

The police response to burglary, robbery and other acquisitive crime

Finding time for crime

PEEL spotlight report

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Scope

This report focuses on the police response to serious acquisitive crime (SAC), which we have defined as: domestic burglary, personal robbery, theft from a person, and theft of and from a motor vehicle.

The terms theft, robbery and burglary are sometimes used incorrectly and are described fully in the [Theft Act 1968](#). Simple explanations of each term are as follows:

- Theft is when a person's property is taken from the owner without their consent, but doesn't involve using force or threatening to hurt them.
- Robbery is taking someone's property using force or threatening to hurt them.
- Burglary is when someone breaks into a building with the intention of stealing, hurting someone or committing unlawful damage.

We welcome the renewed focus on these crimes in the Government's [Beating crime plan](#), which includes SAC in its definition of neighbourhood crime. SAC can have long-lasting and profound effects on victims. They may live in fear of going out or no longer feel safe in their homes, and the consequences leave some in long-term financial difficulties.

Very few of these crimes result in justice for victims. Often the investigation ends without the police identifying a suspect. Charge rates for robbery, burglary and vehicle theft are low, and have dramatically decreased in recent years. [Home Office data](#) shows only 7 percent of all robbery offences¹ and 4 percent of thefts result in a charge.

In the rare event an offender is caught and prosecuted, robust intervention is needed to change offending behaviours. Without this, many will reoffend and impose further misery and harm on victims. SAC often funds drug misuse and addiction, and can lead to a cycle of crime, particularly when offenders are using heroin and crack cocaine.

This report examines these trends and aims to identify what is working well, what needs to change, and the main barriers to making improvements.

To help forces to improve and learn from each other, in this report we highlight some examples of the good and innovative practices we have found during our inspections.

¹ In its classification of robbery as an offence group, the [offence classification index](#) includes business property and personal property. Therefore, statistical data outcomes should be read as including both crime types.

We use:

- 'good practice' to describe the activities carried out by a force that we have found make it work more efficiently and effectively in certain aspects of policing; and
- 'innovative practice' to describe new ways of working that may not have been formally evaluated but that have the potential to make the force work more efficiently and effectively in certain aspects of policing.

Foreword

Serious acquisitive crime (SAC) strikes at the heart of people's feelings of safety in their homes and communities. It isn't just a 'volume crime'.

It affects people on a daily basis. And failing to target it damages public confidence in policing.

The response to SAC from policing isn't consistently good enough. Too many offenders remain at liberty and most victims aren't getting the justice they deserve. Forces are missing opportunities to identify and catch offenders, from the moment a member of the public reports the crime to the point where a case is finalised.

Depending on where in England and Wales they live, some victims of SAC are more likely than others to get a thorough investigation from their force. This can't be justified.

This report brings together some of our findings from recent [police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy \(PEEL\)](#) and thematic inspections in England and Wales. It shows where forces need to make improvements in the way they tackle SAC, and it reports on the good practice we identified. The onus is on forces to learn from each other. They should consider whether they can apply the positive examples in this report to their own force.

It is my view that the current low positive outcome and charge rates for SAC are unacceptable and unsustainable. There needs to be a concerted and focused drive to address this issue, otherwise the public is likely to lose confidence in forces' ability to keep them safe.



Andy Cooke QPM DL

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary

Summary of findings

The screening of volume crimes can overlook the complexity and harm caused by serious acquisitive crime

Some forces need to do more to recognise the harm caused by serious acquisitive crime (SAC). It is classified as volume crime, but it can have a devastating impact on individuals and communities. And [research](#) shows it creates a significant cost to society.

The initial policing response can set the standard for how well a crime is investigated. We are concerned that in too many instances, forces are missing opportunities in the early stages of the investigation, when the crime is first reported. In 71 percent of the burglary reports we examined, we found police personnel didn't give victims any advice on crime scene preservation during the initial call. This failure to secure potential forensic evidence means vital material may be lost, which can hamper the success of investigations. Some forces are also failing to recognise repeat victims or conduct a good enough vulnerability risk assessment.

