard children involved in making youth-produced indecent images

Through Project SOLAH (Safer Online at Home), Sussex Police has a partnership with [Barnardo's](#) and [YMCA WiSE](#). This partnership [safeguards children](#) involved in youth-produced [indecent images](#) by collectively risk-assessing the images, considering the child's wider situation, and using a multi-agency approach to carrying out appropriate follow-up action.

Once it identifies a case, the force works with Barnardo's or YMCA WiSE to contact the family, and to offer safeguarding advice and online education sessions. These sessions, aimed at parents, carers and the child, can be one-off or multiple. The force and its partners also collaborate with schools and social services if needed.

This approach helps the force prioritise safeguarding and allows it to allocate appropriate police resources to high-risk cases. The project makes sure children are safeguarded without experiencing adverse effects or being criminalised.

Since November 2021, the force has referred 170 children to this project. Following the interventions, none of these children have been known to continue this behaviour.

Main findings

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

The force appropriately uses pre-charge bail and voluntary attendance to safeguard victims

The force has updated its procedures according to changes to the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#). This means it uses pre-charge [bail](#) in all cases in which it is necessary and proportionate. As a result, the force has reduced the number of suspects it [releases under investigation](#) without restrictions. This is positive. Bail conditions can put restrictions on what a suspect can and can't do, which can prevent further offending and protect vulnerable people.

The force has clear policies on [voluntary attendance \(VA\)](#), which officers and staff understand well. It uses Power BI dashboards to monitor how it uses VA. Using the same risk assessments as those it uses for arrested suspects, the force appropriately monitors the welfare of suspects it interviews under VA.

The force effectively manages registered sex offenders

Officers and staff in the force's [Violent and Sex Offender Register \(ViSOR\)](#) teams manage registered sex offenders in accordance with the College of Policing's authorised professional practice. The ViSOR teams are appropriately resourced. This means officers and staff can visit offenders in pairs. These visits are routinely unannounced. This is an effective approach to risk management and it means officers and staff work safely.

We found that risk management plans and [active risk management system](#) assessments were effective and carried out in line with authorised professional practice.

The force has strong governance and performance structures in place to support ViSOR teams to manage the risk posed by registered sex offenders. At all levels of leadership, there are meetings to discuss ViSOR teams' performance. In these meetings, senior leaders can focus on improving performance and making sure the force effectively manages the risk registered sex offenders pose.

During our inspection, we found that the number of outstanding risk management plans, active risk management system assessments and home visits was at a manageable level. We also found that there was enough oversight of these through performance meetings.

The force has a proactive approach to addressing sexual offending

Operation Denver focuses on preventing sexual offending by identifying and disrupting potential offenders who haven't been convicted. A Power BI dashboard helps the force identify people who have been suspected of sexual offending twice in a two-year period.

The ViSOR team applies for ancillary orders to help reduce the risk to vulnerable groups, but this increases the team's workload. The force needs to make sure ViSOR teams have enough resources to carry out this work effectively.

The force safeguards children online effectively

During our inspection, we found that the force's online child abuse team (OCAT) had an effective performance management framework. Monthly quality assurance meetings, chaired by a superintendent, help to improve performance and result in better outcomes for victims.

Demand in OCAT is high, and the force expects it to grow. The force needs to make sure the team has enough resources to effectively manage future demand. Despite this, investigators carry out thorough and timely investigations, adhering to national risk assessment timescales and using appropriate legal powers. As a result, we found that OCAT didn't have a significant backlog of work.

The force has clear and robust processes for managing suspects subject to pre-charge bail and those under investigation. It monitors these people through regular reviews, which is in line with the force's policy.

During our inspection, we assessed the way the force safeguards victims in these investigations. We found that in most cases, officers routinely check with partner agencies to identify at-risk children, and they make prompt referrals to children's services when necessary.

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Adequate

Sussex Police is adequate at building, supporting and protecting the workforce.

Areas for improvement

The force must make sure it supports the development of all first-line leaders, and that it effectively trains them

First-line leaders play a crucial role in Sussex Police. Their key responsibilities include managing the performance of [officers](#) and [staff](#), supervising workloads and monitoring their teams' well-being. Specific training is essential to make sure first-line leaders have the skills they need for their roles.

Due to vacancies in the learning and development team, there have been delays in training all first-line leaders. At the time of our inspection, the force told us only 44.5 percent of first-line leaders had completed the Introduction to Leadership programme. This programme is based on three days of face-to-face learning, with topics that include: ethical decision-making, organisational culture and evidence-based practice. The force told us it was prioritising newly promoted leaders, and that it planned to train 58 more first-line leaders by the end of 2025. However, this means that only 55.2 percent of first-line leaders will have completed the training by that date.

During our inspection, we found that some first-line leaders who hadn't done this training felt unequipped and unsupported.

The force has developed its We Are Sussex Leaders programme, which is run by [chief officers](#). The force told us that all its first and second-line leaders had attended part one of this programme, which focuses on leadership expectations, performance and well-being. Feedback so far has been positive. Part two, which is due to take place in the second half of 2025, checks on progress and helps leaders to apply what they have learned. The force intends for the programme to be a long-term approach to supporting professional development.

