

PEEL 2023–25

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy

An inspection of West Mercia Police

Contents

Overall summary	1
Our judgments	1
PEEL 2023–2025	1
Terminology in this report	2
HM Inspector’s summary	2
Leadership	4
Reducing crime assessment	5
Providing a service to victims of crime	6
Victim service assessment	6
Crime data integrity	8
Areas for improvement	8
Main findings	9
Police powers and treating the public fairly and respectfully	10
Area for improvement	10
Main findings	12
Preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behaviour, and reducing vulnerability	15
Area for improvement	15
Main findings	16
Responding to the public	20
Areas for improvement	20
Main findings	22
Investigating crime	24
Areas for improvement	24
Main findings	27

Protecting vulnerable people	29
Areas for improvement	29
Main findings	31
Managing offenders and suspects	34
Areas for improvement	34
Main findings	35
Building, supporting and protecting the workforce	37
Areas for improvement	37
Main findings	39
Leadership and force management	42
Areas for improvement	42
Main findings	43

Overall summary

Our judgments

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

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

We also inspected how effective a service West Mercia 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 satisfied with some aspects of the performance of West Mercia Police in keeping people safe, reducing crime and providing victims with an effective service, but there are areas in which the force needs to improve.

[In our last inspection](#), we highlighted investigative standards as a cause of concern. The force has made significant efforts to improve these. We found improvements in how it supervises investigations and in the quality of investigation plans. But it was disappointing to find that the force didn't always understand what support victims needed and were entitled to receive. Contact with victims is often based on [officer](#) availability rather than victim needs. The force has more to do here to improve the service it provides to victims.

I am pleased to see the force has continued to prioritise the prevention of crime. During this inspection we found that [neighbourhood teams](#) were well staffed, effectively communicating with their communities and striving to solve local problems. They take a problem-solving approach to addressing local issues and make sure the most vulnerable are supported. I am also pleased to see the force has improved how it manages offenders. We found the investigation of child sex abuse images was of a good standard. But the force needs to do more work to make sure it offers a consistent service in managing the risks posed by registered sex offenders.

The force has made improvements to how it treats the people who contact it. It now routinely identifies [vulnerable people](#) and repeat callers. However, the force doesn't always make use of information about vulnerable people. While these improvements help the force [safeguard](#) the vulnerable, it should do more to make sure that first contact with the force is effective.

The force still isn't answering emergency calls as quickly as it should. But it is improving. The number of non-emergency calls members of the public abandon because they aren't answered is still high. This is something we found in our previous inspection in 2021/22. We also found that officers didn't attend calls for service within the required attendance time. The force must improve in these areas to maintain victims' confidence and maximise opportunities to solve crime.

The force has created good welfare and well-being support for its workforce. Despite this, officers and [staff](#) aren't always receiving the support they require. The lack of a suitable case management system limits the force's ability to understand when support is requested and where improvements are needed.

West Mercia Police lacks consistency in the service it provides for vulnerable people. We were disappointed to find significant backlogs in [risk assessments](#). These backlogs result in delays in the force referring vulnerable people to safeguarding partners. We also found delays in the force making referrals to the [multi-agency risk assessment conference \(MARAC\)](#), and many high-risk cases not being referred at all.

West Mercia Police has made some improvements, but still has work to do. Areas that still need attention are its IT infrastructure, improvements in data collection and analysis, and implementing a new operating model. All of this is set against a very challenging financial position, which will undoubtedly have an effect on the decisions it makes.

I look forward to seeing how the force continues to work to improve its performance, which I will be closely monitoring.



Sir Andy Cooke

HM Chief 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.

West Mercia Police has clear strategic plans and priorities. Despite many changes to the [chief officer](#) team, senior officers have provided clarity and direction to the workforce. But we also found that leaders had insufficient quality data to support strategic decision-making. Manual extraction of data, rather than automated processes, and a subsequent lack of confidence in the accuracy and use of data have led to a gap in effective analytical and performance information. The force's digital strategy aims to address this.

The force operating model discourages collaborative working between local policing areas. That can mean the force isn't providing a consistent service. The force is developing a new operating model to improve the quality and consistency of the service provided in each policing area.

Chief officers communicate effectively with the workforce. This has increased their understanding of the challenges the workforce faces. But surveys of officers and staff show persistent low morale, and [personnel](#) lack the confidence to speak up about their issues and experiences. This limits the force's ability to improve the well-being of its officers and staff.

In some departments there aren't enough supervisors for officers and staff. This affects the well-being of the workforce. The force provides leadership training for first-line leaders, but not all first-line leaders have been able to access training. Effective training can increase leadership capability and capacity. The force should make sure it addresses training gaps.

Leaders are also contending with poor IT systems. This limits their ability to manage officers and staff effectively. The force has a challenging financial position and needs to make savings. This will undoubtedly affect what it can achieve.

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

Reducing crime assessment

The reducing crime assessment sets out what West Mercia 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.

The force works with local communities to understand their needs.

The [Neighbourhood Matters](#) website helps communities to connect with their neighbourhood teams and share information. And neighbourhood teams hold pop-up events to connect with [hard-to-reach communities](#).

The force has five problem-solving hubs that focus on crime prevention activity. This includes early intervention initiatives to divert young people from offending. The force has reduced serious violence by introducing hot-spot patrols. And there is a central prevention hub where specialist staff strive to support this work. But the current force operating model is limiting the effectiveness of this prevention activity.

The force holds panels that independently scrutinise its officers' use of police powers. Panel members include a wide range of people from local communities. Their oversight of [stop and search](#) and use of force allows the police to understand if the use of these powers is fair and effective.

The force should improve how quickly it answers 999 calls and reduce how often callers abandon non-emergency [101](#) calls. The force also needs to respond to incidents within published timescales and improve its recording of [antisocial behaviour](#) crimes.

The force doesn't always identify and support vulnerable people. Officers often fail to record the [voice of the child](#) at incidents witnessed by [children](#) or involving their families. This limits the force's ability to understand and intervene to support vulnerable victims.

More detail on what West Mercia 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 West Mercia 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 the crime had been investigated, no suspect had been identified and the investigation was closed.

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

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

The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls. It also needs to reduce the number of non-emergency calls where the caller hangs up before a call handler answers.

We found that call handlers used a structured process that assessed threat, harm, risk and vulnerability, and that call handlers identified repeat victims. This means that call handlers are fully aware of victims' circumstances when considering what response the force should give. Call handlers are polite and give victims advice on crime prevention. But we found that they didn't always give advice on how to preserve evidence.

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

On most occasions, the force responds to calls for service appropriately. But it doesn't always respond to incidents within the timescales it sets for police attendance. It does, however, inform victims about delays. This means victims' expectations are more likely to be met.

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

The force has effective crime-recording processes. It makes sure that most crimes are recorded correctly but it needs to make sure all crimes are recorded promptly.

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

The force mostly carries out effective investigations

The force generally 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 does keep victims regularly updated about the progress of those investigations. Victims are more likely to have confidence in a police investigation when they receive regular updates. A thorough investigation increases the likelihood of perpetrators being identified and arrested, providing a positive result for the victim.

In most cases we examined, the force took victim personal statements, which give victims the opportunity to describe how a crime has affected their lives.

When victims withdraw support for an investigation, the force doesn't always consider 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 doesn't always record whether it considers using orders designed to protect victims, such as a [Domestic Violence Protection Notice](#) or [Domestic Violence Protection Order](#).

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

The force mostly assigns the right outcome type to an investigation, and considers victims' wishes

The force generally closes crimes with the appropriate outcome type. It records clear rationales for the outcomes it uses. But we found that this process wasn't always effectively supervised.

The force almost always informs victims which outcome code has been assigned to their investigation. It takes victims' views into account when deciding which outcome type to assign to a closed investigation. But the force doesn't always make an auditable record of victims' wishes where relevant.

Crime data integrity

Good

West Mercia Police is good at recording crime.

The Home Office Counting Rules, which provide the standard for crime recording in England and Wales, have changed since the last time we inspected the 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 to those from previous audits.

We estimate that West Mercia Police is recording 94.3 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 2.3 percent) of all reported crime (excluding fraud).

We estimate that the force is recording 93.4 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.4 percent) of sexual offences.

We estimate that the force is recording 92.4 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 4.0 percent) of violent offences.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to improve how it records equality data

The force's data for [victims](#) of crime shows that while age and gender of victims are well recorded, ethnicity is less well recorded, and other [protected characteristics](#) aren't well recorded. The force should be collecting this information to understand the extent to which crime affects each protected group and how this differs when compared to those without protected characteristics. This will help the force to consider whether it needs to respond differently to these victims.

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

The force records less than two thirds of crime within 24 hours. Recording crime without delay helps make sure that victims receive the support they require, as well as establishing an effective investigation.