Many 101 non-emergency call handling staff are used as backup 999 operators. There is value in staff being omniscient, but the pressure to answer 999 calls means some operators gather the bare minimum of information when recording reports of volume crime. Forces must make sure SAC victims don't receive a lesser standard of service due to the classification of volume crime.

Forces often lack capacity to investigate SAC

Very few SAC offences result in either an offender being identified or the case reaching charge or summons. We found that at all stages, from call management to the eventual closure of a crime, many forces lack the capacity to properly record, investigate and manage SAC. In some instances, the capability of police personnel was also called into question. This was either due to a lack of practical skills or a lack of access to joint tasking or problem-solving processes that would help them get better results. In some forces, where frontline uniformed response officers investigate SAC, many of those officers told us administration and competing demands delay investigations.

Inadequate digital forensic capability often hinders investigations

Too often, forces' digital forensic, technological and analytical capability isn't good enough to let them carry out thorough investigations, and capacity is frequently limited. This affects how far an investigation can go and causes

significant delays. Most forces need to improve in this area and make the most of the increasing evidential opportunities available through the changing digital landscape.

Insufficient supervision sets the blueprint for poor standards

In one third of the SAC cases we examined, there was insufficient supervision and direction of investigations. This may result in missed opportunities, including the use of intelligence and linking cases. Given the low rates for solving these crimes, this is a concern.

We also found compliance with the [Code of practice for victims of crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\)](#) was inadequate in 46 percent of investigations. And a victim needs assessment was rarely completed. This is unacceptable. Forces must do more to make sure they meet the statutory requirements of the Victims' Code, which sets out the minimum standards victims should expect. Improvements are needed in many forces.

Tackling SAC needs a whole-force approach

An effective approach to SAC needs co-operation and expertise across a range of policing functions. In some forces, officers and staff at all levels and functions see SAC as a shared priority. But this isn't the case in all forces. Many need to do more to carry out effective tasking across teams. Investigations need to be complemented by the work of local policing teams, problem-solving activity, offender management, and activities that help divert those at risk of being drawn into SAC.

Effective information technology (IT) and analytical capability should underpin investigative efforts, so forces can spot SAC trends before they become acute problems. But some analysts still lack access to basic mapping software, and some investigators have insufficient access to analytical and intelligence products.

Forces with a strong crime prevention culture are more adept at problem-solving and achieve better results

To tackle SAC, a focus on crime prevention needs to be a cultural imperative that permeates throughout the force. Officers need to consider why a crime took place, what can be done to prevent it reoccurring, and how they can minimise risk to prevent future victimisation.

It is crucial that police personnel have the training to understand how this applies to their roles, regardless of what capacity or specialism they work in. And they need the skills to carry out effective problem-solving. In some forces there is an ethos of problem-solving and putting preventative solutions in place. But in other forces we found prevention and problem-solving are seen as neighbourhood policing activities. In these instances, investigators don't understand the relationship between crime investigation and crime prevention well enough, or how they can make an impact on prevention.

Defining the problem

What do we mean by serious acquisitive crime?

For this report, serious acquisitive crime (SAC) is defined as personal robbery,² theft from a person, theft of and from a motor vehicle, and domestic burglary. It doesn't include commercial burglary or robbery of business property.

Why is it important?

Being a victim of SAC can have a long-lasting effect on how safe people feel in their homes and communities. The impact can be far reaching, deeply affecting neighbourhoods and everyone who lives in them. A [victim of burglary who shared their experience](#) with Lancashire Constabulary said:

“It left us terrified in our home. On the night after, we had a chair propped up against the double doors from the conservatory acting as a barricade – we just didn't feel safe. And my eldest, who was ten at the time, didn't want to sleep in the house. It has had such an impact on us and how we felt about our home that we moved house six months later. I wouldn't wish what we've been through on anyone.”

In another example, a victim of car crime lost not only his job but also his livelihood. In our 2020 report [Diverging under pressure](#), we highlighted the stark differences in the investigation a victim of crime would receive, depending on the police force responsible for investigating it. We found there was limited understanding as to why so many victims seemed to be losing faith in the criminal justice system. We said that some forces needed to improve their understanding of the outcomes of their investigations to ensure they were effectively pursuing justice on behalf of victims.