The force must consider its professional development review process to make sure it is effective, and that officers and staff value it

Sussex Police has an annual professional development review process for [officers](#), which is called Future Focus. The force requires police officers, but not [police staff](#), to attend Future Focus meetings.

These meetings are designed to support professional development and career planning. The force uses a central spreadsheet to monitor the compliance rates for holding Future Focus meetings.

We found that attitudes towards the Future Focus process were mixed. People who were actively working towards development found it beneficial, but people who were content in their existing roles found it less useful. To improve participation and understanding, the force should clearly communicate the purpose and benefits of the Future Focus process to both officers and staff. This would help to reinforce its value.

Additionally, the force expects that every three months, all officers and staff participate in one-to-one meetings with their line managers. These focus meetings are designed for line managers to hold meaningful conversations that focus on well-being, workload, recognising good work, ongoing development and discussing any concerns.

The force told us that for the year ending 31 March 2025, 78 percent of the workforce had a recorded focus meeting. The force told us that for the previous year, 36 percent of the workforce had a recorded focus meeting. This is a positive trend.

But the force doesn't collect three-monthly data to show how many people have had a focus meeting recorded. It also can't show how many people have had more than one focus meeting recorded in a 12-month period. This means the force doesn't know if all its officers and staff regularly receive one-to-one support from their line managers.

Without regular, meaningful one-to-one meetings, workforce well-being may suffer, problems may stay unresolved and development opportunities may be missed.

Main findings

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

The force provides a good range of preventative and supportive well-being measures for its workforce

Officers and staff know about, and can access, a good range of preventative and supportive measures to improve physical and mental well-being. The officers and staff we spoke to knew how to access support, both through the well-being pages on the force's intranet and via their line manager. However, during our inspection, we found that due to change and increasing demand, officers and staff in some teams felt burnt out, including those in the SIU.

The force gives officers and staff opportunities to raise well-being concerns directly with senior leaders. Meetings with the workforce are well attended, and the force's well-being surveys and organisational health checks help it to make noticeable improvements.

The force supports officers and staff in high-risk roles, and those who experience potentially traumatic incidents

The force gives tailored well-being support to officers and staff in specialist departments, based on their roles. The senior leadership team allocates a budget for extra support, including sessions from external providers, which focus on mental well-being.

During our inspection, we found that the force requires teams exposed to significant harm, such as OCAT, to complete psychological screenings. The force told us these had a 100 percent compliance rate. The force told us that other teams it requires to complete screenings had a 70 percent compliance rate. The force acknowledges that it needs to improve in this area.

The roads policing team, which faces trauma, has annual well-being days, which take place off-site. The team also has a well-being meeting every three months, in which officers and staff can share their experiences and discuss support, concerns and areas for development. This meeting is attended by the department superintendent, [occupational health](#), well-being lead, HR partners, and frontline officers and staff.

The meeting also emphasises the importance of annual psychological screening, and specialists explain its purpose and use.

Senior leaders told us that although completion rates for screenings are stable, the quality of input from officers has improved, leading to more accurate risk assessments and timely support.

The force understands why some members of the workforce want to leave, and it puts in place measures to retain them

The force uses lots of different ways to help it understand how its workforce is feeling. It does this during the Future Focus professional development review process, as well as through workforce surveys.

The force has an early intervention approach to retention. Officers and staff who are thinking of leaving can take part in processes such as a stay conversation. In this process, the force aims to explore the reasons why the person wishes to leave, and tries to find ways to support them to stay. This could include a change in department or role, or more flexible working arrangements.

The force told us that in the year ending 31 December 2023, 65 percent of people who had a stay conversation remained with the force. In the following year, this rate improved. The force told us that in the year ending 31 December 2024, 77.5 percent of people who had a stay conversation remained with the force.

The force prioritises retaining officers and staff, and it holds wider discussions about it. For example, senior leaders regularly discuss retention-related themes at the force's accountability board.

The force has taken several steps to help new recruits feel supported and stay in their jobs. It collects feedback from student officers so it can make improvements, and it updates recruitment materials to set clear expectations. A dedicated inspector and a support team are available to help student officers with any problems.

Well-being is a priority for the force and, at an early stage in training, it provides information on mental health first aiders, safeguarding support and health services. The force screens new joiners for learning needs such as dyslexia. Support is also available for people from under-represented groups and those who speak English as an additional language.

The force continues to work hard to develop officers and staff from under-represented groups and to promote inclusion

The force is working to understand and remove barriers faced by under-represented groups. It reviews promotion, recruitment and retention data, and it supports officers and staff through identity-based mentoring and staff networks, each backed by senior leaders. The force partners with external organisations such as KPMG to offer mentoring and development opportunities for officers and staff from ethnic minority backgrounds.

In February 2025, the force published its anti-racism statement and appointed race equality advocates to lead change. Tools such as the Let's Talk About Race toolkit and listening circles help officers and staff discuss issues and improve inclusivity.

The force escalates and addresses concerns at its equality, diversity and inclusion board, which is chaired by the assistant chief officer for trust and legitimacy.