The force needs to improve how it records crime when antisocial behaviour personal is reported

The force is failing to record most crimes when victims report [antisocial behaviour](#) deliberately targeted at individuals or a particular group ([antisocial behaviour personal](#)). We examined 50 incidents. Of these, the force should have recorded 16 crimes, but had recorded only 5. Victims of antisocial behaviour are often subjected to abuse and torment for substantial periods of time, and crime is often committed by their neighbours. If the force fails to record crimes and to provide an effective service to tackle antisocial behaviour, it can mean victims live in fear in their homes while being subjected to long-term abuse.

Main findings

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

The force records most rape offences correctly

The force records most reports of rape correctly. We found that it had recorded and classified 37 rape crimes correctly, although it had incorrectly classified 1 rape crime as a reported incident of rape (N100 classification). Rape is one of the most serious crimes a victim can experience. Therefore, it is important that crimes are recorded accurately to make sure victims receive the service and support they expect and deserve.

The force doesn't always record crimes against vulnerable victims

The force doesn't always record crimes against vulnerable victims. We examined 70 reports. Of those incidents, the force should have recorded 61 crimes. It had recorded 55 crimes. Some of the crimes missed were crimes of a serious nature, such as [controlling and coercive behaviour](#), and [stalking](#). Failing to record these crimes can result in offenders not being identified or brought to justice.

Police powers and treating the public fairly and respectfully

Adequate

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

Area for improvement

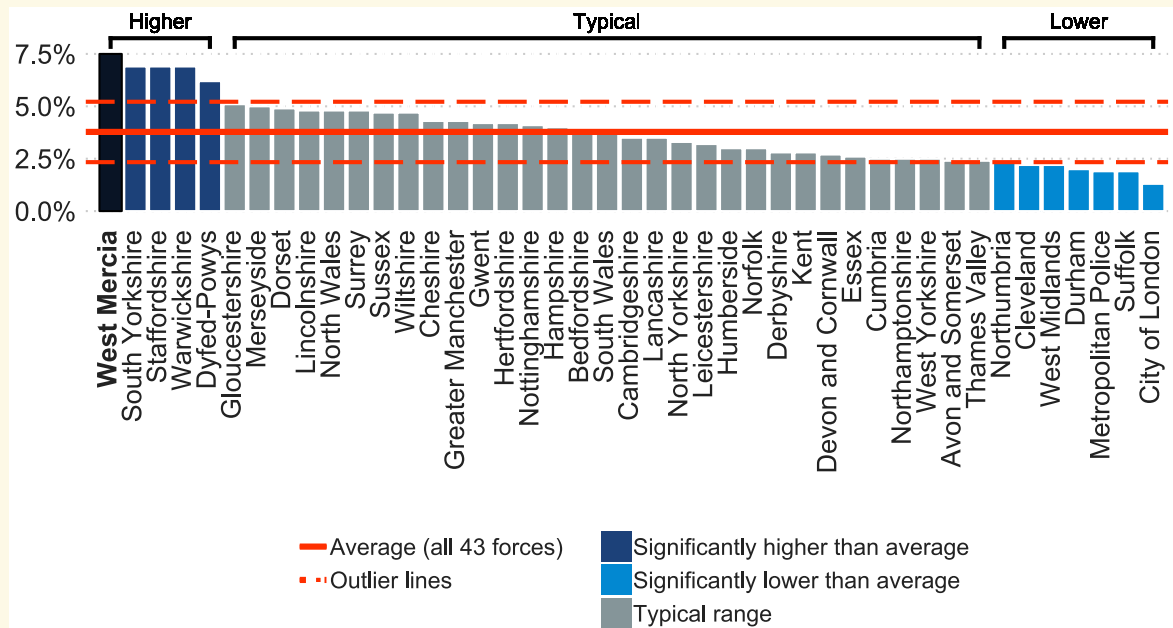
The force should make sure it has detailed data so it can fully understand how well it uses stop and search and use of force, and should publish this information on its website

The force has improved data recording processes of [stop and search](#) and use of force incidents by preventing [officers](#) and [staff](#) from submitting incomplete forms. But the force now needs to analyse this data to better understand how these powers are being used. It should also make sure that it has access to more detailed data, such as when force is used during stop and search incidents.

The force will then better understand how fairly it uses police powers. For example, in the year ending 31 March 2024, members of ethnic minority groups made up 11.8 percent of use of force incidents recorded by the force, but accounted for only 5.8 percent of the local population. The number of use of force incidents involving members of ethnic minority groups is also higher than the number of arrests of members of this group. This suggests that the force may be using force more often on people from these minority groups. A more detailed and accurate range of data of the use of police powers might help the force better understand this issue.

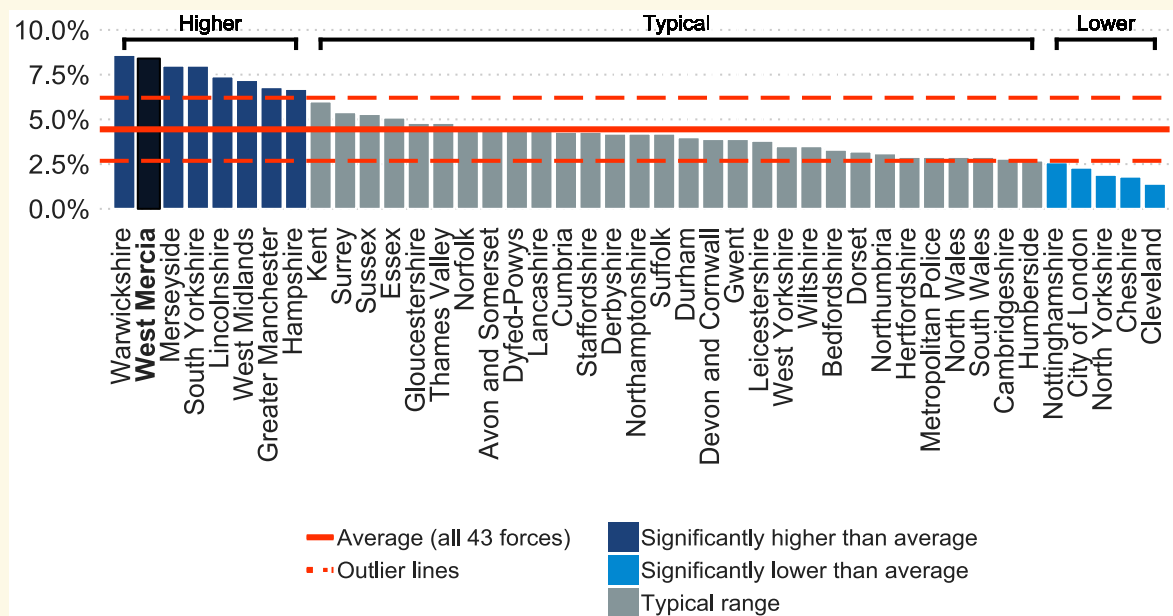
In the year ending 31 March 2024, force data showed 8.4 percent of use of force incidents resulted in subject injury, and 7.5 percent resulted in officer injury. Both rates are higher than expected for forces in England and Wales. During our inspection we raised this with the force. It wasn't able to explain these levels of injury.

Figure 1: Proportion of use of force incidents resulting in officer injury across forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2024



Source: [Police use of force statistics, England and Wales: April 2023 to March 2024](#) from the Home Office

Figure 2: Proportion of use of force incidents resulting in subject injury across forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2024



Source: [Police use of force statistics, England and Wales: April 2023 to March 2024](#) from the Home Office

When it has collected and analysed the more detailed data, the force will be able to publish how its officers are using these powers on the force website. This will help the community to understand if the force is using police powers fairly.

Main findings

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

The force doesn't always record reasonable grounds in stop and search encounters

During our inspection, we reviewed a sample of 103 stop and search records from 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024. On the basis of this sample, we estimate that 80.6 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 7.5 percentage points) of all stop and searches by the force during this period had reasonable grounds recorded. This is a statistically significant deterioration compared with the findings from our previous review of records from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020, when we found 94.4 percent (with a confidence interval of +/- 3.9 percentage points) of stop and searches had reasonable grounds recorded. Of the records we reviewed for stop and searches on people who self-identified as from an ethnic minority background, 18 of 24 had reasonable grounds recorded.

During our inspection we viewed [body-worn video](#) recordings of officers carrying out stop and searches. We saw that West Mercia Police officers regularly treated people with dignity and respect. Also, as well as regular public and personal safety training, the force provides [College of Policing](#) training that includes sessions on procedural justice, the [Police Race Action Plan](#) and unconscious bias. Every week 30 to 40 officers are trained, and 496 officers had been trained at the time of our inspection. This will support improvements in how officers use stop and search.

The force is developing its understanding of disproportionality that may occur when using stop and search

Senior leaders are working to improve scrutiny of policing activity relating to disproportionality. The force has access to a more detailed range of data. Officers are now required to include ethnicity data on all stop and search forms submitted. And senior leaders are starting to improve the force's understanding of disproportionality.

A senior police officer reviews every stop and search of members of the Black community. The review considers the circumstances leading to the search, how officers treated the person and the outcome. But the force doesn't yet use this data to identify patterns and themes. Doing this would increase the force's understanding of how effectively it is using its powers to reduce crime. This in turn would increase the possibility of positive change for Black communities.