Although the number of SAC reports has generally decreased over the past decade, the public still has the right to expect a quality policing response that brings offenders to justice. However, most SAC offences don't lead to an offender being charged.

² In its classification of robbery as an offence group, the [offence classification index](#) includes business property and personal property. Therefore, statistical data outcomes should be read as including both crime types.

The financial cost of SAC reoffending is high

According to a [2019 report by the Ministry of Justice](#), the estimated economic and social cost of reoffending was £18.1 billion annually. Of those costs, £9.3 billion were theft offences committed by adults.

The Government's [Beating crime plan](#) shows several drivers of acquisitive crime, which add complexity to this type of offending. These include:

- living in poverty;
- drug misuse (the [Home Office reports](#) that those who use heroin and crack cocaine at least twice a week commit 45 percent of acquisitive offences, excluding fraud);
- offenders being released from prison, then going on to reoffend;
- organised criminality; and
- changes in the market value of some types of stolen property (for example, the theft of catalytic converters for the metals they contain).

SAC makes up a substantial proportion of overall crime

Although there has been an overall fall in crime since the 1990s, SAC offences increased by 24 percent between March 2017 and September 2019. Reductions in SAC reported in 2021 were driven by national lockdown restrictions. Although SAC reports haven't yet returned to the levels seen in 2019, we expect some increase in SAC across all crime types.

SAC offences aren't randomly distributed

No communities are immune from SAC, but nearly a quarter of these offences are concentrated in just 5 percent of local areas. London, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands have significantly more SAC reported than other areas.

Within force areas, certain locations are more likely to be at risk of being targeted. The College of Policing's [Safer streets: Neighbourhood crime factors](#) shows personal robbery is most common in metropolitan areas and can be concentrated in areas with a large night-time economy and around drug dealing hotspots. It isn't confined to the hours of darkness.

Vehicle theft is also more likely to occur in urban areas, particularly in car parks and on long residential streets. These places are at higher risk of being targeted due to the volume of opportunities.

Domestic burglaries are most likely to occur in the evening or at night, and there are higher volumes of these crimes in areas that lack social cohesion and stability. Criminals are more likely to target properties with direct access to roads and footpaths that offer a means of escape.

Victims of SAC are at increased risk of repeat victimisation

According to a [2021 Office for National Statistics bulletin](#), just under a third of domestic burglaries (30 percent) and over a fifth of vehicle-related thefts (22 percent) are committed against repeat victims (those who have experienced the same crime more than once within a 12-month period).

This shows homes are more likely to be burgled if they have been burgled or targeted before. A [College of Policing report](#) shows that when a home is burgled, there is an increased risk of it being burgled again. And properties within 400 metres are more likely to be targeted within the following six weeks.

Offending and reoffending

Offenders convicted of burglary, robbery and theft from a person are most often young males

A [2022 College of Policing study](#) drew on national data to evaluate the crime profile of neighbourhoods, offenders and victims. It found 90 percent of domestic burglars were male, and 53 percent were aged between 25 and 39. Those convicted of robbery were predominantly male, the majority of whom were aged between 16 and 24. Those who had been convicted of theft from a person were again predominantly male (75 percent). Vehicle crime offenders were shown not to be a homogenous group.

SAC reoffending rates are higher than any other crime type

[Research](#) shows that 31.9 percent of those convicted of robbery and 52.2 percent of those convicted of theft reoffend within one year of release from prison, compared to 25 percent for all other crimes. In a [press release of June 2021](#), the Government said that a total of 80 percent of all recorded crime is committed by those reoffending, a considerable proportion of which is SAC, including theft and robbery, and certain drug crimes linked to SAC.

Outcomes

Most SAC offences don't lead to an offender being charged

Table 2 gives Home Office data for 2021 on the investigative outcomes for all cases involving theft and robbery in police forces in England and Wales, excluding Greater Manchester Police. On average, only 6.6 percent of robbery offences reached the point of charge or summons, while 4.2 percent of theft offences resulted in this outcome for the same period.