These efforts are helping the force become fairer and more supportive for everyone.

Leadership and force management

Adequate

Sussex Police's leadership and management is adequate.

Area for improvement

The force should make sure it effectively scrutinises performance across the force and has processes and technology in place to meet demand

Since [our 2021/22 PEEL inspection](#), Sussex Police has improved the way it answers and responds to emergency calls. It needs to make sure it achieves this level of progress in other areas of the force, and that it makes best use of its data and information to monitor performance.

In this inspection, we found that the force needed to make improvements to the way it governs and monitors several areas, such as:

- use of force;
- problem-solving activity;
- the activity of [domestic abuse](#) caseworkers; and
- its approach to helping supervisors manage suspects and wanted people.

The force needs to make sure it has effective management in all areas, and that senior leaders hold to account those responsible for achieving good performance.

At the time of our inspection, the force was preparing for significant changes to its operating model for public protection and its [safeguarding](#) investigation unit. The force should assure itself that these changes will address the performance concerns it has in these areas. It should also monitor the changes to make sure they achieve the expected benefits.

At the same time as making changes to the structure of its organisation, the force should make the most of available technology to improve its performance, rather than just aiming to recruit more people. In some areas, new technology may be a better investment for the force than people. Sussex Police is one of a few forces that hasn't adopted auto-redaction technology (which anonymises sensitive information in case files) to help its investigators. Using technology can make existing [officers](#) and [staff](#) more effective and efficient.

Innovative practice

The force has introduced a leadership programme aimed at first and second-line leaders

Sussex Police has introduced a structured leadership development programme called We Are Sussex Leaders.

The programme is designed to make sure all leaders understand the force's expectations in relation to performance, professional standards and risk management. [Chief officers](#) run the programme, and they personally communicate these expectations to participants. This reinforces the importance of leadership accountability.

The programme is aimed at first and second-line leaders, but senior leaders also participate and gain value from the process. They lead cross-departmental cohorts, and they give guidance and mentorship. Through this structured support network, first and second-line leaders can access advice from peers and senior leaders beyond their usual line management arrangements.

We observed part one of the programme, which all first and second-line leaders had attended. We were impressed by the concept and content.

The force told us it had received positive feedback from attendees and senior leaders. Officers and staff consider it to be a valuable way of building leadership skills and promoting a positive culture and shared values.

The force intends to continue the programme in the long term. At the time of our inspection, it was planning to run part two in the second half of 2025.

Main findings

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

The force has an effective planning process and force management statement, which are supported by plans that will help the force achieve its goals

Sussex Police has an effective strategic planning and force management statement process. This means it has plans in place that link its strategic priorities with tactical activity. The force's planning processes identify poor performance and have allowed the force to challenge other organisations, as well as itself. One particular challenge has led to a substantial improvement in conviction rates for rape, through work with the Crown Prosecution Service.

The force was an early adopter of Power BI, and it continues to develop in this area. The force presents data it draws from various systems at a level appropriate for each board. It can also carry out in-depth analysis in relevant thematic areas.

Following the recommendations we made in our 2021/22 PEEL report, the force has introduced an analytical tool that shows in live time how the FCCCD is handling demand. This includes a detailed surge-planning process and automated alerts to chief officers. As a result, chief officers scrutinise the most serious performance issues, and this has led to a reduction in the force's need for crisis management processes.

The force should make sure its operating model allows the safeguarding investigation unit to achieve its aims

Since our 2021/22 PEEL inspection, the force has made significant changes to the way it responds to incidents and investigates crime.

At the time of this inspection, the force was reviewing the way it investigates some of the most serious crimes. It was also preparing to put in place the first part of its new public protection model. We found that the investigators in the SIU were managing more than 1,300 active investigations that were more than 12 months old. The force knew about the high workloads in the SIU, so it introduced Operation Goal to reduce the backlog.

The force told us that the resourcing of its new public protection model was based on comprehensive analysis and a detailed review of crimes recorded by the SIU. The force should continue to monitor performance in this area, making sure the changes achieve the expected benefits.

The force has a sustainable financial strategy

In the financial year ending 31 March 2024, Sussex Police received a total of £362.7 million in funding, which is £209,000 per 1,000 population. In the same year, the force received 42.9 percent (£155.6 million) of its total funding through council tax [precept](#). This is in line with expectations when compared with other forces in England and Wales.

In 2024/25, the force needed to make savings of £8.2 million, plus a further £24.4 million over the following three years.

According to the force's most recent medium-term financial strategy, the force was planning to make £6.0 million of savings to achieve a balanced budget for the financial year ending 31 March 2025. The force forecasts that it will need to make £9.8 million in total savings in the following three financial years, while still having budget deficits of £5.2 million and £7.9 million in 2026/27 and 2027/28 respectively.

The force forecasts a good level of general reserves – £16.8 million – in the financial year 2025/26. At that amount, its general reserves are 4 percent of its net revenue budget, which is in line with other forces. The force is planning to keep the general reserve level consistently at 4 percent throughout the current medium-term financial strategy (until 2028/29).

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