The force is improving its supervision of how officers use their powers

The force has multiple layers to its supervision of stop and search and use of force. As well as requiring chief inspectors to [dip sample](#) records of police use of powers, each local policing area has an inspector that reviews ten stop and search incidents per month. And sergeants are required to review all stop and search and use of force incidents recorded by their teams. These reviews are used to provide feedback to officers and improve standards.

The force's use of powers board has identified that more consistency is required in how each policing area supervises the use of these powers. During our inspection we also found that the standard of the reviews was inconsistent. And we found a backlog of reviews waiting to be carried out. Some stop and search forms hadn't been reviewed for six months, which sergeants told us was due to lack of time. The force has found it difficult to increase the capacity of sergeants to carry out this oversight. We also found this was the case for other supervisory responsibilities that were part of their roles.

Despite this, supervisors now have better data to support the oversight of officers' use of force. Data to the year ending 31 March 2024 shows the force recorded 6,740 incidents of use of force. As an arrest would usually count as a use of force, we would expect the number of times use of force is recorded to be at least as high as the number of arrests, if not higher. But over the same time frame, West Mercia Police recorded 15,506 arrests. This suggests the force was failing to record the use of force consistently. But more recent data that the force provided shows that this has improved and now the number of recorded use of force incidents equals to nearly 90 percent of the number of custody records. This is because of the introduction of the new app officers use to record use of force.

The force has effective external scrutiny of its use of stop and search and use of force

The force has established independent scrutiny panels in each of the five local policing areas in West Mercia. We found the panels we observed had a diverse membership. Panels meet quarterly and review at least five incidents of stop and search and use of force, selected by the force. Panel members review body-worn video and are given an overview of each incident by the chair. We saw panel members asking questions, giving opinions and challenging the officers' contact with the public. The force shares the learning from this feedback with officers. It then updates the panel on the action taken as a result of their feedback.

Officers from one neighbourhood team regularly visit a local community centre. This centre attracts young people who might otherwise only meet the police in times of crisis. The centre leader told us the visits had improved the relationship between the attendees and officers. The force holds its local scrutiny panel at the centre, which also hosts a boxing club. It schedules the panel to take place before a boxing training session. This results in good attendance from young people at the panel. This gives a seldom-heard group of people, who are most likely to be subject to these powers, the opportunity to express their views on local policing activity.

In the summer of 2024, the force held pop-up engagement events to share body-worn video footage of stop and search. These took place in predominantly Black and ethnic minority communities. Community members who took part were asked to complete post-event surveys to help the force understand how these communities felt about the use of stop and search.

The force receives important feedback from the panels. There is evidence of a clear feedback loop to officers and then back to the panel. But the force could use this feedback more effectively by collating themes and then using the information to identify and make improvements across its policing areas.

Preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behaviour, and reducing vulnerability

Adequate

West Mercia Police is adequate at prevention and deterrence.

Area for improvement

The force should better co-ordinate and carry out prevention activity across all its policing areas and departments

The force has developed the capacity and capability to support the successful prevention and deterrence of crime. There are enough [officers](#) and [staff](#) across the force well trained in prevention and problem-solving. It has problem-solving hubs in its policing areas, supported by a centrally based prevention hub.

And local [neighbourhood policing teams](#) generally have enough officers and staff, and are focused on prevention activity.

However, we found that officers and staff weren't always clear about how they could contribute to the prevention of crime. Much of this confusion has been caused by the frequent changes of direction from senior officers leading this activity. The force implemented several new initiatives poorly, which led to disparate and inefficient working practices. For example, many officers have been trained to spot offenders likely to assault women in the nighttime economy. This is positive. But the force's processes and structures make it difficult to deploy these officers to where they are needed.

[Chief officers](#) recognise that the force's preventative activity lacks strategic co-ordination. They told us this will be addressed in 2025 by planned changes to their operating model.

Main findings

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

The force communicates with the public and reaches out to seldom-heard communities

West Mercia Police has developed several ways to communicate with its communities. Officers and staff use pop-up engagement events, a public engagement van, social media posts and a two-way public messaging system. The force also consults with local and specialist independent advisory groups. These include a group advising on violence against women and girls, and another advising on disability issues. As a result of working with these groups, the force has changed its violence against women and girls strategy and created a Stay Safe booklet for those with learning difficulties.

West Mercia has seen a rise in death and serious injury road collisions, often caused by drug and drink driving. The force collaborated with a YouTube influencer who has around 500,000 followers. Many of these followers are interested in car cruising. This collaboration resulted in the production of a YouTube video about the dangers of drug and drink driving. The video gets this message across to both victims and those who commit offences. The force told us that by September 2024, 5 weeks after its release, the video had received about 271,000 hits. And 75 percent of viewers watched it all the way through.

Senior leaders told us that officers and staff would be supported further in their engagement work by a new community charter and better guidance on how they are to use the existing force engagement tracker. This was introduced in March 2025, after our inspection had ended.

Local policing teams and specialist officers and staff are good at tackling antisocial behaviour

In our [victim service assessment](#), we found that the force was failing to routinely record crimes when victims reported antisocial behaviour. But we also found many cases where officers and staff dealt well with such reports, whether the reports were recorded as crimes or not.

All antisocial behaviour incidents are graded according to risk. They are monitored by antisocial behaviour co-ordinators. One high-risk antisocial behaviour case management plan we reviewed involved a repeat offender. The offender had mental health vulnerabilities and created significant noise at home. This caused distress to others living nearby, with two elderly residents particularly affected by this behaviour. We were pleased to see that the force plan to deal with this issue was well supervised. The plan included an emergency antisocial behaviour risk assessment conference. The force held this conference within the required 72 hours. Meeting notes detailed a clear plan of how agencies were going to deal with the offender and provide support to the victims. This case was ongoing at the time of our inspection.

Antisocial behaviour co-ordinators told us they had clear direction for their work across the force. This is based on national best practice. Their responsibilities include issuing all types of antisocial behaviour legislation, making sure there is a consistent approach to how this legislation is applied across the force. In one case, the force told us it recorded 123 incidents of antisocial behaviour committed by a young teenager. The teenager's offending stopped when police obtained a civil injunction. We also saw good examples of the force using [Criminal Behaviour Orders](#) to reduce the antisocial behaviour caused by shoplifters.

The number of recorded antisocial behaviour incidents has decreased consistently over the past four years. In the year ending 31 March 2024, West Mercia Police recorded 16,929 antisocial behaviour incidents. This is 21 percent lower than for the year ending 31 March 2023 when 21,500 antisocial behaviour incidents were recorded.

The force identifies and deals with emerging crime trends to minimise harm against vulnerable people, groups and locations

Each of the five local policing areas holds a monthly problem-solving and tasking meeting. These have agendas that include the most frequent callers, locations, repeat suspects and victims. We observed at least one of these in each area. We saw participants provide overviews of what was being done to solve problems. Appropriate actions were set and there was effective partnership working between local policing teams and partner agencies such as the local authority, the fire and rescue service, and health organisations.

Each policing area also has a rural and business crime unit. We found officers and staff had developed a productive relationship with the rural community. An experienced member of staff analyses crimes and intelligence, and the unit is able to acquire cameras, SmartWater (a forensic marking system applied to valuable items) and tracking devices.

The force told us that in 2023, 10 GPS domes fitted to agricultural equipment were stolen, at a value of £100,000. This police team deployed a dome with a hidden tracker and subsequently arrested two people. The force and the rural community publicised this widely. The force told us that in 2024 no domes were stolen in this policing area.

The force has worked with the University of Wolverhampton to find an evidence-based approach to deterring crime and antisocial behaviour at night. This initiative's research showed that ID scanners were effective at reducing crime and disorder at nighttime economy hot spots. One problem-solving hub used Safer Streets funding to obtain an ID scanner for use at selected licensed premises. It scanned the IDs of patrons as they entered the premises and detected whether the IDs were genuine. If patrons agreed, the scanner also took a fingerprint. This process identified a suspect involved

in a serious assault. The team shared this practice with the other four problem-solving hubs, and the force has recognised this work in its internal awards process.

The force told us that during the first 3 months of carrying out hot-spot patrols (June to August 2024) there was an 18 percent reduction in serious violence across the relevant areas. At the time of our inspection, senior leaders were planning how to continue the patrols when funding was due to end in April 2025.

The force works with partner agencies to prevent children from becoming victims and to divert them from offending

One neighbourhood officer told us about a location that had an antisocial behaviour problem involving children on bikes. The force decided that diversionary tactics were more appropriate than prosecution. Within five weeks the local police team put in place a dispersal notice, carried out directed patrols and staffed pop-up police pods. It also involved the local authority youth team to work with the children. After two weeks there were no further incidents.

The force has ten prevention/intervention officers who work with children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences. They support the children's families and carers to safeguard the children. But they carry out different tasks depending on the policing area they are based in. This means vulnerable people are being given inconsistent levels of service. It also reduces the force's ability to understand what works.