Table 2: [Home Office data](#) on the percentage of robbery³ and theft cases that resulted in one of the outcomes available to the police

Outcome classification	All robbery offences	Theft offences
Charged/summonsed	6.6%	4.2%
Taken into consideration	0.0%	0.1%
Out-of-court (formal)	0.2%	0.3%
Out-of-court (informal)	0.3%	0.9%
Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	0.1%	0.3%
Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)	6.6%	5.0%
Evidential difficulties (victim doesn't support action)	20.4%	8.1%
Investigation complete – no suspect identified	39.4%	71.4%
Action undertaken by another body/agency	0.1%	0.1%
Further investigation to support formal action not in the public interest	0.1%	0.5%
Diversions, educational or intervention activity, resulting from the crime report, has been undertaken and it isn't in the public interest to take any further action	0.1%	0.1%
Offences not yet assigned an outcome (including crimes that are open and not yet finalised)	26.1%	9.0%

³ In its classification of robbery as an offence group, the [offence classification index](#) includes business property and personal property. Therefore, statistical data outcomes should be read as including both crime types.

Methodology

What did we examine?

We drew evidence from a range of sources, including emerging academic practice and findings from:

- our [police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy \(PEEL\)](#) programme, which assesses the performance of police forces in England and Wales (comprising all 2021/22 PEEL inspections concluded up to April 2022);
- our [victim service assessment](#), which forms part of our overall PEEL assessment;
- our [inspection of the police response to the pandemic during 2020](#);
- [force management statements](#) (self-assessments that chief constables and their London equivalents prepare and give to us each year);
- our [inspection of regional organised crime units](#);
- our [joint thematic inspection of integrated offender management](#) (with HM Inspectorate of Probation); and
- published data from the Office for National Statistics' [Crime survey for England and Wales](#) and the Home Office's [Crime outcomes in England and Wales 2020 to 2021](#).

Our findings: The investigation of serious acquisitive crime

We are concerned that very few serious acquisitive crime (SAC) offences result in justice for victims. Often investigations end without the police identifying a suspect. Charge rates for robbery, burglary and vehicle theft are low and have dramatically decreased over recent years.

In this section we set out our findings. We start with the moment police receive a report of an SAC, through to the conclusion of the investigation.

Call handling

Effective call handling sets the trajectory of an investigation

The initial actions staff take when an SAC is reported to police are vital in laying the foundations for a successful investigation. The first call is an opportunity to obtain accurate and relevant information, and to confirm if a crime has occurred. Call takers should assess the victim's needs and any risks using a structured triage and vulnerability risk assessment. This informs the prioritisation and response. Call takers should also give callers reassurance and guidance, including about preserving forensic evidence.

In our police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections, we found better-performing forces understand the importance of call management as the start of an investigation. Call handlers and dispatchers receive training on the different crime types, such as theft, robbery and burglary. They also receive training on the assessments they must apply to determine the best response. Appropriate supervision is also available, with the option to consult more experienced staff (such as the control room inspector) on more complex cases. To create a more efficient and flexible response to extraordinary and peak demand, many forces train control room staff in a range of functions, such as emergency and non-emergency call handling.

However, during the pandemic many forces experienced a shortage of call taking staff. Understandably this led to call takers prioritising 999 calls. But in some cases it also meant call takers concluded 101 non-emergency calls more quickly than they might otherwise have done. In our PEEL inspections we found this situation continued in many forces' control rooms and was exacerbated by continuing recruitment difficulties. We are concerned these pressures may be contributing to some of the missed opportunities we found at the vital first stages of an investigation, as set out below.

Forces need to improve risk assessments and victim needs assessments

All reported crime should be subject to a risk assessment process within the control room. One of the most commonly used is [THRIVE](#) (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement). It helps forces ensure they prioritise investigations effectively and they make an assessment of risk of harm, which informs the response. As part of our PEEL [victim service assessment](#), we reviewed the application of vulnerability risk assessment processes for offences classified as: burglary, and theft (other).