The force has five child exploitation teams working to disrupt the criminal and [sexual exploitation of children](#). They also have different working practices to fit with their respective local authorities. We visited two of these units. In one unit, we saw that the team identified vulnerable children by working with social workers. The unit follows the [Get Safe model](#) and considers referrals at a weekly inter-agency triage meeting. In the other unit, the team identifies vulnerable children by speaking to other force departments and researching internal databases.

Both teams showed us examples of how they had proactively safeguarded children at risk of significant harm. Sometimes this involved building evidence-led prosecutions against the offenders. The teams also use civil enforcement orders. In one case the team planned to apply for a [Sexual Risk Order](#) if the suspect was convicted in court. It planned to apply for a [Sexual Harm Prevention Order](#) if the case was unsuccessful.

The force doesn't effectively manage its problem-solving processes

At the time of our inspection the force had 204 open problem-solving plans (PSP). PSPs are used to tackle a specific problem that affects a community, where the police can do something to address it. However, we found many of the force's PSPs weren't created to tackle a specific, identified problem and so weren't appropriately recorded. They included activity such as hot-spots policing, which is a strategy aimed at reducing crime more generally.

The force also records PSP 'lites' on the PSP system. PSP lites record the work of the intervention and prevention officers. Some staff and officers we spoke to told us that they were confused by the processes, and that IT systems made recording activity difficult. We found PSPs we reviewed were of varying quality. Senior leaders are aware of this, and the force has an ongoing review of problem-solving. This review should result in the force making the most of the many experienced and skilled staff who work in prevention activities.

Responding to the public

Requires improvement

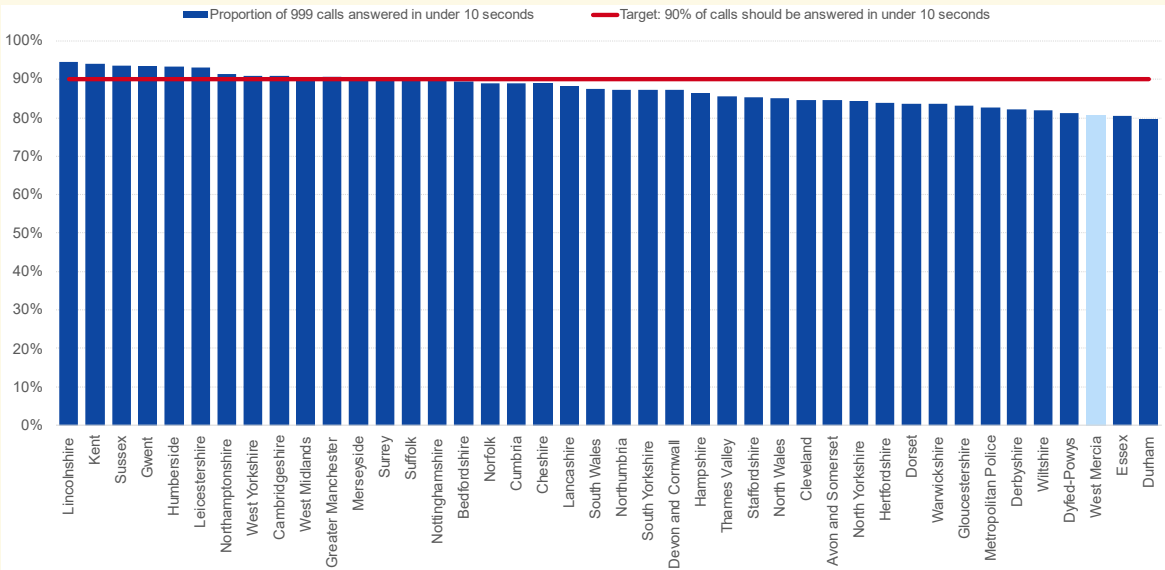
West Mercia Police requires improvement at responding to the public.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to make sure it answers emergency calls quickly enough

The force needs to improve the time it takes to answer emergency calls. In the year ending 31 October 2024, West Mercia Police received 131 calls per 1,000 population. This was lower than expected compared to the average for forces in England and Wales. In the year ending 31 October 2024, the force answered 78.9 percent of its 999 calls within 10 seconds. This is lower than the standard expected for forces in England and Wales of answering 90 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds.

Figure 3: Proportion of 999 calls answered within 10 seconds by forces in England and Wales in the year ending 31 October 2024



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

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

The force has made some improvements and in December 2024 it answered 87.2 percent of 999 calls within 10 seconds. But the force told us that IT issues and lack of staffing continued to affect its ability to improve. It is important the force sustains these recent improvements so it can provide an effective service to the public.

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

The force told us that in the year ending 30 November 2024 the 12-month rolling average for non-emergency call abandonment was 29.3 percent. As set out in the 2020 national contact management strategy principles and guidance, forces with a switchboard should aim to have an abandonment rate below 5 percent.

The force aims to answer 70 percent of non-emergency calls within 2 minutes but has failed to achieve that target. The force told us that 20 percent of calls were abandoned in the first 60 seconds, but it can't identify why. The force commissioned a survey of 354 callers who had abandoned their non-emergency calls. About 25 percent of responses said they were cut off. The force told us it couldn't ascertain if this was due to limitations with technology or due to other factors. The force will struggle to make improvements if it doesn't understand the cause of the problem.

The force should improve the recording of vulnerability on incident logs

During [our last inspection](#), we reported that vulnerability wasn't being consistently identified or recorded by the force. We have seen improvements during this inspection. In our [victim service assessment](#), we found that the force was checking systems for vulnerability in 87 of 94 cases. But it only recorded the details of the vulnerability in 26 of 36 relevant cases.

Recording this information makes sure that [officers](#) and [staff](#) understand that the caller or [victim](#) is vulnerable when they attend an incident. It prompts them to consider any additional support that may be needed. If vulnerability isn't recorded, officers and staff attending the incident might miss opportunities to support the victim.

Main findings

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

The force should attend calls for service in line with its published attendance times and make sure there is effective supervision of deployment

West Mercia Police correctly prioritises calls based on risk. But officers aren't always able to attend within the force's target attendance times. One factor that contributes to this is the large force area, which means some officers must travel long distances in response to calls for service. And in the more rural areas there are fewer officers, a lack of trained response drivers and not enough vehicles. These problems are exacerbated by ineffective force practices that often prevent officers supporting other local policing areas when needed.

Out of the 60 incidents we reviewed during our inspection, the force responded within its target 47 times. When there are delays, callers are given an update, and the force reassesses risk every day. Any change in the risk grading needs a supervisor to confirm the decision. We found this oversight was effective in 29 of 39 cases.

The force has effective oversight of its response to calls for service

West Mercia Police has a management structure that provides effective governance and oversight of the [force control room](#). Daily meetings give leaders oversight of demand, and an operational demand manager monitors incidents that haven't yet been attended. The operational demand manager shares incident data with senior operational leaders across the force every day. But this doesn't always result in vehicles and officers being managed effectively across the force to address changing demand. There is limited sharing of resources across local policing areas.

The force's call handlers carry out effective structured risk assessments

The force's control room staff use the [threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability, and engagement \(THRIVE\)](#) risk assessment effectively. In our victim service assessment, we found that the force used THRIVE on 92 of 98 calls, and we found the THRIVE assessment to be meaningful in 87 of 93 calls.

The force has a quality assurance audit process to monitor the use of THRIVE and the quality of the assessments. It uses the audit results to support team and individual performance improvements.

The public can contact the force through various different channels

The force has digital contact channels and continues to increase the number of ways the public can contact it. It promotes online contact through its website, providing clear options around frequently used topics.

The force uses a virtual policing response in its control room. This provides an immediate video response to help gather evidence of crimes more quickly. It also gives options to people who don't want officers to attend their home. The force has used this technology in rural areas to help response officers to contact callers and victims. The force is continuing to expand this service to more policing areas where appropriate.

In December 2024, the force introduced a call-back option. And in 2025, the digital desk in the force contact centre plans to introduce live chat. This increased use of digital technology will provide a greater range of ways for people to contact the force. It should also contribute to wider improvements in how the force carries out its services.

Investigating crime

Adequate

West Mercia Police is adequate at investigating crime.

Areas for improvement

The force doesn't consistently achieve appropriate outcomes for victims

The force isn't always achieving acceptable outcomes for [victims](#) of crime. It has low numbers of crimes that are solved following investigations. The force needs to better understand the issue and work to achieve better outcomes for victims.

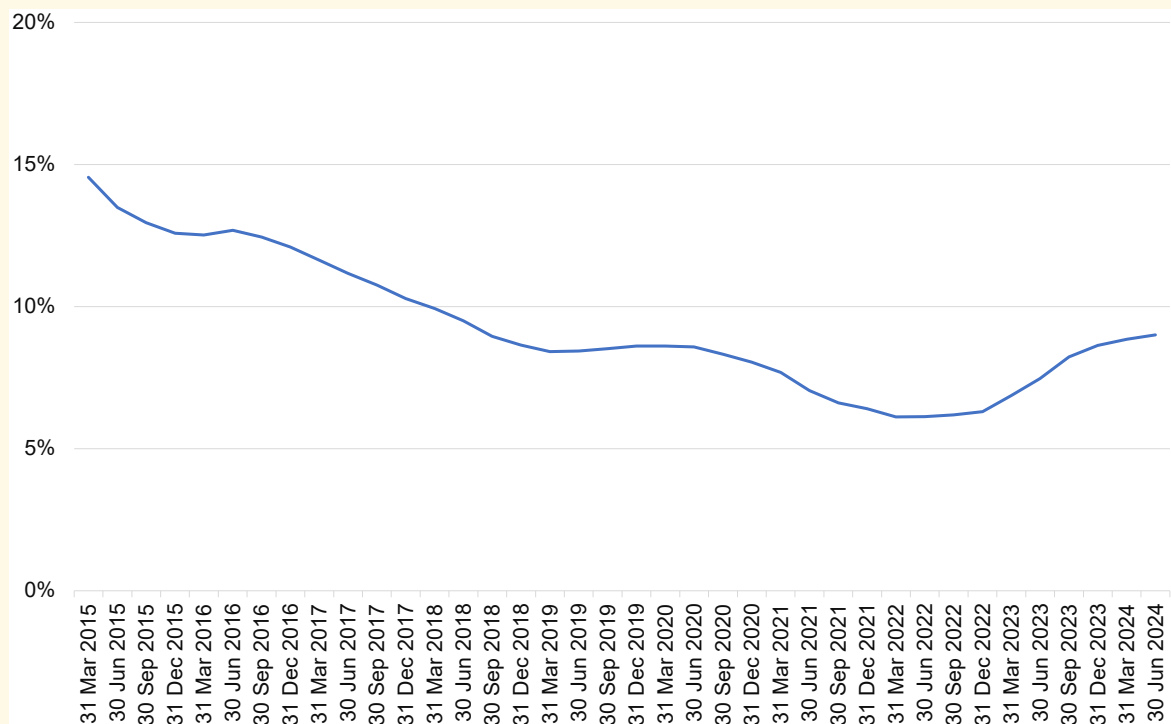
Figure 4: Percentage of victim-based crime recorded by West Mercia Police and all forces in England and Wales by selected outcome types in the year ending 30 June 2024

Outcome types	West Mercia outcome rate	England and Wales outcome rate
1 – Charged/summonsed	9%	6.3%
2 and 3 – Caution – youths and adults	0.7%	0.7%
8 – Community resolutions	1.1%	1.7%
9 – Prosecution not in the public interest (Crown Prosecution Service decision)	0%	0%
10 & 21 – Prosecution not in the public interest (police decision)	0.1%	0.8%
14 – Evidential difficulties (suspect not identified but the victim declines or is unable to support)	5.4%	5.8%
15 – Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports police action)	15.8%	13.1%
16 – Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim doesn't support or withdraws support)	26.6%	21.3%
17 – Prosecution time limit expired	0.5%	0.3%
18 – Investigation complete – no suspect identified	35.1%	43.3%
20 – Action undertaken by another body/agency	0.8%	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

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

Figure 5: Proportion of victim-based crimes assigned a ‘charged/summonsed’ outcome (outcome 1) by West Mercia 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

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

We found the force had a very low use of [out-of-court disposals](#). It is missing opportunities for justice with fair outcomes for victims, offenders and communities.

The force should make sure it carries out a victim needs assessment where appropriate

Under the revised [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#), all [victims](#) of a criminal offence are entitled to a victim needs assessment. This assessment identifies at an early stage whether victims need additional support throughout the investigation. It also identifies whether a victim is entitled to enhanced rights under the Code. This can mean the difference between a victim supporting or not supporting an investigation. In our [victim service assessment](#), we found the force carried out a victim needs assessment in only 24 of 59 relevant cases. And it only recorded when a victim was entitled to enhanced rights in 17 of 37 relevant cases.

We found [officers](#) and [staff](#) didn't always understand the purpose of the initial victim needs assessment. Officers didn't always know which victims were entitled to enhanced rights. We also found that how often officers updated victims on the progress of investigations was rarely victim-led. Instead, officers told us they routinely set victim updates to 28 days. And they often gave updates by text and email during a night shift, due to demands on their time. The quality of service to victims is diminished as a result.

Main findings

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

The force has improved its oversight of investigations

In our last inspection, the force was issued a cause of concern for the quality of its investigations. The force has improved its investigative standards since that time.

Senior leaders are promoting improvements to investigation quality. There is an experienced audit team monitoring investigation standards and outcomes. Supervisors can access investigation dashboards that provide a good oversight of their team's investigations. When the force identifies areas that it could improve, it acts on them. For example, by giving clearer direction to local leaders or by inserting additional material into officers' [continuing professional development](#).

During our victim service assessment, we found that investigation plans were appropriate in all 75 of the 75 cases we reviewed. But we also found that supervision was effective in 58 of 67 cases, and when speaking to officers and examining their workloads we found examples of inconsistent supervision. Officers told us about a lack of effective decision-making, and some told us they had no supervision for extended periods. We also saw force data showing supervisor reviews weren't always carried out promptly. But some officers told us that they received good supervision. It is important that all officers have good supervision. This will help the force provide a good standard of investigation to all victims of crime.

The force is striving to reduce delays in digital forensic examinations

The force recognises that it takes too long to examine electronic devices. Dedicated digital media investigators are working in each of the five local policing areas to improve the level of service and to carry out prompt examinations of priority devices. They also provide support and guidance in developing digital investigation strategies.

The force also has a digital van that triages devices at the scene. This early screening of digital devices has improved decision-making around which devices require further examination and has reduced the number of items seized by investigators. The force also has a considered and well-managed programme for [digital forensic](#) improvements, which should result in improved performance over time.

Officers and staff don't have confidence in the crime management system

Many officers and staff told us they found it difficult to use the force crime management system. They told us their training on the system was inadequate and that files took a long time to complete. They also told us that the system often crashed, resulting in lost work.

We were told that officers often felt their decisions over whether to remand suspects in custody, or even whether to arrest suspects in the first place, were negatively influenced by the stress caused by this inefficient system. These difficulties mean that the force doesn't always manage the risk posed by offenders effectively. It also means it doesn't always properly consider the needs of the victim.

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

Officers told us that there was a focus on improving positive outcomes for victims of crime. Many officers told us they considered the victims' views throughout investigations. But we reviewed 34 cases and found only 26 cases had an auditable record of the victims' views. The force encourages officers to consider evidence-led prosecution when a victim of crime doesn't support further action. But we found this had been done in only six of nine relevant cases.

In our victim service assessment, we found the force generally closed crimes with the right outcome type. We reviewed 94 cases and found the correct outcome had been assigned in 79 of the cases examined.

Protecting vulnerable people

Requires
improvement

West Mercia Police requires improvement at protecting vulnerable people.

Areas for improvement

The force should make sure its governance processes and performance data insight improve how it identifies and protects vulnerable people

The force has a [chief officer](#) lead for [safeguarding](#) and a clear governance structure that provides direction to [officers](#) and [staff](#) around vulnerability. However, we found the force lacked confidence in its vulnerability data. We attended two force strategic meetings where different analyses of the same force data sets were presented. And the force has limited access to data from some of its safeguarding partner organisations.

The force records data on spreadsheets, which increases the possibility of user error and leads to incomplete and inaccurate data being presented at strategic meetings. This means the force doesn't fully understand the vulnerability issues it faces. And it affects the force's ability to make evidenced-based responses to strategic and operational issues. The force should remove manual and inefficient data collection processes to improve data quality.

The force should increase its consideration and use of ancillary orders to safeguard vulnerable people in all appropriate cases

When we last inspected the force in 2021, we reported that the use of [Domestic Violence Protection Orders \(DVPOs\)](#) and [Domestic Violence Protection Notices](#) was low. These orders and notices protect [victims](#) by helping police and magistrates' courts put in place protective measures immediately after a domestic violence incident.

We found the force's use of DVPOs and Domestic Violence Protection Notices remained low despite some improvements. In the year ending 30 September 2024, the force applied for DVPOs in 0.88 percent of its recorded [domestic abuse](#)-related crimes. In our [victim service assessment](#), we found that it considered the use of such orders in six of ten relevant cases.

Many [officers](#) we spoke to lacked confidence and knowledge around how to apply for orders. We also found the force's unreliable IT systems limited the effective use of orders. Despite this, we did see specialist teams making good use of orders to protect vulnerable [children](#).

The force plans to introduce a civil interventions team, which should improve its use of orders. The force must make sure that those applying for orders are confident and have the right level of support, and that the use of orders increases, to protect [vulnerable people](#).

The force needs to make sure it manages adult and child safeguarding risk assessments effectively, and that referrals to safeguarding partners are made promptly

When [officers](#) identify risk and vulnerability, they complete [child](#) and adult [risk assessments](#). Four harm assessment units are responsible for secondary risk assessments and referral to statutory partners. The force also has domestic abuse risk officers who are responsible for making safeguarding referrals for high-risk [domestic abuse](#) cases.