Though many call takers showed empathy and understanding, we were disappointed to find that in 42 percent of the cases we examined, vulnerability risk assessments were absent or weren't completed to an acceptable level. The quality of assessments also varied. This mirrored a failure to show a clear understanding of callers' needs and whether they were repeat victims of crime. In one worrying example, a victim reporting a £10,000 domestic burglary told the call handler they had been the victim of a similar burglary six months previously. But staff carried out no checks and the previous burglary was missed by the desk-based telephone investigator, who filed the crime without further investigation.

The failure to fully exploit risk assessments and consider their results suggests a perfunctory approach to processing current demand, rather than taking a victim centred approach. It can also adversely affect investigations, limit the recovery of forensic evidential opportunities and fail to protect victims from further crime.

Innovative practice: live performance monitoring supports learning and performance

In some forces, quality assurance teams work in the control room to review calls received by call takers and the subsequent logs they generate. The teams send feedback from these reviews to a staff member's supervisor. Call takers and their supervisors then review them together to consider whether they need to make any improvements or changes.

Hertfordshire Constabulary has built on this approach by investing in intelligent software to seek dynamic caller feedback on multiple crime or incident types. The force can review the feedback in real time against performance indicators via a force IT dashboard. This means supervisors can make immediate adjustments, such as to staffing levels, and take service recovery opportunities if needed. It also gives senior managers dynamic performance data and up-to-date public opinion.

Forces fail to routinely give crime prevention and forensic advice

Call handlers should be able to give appropriate advice on preventing crime and preserving evidence during the call. They should consider the [golden hour principle](#), fast-track actions and initial investigation factors. This is a critical period in any investigation. It is a time to secure and preserve evidence that will otherwise be lost. This evidence may have an impact on how well the investigation can progress.

We found call handlers were generally aware of the benefits of giving crime prevention and golden hour forensic advice. But we found staff only gave victims appropriate advice on preserving evidence in 28 percent of the 420 reports we reviewed. This means evidence could potentially be lost or degraded, to the detriment of investigations.

Similarly, staff often miss the chance to give advice on preventing crime. We found call takers offered victims crime prevention advice in only 30 percent of cases. This shows many forces aren't routinely taking opportunities to prevent further crimes.

Some forces give call handling staff information on golden hour evidence preservation as an essential training module. But in some forces staff were unclear whether, or how recently, they had received training.

Recommendation 1

By March 2023, forces should make sure their crime scene management practices adhere to the [authorised professional practice on managing investigations](#) for SAC or provide a rationale for deviating from it. They should also include:

- giving victims timely and appropriate advice during their initial call; and
- applying a risk assessment process such as THRIVE, clearly recording it, and flagging those re-victimised for further support.

The initial policing response

Most forces attend SAC offences within target times

After a crime is reported, forces need to decide whether to deploy resources to attend the scene and, if so, who to deploy to complete the initial investigation. All forces have a deployment policy and use a tier-based approach to grade calls for service. Incidents are graded as:

- emergency response;
- priority response;
- scheduled response; or
- resolution without deployment.

This helps forces prioritise their resources and improve victim satisfaction.

Forces should respond to calls for service within their published timeframes, based on the priority they give the call. Changes to the priority of the call shouldn't happen without a valid and recorded reason. Forces should consider risk and victim vulnerability, as well as other intelligence.

We found in our recent PEEL inspections that forces generally grade SAC appropriately, and that they generally deploy resources to SAC offences in a timely way. Forces assign most deployments to uniformed response officers, who attend the scene, record the crime and carry out the initial investigation. We found that

in 83 percent of the 420 SAC reports we examined, during the initial investigation, forces completed all early lines of inquiry they identified.

Many officers who initially attended then kept ownership of the investigation, with few crimes being passed on to specialist investigators. We make further comment on this practice below, in [How forces allocate investigations](#).