It is important that all cases are referred to statutory partners as soon as possible so that appropriate [safeguarding](#) and support is provided without delay. This is particularly important when a case is assessed as being high risk.

During our inspection, both in July 2024 and again in December 2024, we found one policing area had significant backlogs in cases waiting for a secondary risk assessment. In December 2024, the backlog of 1,023 cases caused a 16-day delay in assessments, including assessments of high-risk referrals.

We found no significant backlogs in the other policing areas. But the force hadn't implemented a sustainable plan to prevent backlogs in a policing area previously highlighted as having problems.

Since our inspection, [chief officers](#) told us they had cleared the existing backlogs. They said they had put appropriate governance in place to monitor and deal with the backlogs in the future. This is promising, but it is too soon to assess whether these measures will be effective. We will continue to monitor this issue.

The force needs to make sure it trains officers and staff to recognise children as victims, and to assess risk and manage responses to reduce further harm

The force provides [child safeguarding](#) guidance and training to [officers](#). But we found officers didn't always complete [risk assessments](#) for children promptly. They also don't often obtain the [voice of the child](#). The force told us that only 4 percent of child risk assessments included the voice of the child. And we were told by staff in harm assessment units that risk assessments were often of a poor standard.

Some officers told us they didn't understand what happened when a risk assessment was completed. This lack of understanding may affect the quality and frequency of gathering quality information to identify risk and support safeguarding.

The force should make sure its officers understand the role they play in protecting children. This will help improve how well they identify vulnerability, and the quality of information they gather.

Main findings

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

The force should make sure that it protects vulnerable people by referring all appropriate domestic abuse cases to MARACs without delay

The force has clear guidance for dealing with risk from domestic abuse crimes and incidents. All high-risk domestic abuse must be referred to the MARAC. We also found that one policing area referred some medium-risk cases.

However, in the year ending 30 September 2024, West Mercia Police dealt with 2,300 high-risk domestic abuse cases, but only referred 1,317 cases to MARACs. And the number of cases discussed at the MARAC was below the 2,200 recommended by [SafeLives](#) based on the size of the local population. The force wasn't able to explain to us why lower-than-expected numbers of cases were being presented at MARACs. It has commissioned work to better understand this.

A MARAC should take place within 28 days of referral. But we found that this wasn't always achieved. Force data shows only one policing area meets this timescale. The force told us that legacy decisions to limit the number of cases referred to MARACs have contributed to delays. To mitigate risk, all cases waiting to be discussed at MARACs are subject to a risk management plan and safeguarding interventions.

There is no force-level MARAC steering group. This reduces how effectively the force can work with other organisations at a strategic level to identify and overcome issues. But the force has worked with partner organisations to increase the number of MARACs in some areas. When cases were discussed at these conferences, we found the police contribution helped effective decisions to be made to reduce the risk.

The force should continue to improve how it uses preventative schemes

The force has improved the oversight of how it uses the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#) (also known as Clare's Law) and the [Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme](#) (Sarah's Law). Force strategic boards are starting to have access to more data about the number of applications to these schemes, as well as any backlogs. But the process of gathering this information from across the five local policing areas is a manual process that is vulnerable to user error. And each area manages the scheme differently.

We found examples of effective local area oversight, despite backlogs in some areas. But the force should make sure the scheme management is consistent across all policing areas.

The force uses feedback from victims to improve its services to vulnerable people

The force has a board that monitors and directs activity related to the force's victim and witness strategic plan. This has three pillars: service, support and satisfaction.

The board commissioned an analysis of a victim satisfaction survey. This included examining how victim satisfaction changed if a victim's case wasn't prosecuted. Analysts compared satisfaction levels between cases where there was no prosecution because of lack of evidence and cases where there was no prosecution because the victim didn't support the process. They found that victim satisfaction was generally not affected by case outcomes, but by how officers supported the victim throughout the investigation. The force is using this data to inform officer training and improve its victim-centred approach.

The force also analysed satisfaction data for victims of violent crime. It found increases in satisfaction where victims received a follow-up visit from local neighbourhood officers. This included giving case updates, making referrals to other agencies, and providing crime prevention advice. The force changed its policy to include this follow-up activity. This will improve its support to victims.

Local neighbourhood policing teams take positive action to protect vulnerable people

During our inspection we observed monthly problem-solving and tasking meetings. Many of the cases that we saw discussed at these meetings related to how to safeguard vulnerable victims.

One example concerned a repeat domestic abuse victim. Participants told the meeting about interventions that had been put in place for the victim and offender. They said that the focus for the police and partner organisations now needed to turn to the location of the incidents. The force arranged a meeting between domestic abuse specialist officers, the housing provider and the health organisations. This shows that the force uses effective partnership working to safeguard and support vulnerable victims.

We saw neighbourhood teams working to protect people in similar ways, using a problem-solving approach for repeat victims and offenders.

Managing offenders and suspects

Adequate

West Mercia Police is adequate at managing offenders and suspects.

Areas for improvement

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

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

But we found that the force didn't effectively monitor overdue ARMS assessments. During our [Violent and Sex Offender Register](#) audit, we found a backlog of 253 ARMS assessments. The oldest was more than eight months old. It isn't possible for the force to reassure itself that there are no delayed ARMS assessments without a formal effective monitoring process. This is an inherent risk.

The force needs to make sure there is a clear policy for the management of violent and sexual offenders, and that this is followed in all its policing areas

There is a [management of sexual or violent offenders \(MOSOVO\)](#) team in each of the five local policing areas. These work independently under the leadership of a detective inspector. These detective inspectors have responsibility for other departments as well as the MOSOVO teams. As a result, we found that the MOSOVO teams didn't always receive the consistent oversight that they needed.

We found that each area team had different work practices. This includes differences in shift patterns, tasks completed, work distribution, welfare provisions, and when and if single-crewed visits are made.

This means that offender management varies across the force. The force should adopt a clear policy across all areas. It should have governance and performance recording to make sure this is taking place.

Main findings

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

The force is effective at managing online child sex abuse investigations

West Mercia Police has dedicated teams that investigate online child abuse. We found effective governance and oversight from senior leaders, with performance data collected and reviewed monthly. The teams work productively with partner organisations to reduce the risk of harm to children. Referrals to children's services aren't always made until arrest. But early liaison is always considered, and information is shared between partner organisations at the first opportunity.

Effective risk assessments are completed by trained officers and staff, and arrests are prioritised based on risk. We found there were no backlogs in high-priority cases. And supervisors had good oversight of backlogs on lower-priority cases.

The force uses volunteers to support how it manages risk. These are specially selected and trained special constables. They carry out [bail](#) checks and provide support to the teams during investigation. The force uses civil orders to prevent offending and to safeguard victims. The force applies for Sexual Harm Prevention Orders on conviction and considers Sexual Risk Orders based on the risk from the offender.

The force provides support for offenders and their families

We found that the force worked with partner agencies to provide support to families of suspected offenders. The force signposts vulnerable offenders to other agencies to lower their risk of self-harm.

Families are referred to the charity Family Matters, which works with them to provide a range of services when a member of their family is under investigation, arrested or sentenced for an offence.

This support allows the police to focus on their investigations knowing that effective safeguarding has been carried out to support others who have been affected by the enforcement action taken against offenders.

The force should make sure it follows authorised professional practice guidelines on single-crewed visits to registered sex offenders

In the force, the ratio of police offender managers to registered sex offenders is 1 to 48. The team told us it generally considered this to be an appropriate and manageable workload. But effective oversight and management of registered sex offenders includes wider considerations, including how visits to offenders are carried out.

During our inspection we found that supervisors carried out a risk assessment that authorised visits by a single offender manager. Supervisors didn't always record the rationale as to why this authorisation was given. Visits to offenders should be carried out by two offender managers, to reduce the risk of injury or manipulation from offenders.

In December 2024, we carried out a further assessment and found that offender managers were still making visits alone. To manage risk effectively the force should make sure that any visits by a single offender manager are subject to a risk assessment. This should include a record of the rationale behind the decision.

Building, supporting and protecting the workforce

Requires improvement

West Mercia Police requires improvement at building, supporting and protecting the workforce.

Areas for improvement

The force should make sure that it identifies officers and staff who need extra support, and provides them with appropriate care

Senior leaders have made significant efforts to provide comprehensive well-being support, but we found that this wasn't always apparent to [officers](#) and [staff](#).

During our inspection we found that the support available for staff and officers in high-risk roles wasn't enough, with many of them telling us they hadn't received any extra well-being support from the force. Some told us that, although they had completed stress assessments, the force did nothing with the results. We spoke to detectives in high-risk roles who were particularly vulnerable. They had high workloads and told us they completed work on rest days.

We also found that the force didn't identify, nor provide, well-being support to all staff and officers who dealt with traumatic incidents. In our PEEL workforce survey, we found that only 35 percent of respondents (449 of 1,283 respondents) felt that time was prioritised for de-brief and decompression after such incidents.

The force has recently changed the way it manages well-being after traumatic incidents. In January 2025, it showed us a new digital system designed to improve the critical incident debrief process. We will continue to monitor the force's progress and how it supports workforce well-being.

The force needs to introduce its occupational health case management system as soon as possible

The force's current occupational health systems and processes limit its ability to track [officer](#) and [staff](#) well-being, to understand what interventions work and to make informed improvements. This means it can't easily identify officers who may need additional support. While individual officers and staff that had used the occupational health unit services told us they were happy with their treatment, the lack of a case management system means the force can't meet the [Oscar Kilo foundation occupational health standards](#).

The force told us that it planned to introduce a case management system in February 2025. We hope that the prompt adoption of the system provides the needed improvements and benefits the workforce and the organisation.

The force must make sure that it has enough effectively trained sergeants

During our inspection we found some teams with no permanent sergeants. In some areas, sergeants were responsible for teams based across different stations. And several teams have had frequent changes of sergeants. In areas with limited cover, [officers](#) told us that their sergeants didn't review and finalise cases as quickly as they should. New recruits felt they didn't always have enough support from a supervisor to help them learn how to carry out effective investigations.

The force told us that by December 2024, 44 percent of sergeants had attended the first-line leaders' course. Those who had attended the course told us it had prepared them for their roles. But not all new leaders have been able to access this training. This leads to inconsistency in the quality of first-line leaders, and their ability to support their teams' well-being and development.

The force needs to make sure its professional development review process is effective and valued by its officers and staff

[In our previous PEEL report](#), we said the force should improve how it manages individual performance, making sure reviews are consistently and fairly applied across the workforce and valued by all. This remains an area for improvement.

The force encourages its [officers](#) and [staff](#) to complete performance reviews. Despite this, many officers and staff we spoke to said they felt the process lacked meaning. Some officers said they had never had a professional development review (PDR) discussion. And we found that supervisors had completed some annual reviews by email, as they didn't have time to talk to every member of their team.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, only 54 percent of police officers, 77 percent of police community support officers, and 56 percent of staff had completed an annual performance assessment. The force told us that by the end of June 2024 PDR completion had increased to 89 percent for officers and 92 percent for police staff. But in our PEEL workforce survey, we also found that of those respondents who said they had a PDR in the past 12 months, only 38.8 percent (367 of 946 respondents) agreed that these were an effective tool in their development. And only 48.1 percent (455 of 946 respondents) agreed that they valued the process.

The performance review process includes a talent matrix to identify officers and staff who are ready for promotion or those who are underperforming. The force doesn't have an IT system to store this information. Instead, offline documents are held by each local policing area. The inconsistent use of performance reviews and lack of centralised IT prevents senior leaders having an overview of performance across the force.

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 doesn't address the factors that contribute to well-being challenges

The force doesn't always manage to balance operational demand with the well-being needs of its staff and officers. The force has preferred staffing levels for each team, but these are sometimes ignored. This creates increased workloads for officers and staff left on duty. Some officers told us they weren't applying for leave because of these workloads, and some told us they were working at home on their rest days. In one department we were told that staff were taking sick leave to get time off due to the rigid leave system.

Several investigative teams are understaffed, and the force regularly uses overtime to manage demand in these departments.

We also found that officers were promoted, temporarily promoted or moved to cover other roles for extended periods of time. When this happens, their posts are not always filled. This increases demand on remaining staff. Some posts are left unfilled for long periods of time, and there are unfilled permanent vacancies.

This limits the workforce's ability to disengage from work and increases the risk of burnout and sickness.

Officers and staff may not have confidence to speak up

Staff surveys indicate that West Mercia Police's workforce morale is low. In October 2023, the force carried out a cultural audit and published the outcome. In the audit, the force found officers and staff reported discriminatory behaviour in only very small numbers. But the force also found that 57 percent of respondents expressed concern about having the confidence to speak up if faced with such behaviour.

The [Police Federation's November 2023 'Pay and Morale Survey'](#) ranked the force as one of the lowest in the country when scored for officer morale. One senior officer told us: "The biggest challenge the force has is the low morale of its workforce."

In our PEEL workforce survey, we found that 15.3 percent of respondents (196 of 1,277) felt bullied or harassed at work, and 13.8 percent (178 of 1,282) felt discriminated against. Approximately half of these respondents hadn't reported the incident as they felt nothing would happen if they did.

The force has carried out many activities to understand and address the findings of its cultural audit, including a senior leaders event, staff forums and a programme called Let's Talk About, which encourages people to have difficult conversations. It also introduced an 'upstander' course to equip its workforce with skills and techniques to intervene when they experience or witness inappropriate behaviour. At the time of our inspection, the force had held two upstander courses so far, but only three people in total attended them. Despite the force's efforts and positive initiatives, the effect on the workforce isn't yet apparent. We will continue to monitor this important area of work.

The force effectively supports its new recruits, helping to retain and develop them

We spoke to new recruits to the force and found they were generally positive about the support they received. The force provides a range of initiatives, including one-to-one tutoring.

Performance co-ordinators support student officers. They meet with the learning and development team and the force learning partner, the University of Staffordshire, every 70 days to identify students who are struggling and provide early intervention to support them. The force found that students were stressed because of the number of assessments they had to complete. It worked with the university to change the academic requirement and reduce the number of assessments.

The force carries out neurodiversity screening for all new recruits, to identify officers with additional support needs at an early stage. And supervisors attend a leadership training course with learning around student officers and the challenges they experience.

The force uses an employee experience IT platform called Viva Engage. There is a student officer Viva Engage channel that helps students across the force to interact with other students.

The force has say-and-stay interviews, and a retention sergeant for students to talk to if they are considering leaving. As a result of feedback from people thinking of leaving or who have left, the force has changed its posting policy for officers from an ethnic minority background. The force makes sure that it posts these new officers to areas where it already employs officers with a similar background. As a result, the force has improved its retention rates for officers from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The force is improving opportunities to develop officers and staff from under-represented groups

The force has effective oversight of under-represented groups across its workforce. It tracks and supports their progression. It monitors the gender of those passing the police promotion exams. And it monitors the gender and ethnic background of those leaving the force.

The force also monitors the number of female officers and officers from an ethnic minority background at each rank. And it identifies and attempts to remove barriers that prevent under-represented groups progressing or applying for promotion. For example, the force supported a female officer to complete a master's degree in which she wrote a dissertation on the progression of women in policing above the rank of inspector. The force plans to use this academic research to inform its policy and practice.

The force provides access to training programmes that support personal development. These include the Aspire, Lead, I am Remarkable, and Step-Up programmes. They aim to build confidence and help people develop and progress. Each one is aimed at different ranks, network members or under-represented groups. The force has adopted a new process for the sergeant promotion board so that neurodivergent officers aren't at a disadvantage.

Senior leaders communicate directly with the staff networks that represent the views of the workforce, such as the Police Federation. And all staff networks have a nominated senior officer sponsor who meets monthly with them. The force has successfully trialled reverse mentoring, where network members share their perspective with senior leaders. The force has told us that this will be implemented more widely.

Leadership and force management

Requires
improvement

West Mercia Police's leadership and management requires improvement.

Areas for improvement

The force needs to make better use of data and analysis to make sure it is operating efficiently and effectively

The force has a clear governance structure and holds effective executive meetings. The force has access to performance data such as response times and call answering times. This data can be presented to the workforce in an accessible way using Power BI products.

But some data is manually drawn from systems, which takes hours of staff time that could be better used elsewhere. And this process is vulnerable to user error, which can affect the accuracy of the information leaders receive. This means senior leaders aren't always able to hold managers to account for their teams' performance. As a result, some [officers](#) and [staff](#) aren't clear what is expected of them.

The force needs to improve its collection and analysis of data so it can promote effective performance and productivity across the force.

The force should improve how it uses its operating model and workforce to help it to deal with priorities and demand

The force's current operating model isn't fully staffed, so the force doesn't have enough [officers](#) in the right places to fulfil its objectives. We found that the teams within the operating model responsible for investigating crimes were under-resourced. As a result, the force is using inexperienced officers to investigate crimes that they aren't properly trained to deal with.

We also found examples of the five local policing areas operating differently. This leads to a lack of collaboration between them and creates barriers for force leaders to understand and improve performance.

The force needs to continue its review of its operating model, and of the skills of its officers and staff. The force should make sure it has the right resources, processes and plans in place to meet the demand it faces.

The force needs to improve its productivity through digital, data and technological solutions

The force's IT systems have significant limitations. We found the various force IT systems didn't always share information effectively. They could communicate better with each other. And manual processes increase the chance of delays in analytical work and could delay needed improvement.

The force is aware it must prioritise investment in the technology that will make its systems and processes more efficient and effective. It has started replacing and upgrading its IT infrastructure. This work needs to be prioritised and appropriately funded.

The force needs to address the inefficiencies in its systems and processes through modernisation. Then the workforce can be more productive. This will help it to meet current and future demands.

Main findings

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

The force is improving its planning processes

West Mercia Police's [force management statement](#) is part of the strategic planning process. It is used to help develop the police and crime plan, and the force budget. This is positive for the force.

The force uses available internal data and data from partners such as education and health partners to produce a strategic assessment for each community safety partnership. This is more developed in some partnership areas than others. The force is working with the [police and crime commissioner](#) to improve the quality of partnership data.

Both the force management statement and the strategic assessments inform an annual priority-based budgeting process. But the effectiveness of force planning and budgeting is limited because of the force's data collection and analysis problems.

The force connects with its different communities and works to make changes to how it operates so that it can better respond to their needs

West Mercia Police connects with its communities through its local neighbourhood policing teams. And through community safety partnerships it works to better understand the community's needs. The force has invested in partnership analysts to support this work.

The force has improved its governance structures and introduced new executive meetings. These have started to improve its oversight of performance, well-being, resourcing and improvement activity. Despite the positivity of this work, its success is limited by the force's problems accessing reliable data. We will continue to monitor the force's efforts to improve the governance of its functions.

The force is taking action to improve standards of leadership

The force has a leadership team that encourages challenge and debate from its officers and staff. Though all but one of the chief police officers were in temporary roles at the time of our inspection, they were committed to improving the force to better serve the community. The senior and middle management leadership communicate well with chief officers. The force holds regular 'top 100 leaders' events, which all officers at or over the rank of chief inspector and equivalent police staff grades attend.

The force has a workforce resource meeting that monitors staff development, fills training gaps and manages sickness. This is now supported by a skills matrix. The force has leadership programmes in place to support its officers and staff. It is focused on investing in its sergeants as frontline leaders.

The force is improving the productivity of its resources and assets

The force provides specialist support to its police leaders to improve their skills and productivity. This includes a meaningful collaboration between force leaders and the commercial department. This department creates Tiger Teams, which work with operational police units. Tiger Teams are used to solve problems. For example, one of these groups supported improved body-worn video compliance when it was identified as an issue.

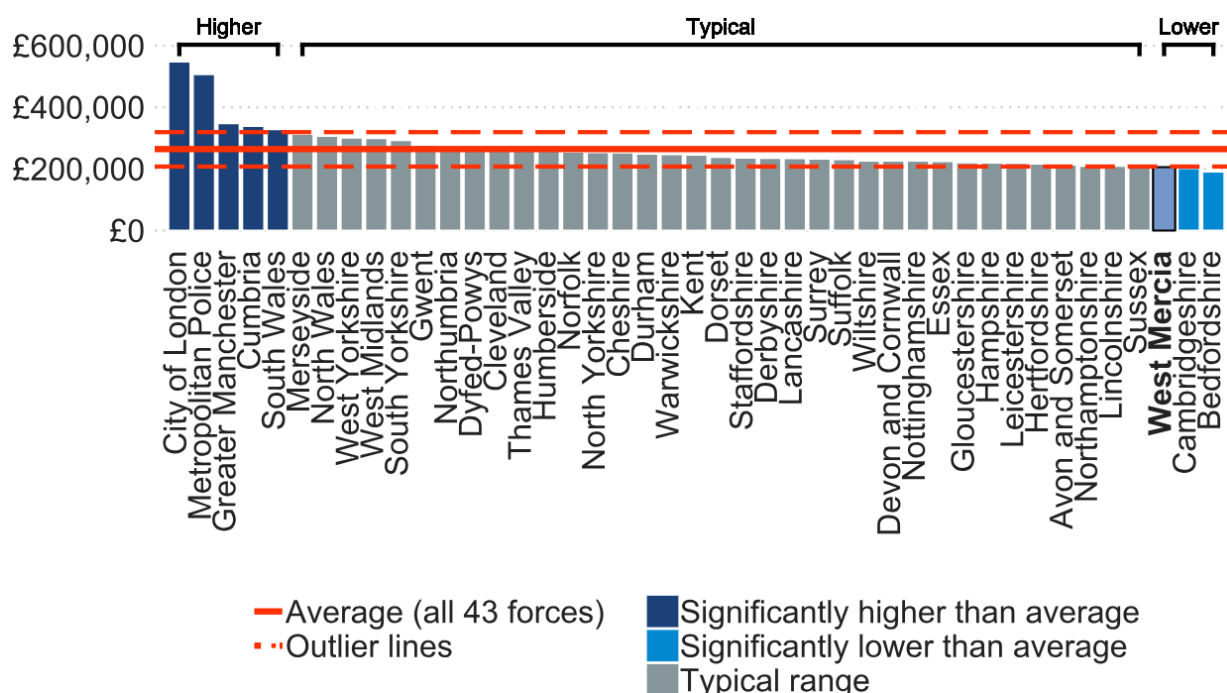
The force told us its procurement department had been nominated for commercial awards. It was a finalist in a 2024 international competition for saving £500,000 by bringing uniform supply in-house.

Through these efforts the force is able to demonstrate increased focus on productivity and efficiency. We will continue to monitor these efforts as the force addresses its issues with data, governance and its operating model.

The force's finances and reserve strategy need attention

In the financial year ending 31 March 2024, the force received a total of £272.9 million in funding, which was £206,000 per 1,000 population. The force is funded at a lower rate than expected for forces across England and Wales.

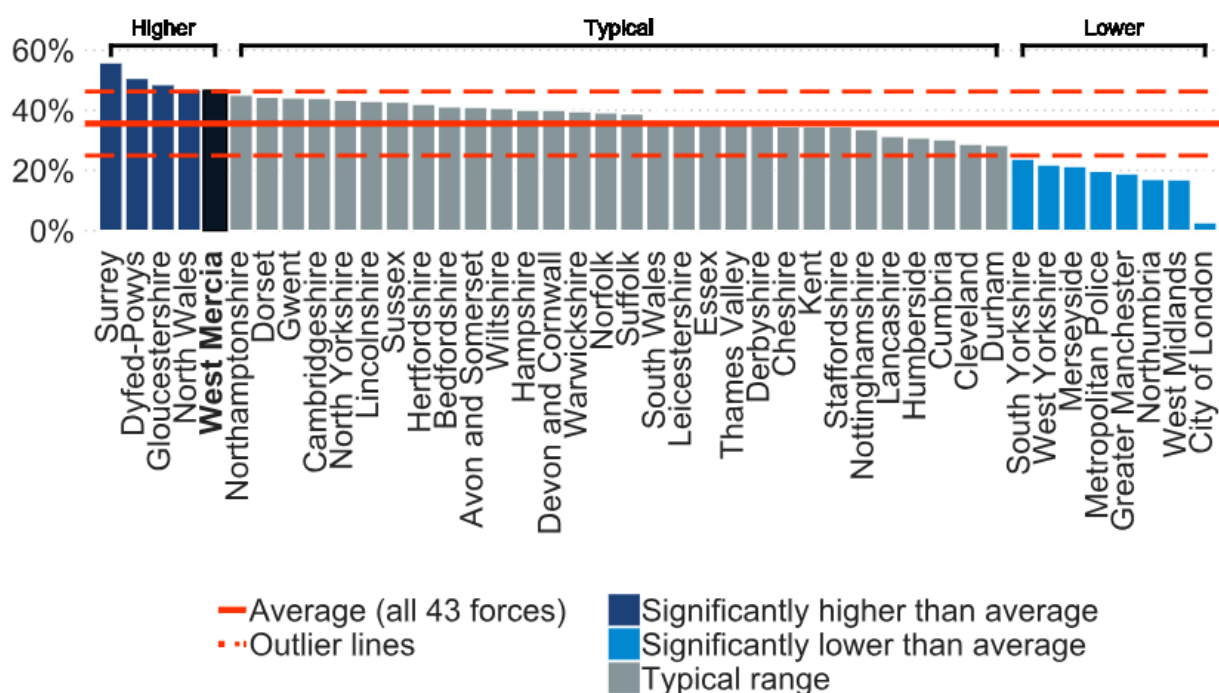
Figure 6: Total funding per 1,000 population in the year ending 31 March 2024 for forces in England and Wales



Source: Data collection and analysis from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

In the year ending 31 March 2024, West Mercia Police received 46.6 percent of its total funding from precept (£127 million). This was higher than expected for forces in England and Wales.

Figure 7: Percentage of funding that came from council tax precept in the year ending 31 March 2024 for forces in England and Wales



Source: Data collection and analysis from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

At the time of our inspection, the force had nearly £100 million in borrowing. This was 32 percent of its net revenue expenditure in the financial year ending 31 March 2024. The force is paying £13 million per year against this borrowing. This equates to over 4 percent of the force total funding.

But the force's reserve position is now such that it can no longer use the reserves to balance the budget. At the end of March 2024, usable police fund (general) reserve levels stood at £7 million. This equates to around 3 percent of the force's total funding. The force estimates that total revenue reserves will decrease from £19 million to £11 million by the end of March 2025.

The force needs to fill a budget gap of £13.5 million. To bridge this deficit the force has created efficiency plans and is confident they will make savings via the new operating model and priority-based budgeting. We will continue to monitor the force's performance in this area.

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