Without effective evidence preservation, forces set themselves up to fail

Better-performing forces recognise the value of initial advice and have adopted the standards set out in the National Policing Prevention Strategy, recently agreed by the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#). We found good practice in Merseyside Police, where SAC is a priority. A crime scene investigator (CSI) supervisor triages jobs, and contacts victims directly if necessary to establish potential forensic opportunities.

In some forces, officers attending crime scenes have a good awareness of the golden hour principle and evidence preservation. They receive basic investigative training, with regular refresher training and continuous professional development. This includes opportunities to make the most of evidence from digital capture technologies such as doorbell imagery. Operational vehicles are equipped with the right materials, such as cordon tape, bollards, signs, evidence bags, labels and sealing tape. These forces require officers to have [body-worn video](#) switched on at incidents to support evidence gathering. And attending officers generally receive good support from criminal investigation departments (CIDs) or other specialist investigation teams. This might include attending scenes for serious crimes and giving specialist advice.

Most forces have a crime scene attendance policy that informs their deployment of a CSI according to crime type, threat, harm and risk. This guidance usually includes a flow chart for burglary, theft and other crime scenes. Forensic supervisors are also available to advise on matters that need their professional judgement.

Most forces' policies include a managed and flexible approach to forensic deployment. But we found some forces don't have enough forensic staff to routinely consider deploying them to burglary as a priority. They prioritise their limited forensic capacity in favour of high-harm crimes, such as serious assault and rape. For example, in one force a policy on laboratory submissions prioritises only high-risk/high-harm categories. This means the force doesn't always effectively investigate residential burglary, robbery and indecent images. We also found forces sometimes take neighbourhood officers away from their duties for considerable periods so they can protect crime scenes. This is due to delays in CSIs attending.

While we understand the need to prioritise high-harm crimes, some forces don't have enough CSIs or forensic experts, and this means they can't investigate and solve SAC well enough.

How forces allocate investigations

Forces lack investigative capacity and capability to effectively tackle SAC

[The Government has committed to recruiting an additional 20,000 police officers](#) in England and Wales by 31 March 2023. This has begun to reverse the reduction in police officer numbers, which had been taking place since 2010. [Data as of March 2022](#) shows many forces have exceeded their targets for the first two years of the programme. Of the total planned recruitment, 68 percent has so far been achieved.

Forces need to respond to both high-harm and volume crimes with finite investigative resources. This means they often need to use their investigators flexibly to meet competing demands. Although forces have prioritised uplift resources across many frontline roles, we found that too many forces lack the capacity and capability to effectively investigate SAC. This applies to uniformed officers, CID and specialist investigative departments.

Investigators are trained and accredited under the [professionalising investigations programme \(PIP\)](#) through a series of four levels, all of which include crime prevention as a foundation to investigation. The PIP 1 level is training to conduct priority and volume crime investigations, and PIP 2 level is for serious and complex investigations. Burglary, theft and robbery are classified as volume crime, but many also have significant harm and risk factors. Assessing threat, harm and risk can help forces decide how to allocate investigations.

[In 2016 we identified a substantial national shortage of qualified PIP 2 detectives and investigators](#). Although all forces have developed plans to increase numbers, gaps in capacity remain in some functions. Many [force management statements](#) cite detectives' high workloads as a problem of considerable concern. In some cases, this affects their motivation and wellbeing.

Forces take different approaches to the type of investigator they allocate to an SAC following the initial response. It can depend on what crimes are a priority for the force. But the national investigator shortage is generally a factor. Some forces, following the initial response, allocate residential burglary and robbery investigations to qualified PIP 2 detectives. They are usually in CID or other specialist teams, particularly if the crime is linked to another complex and serious crime. However, we found capacity issues in many specialist investigation teams. For example, in one force the burglary team gave no investigative support unless there was a known suspect.

Many forces told us that due to the national detective shortage and variations in funding, they can't assign PIP 2 detectives to investigate SAC. Instead, they need to use those detectives for priorities such as child abuse and rape. As a result, some forces' policy is to allocate burglaries and some personal robberies to PIP 1 investigators, usually uniformed response officers. We recognise this is sometimes necessary. But without the right support, this approach can result in poorer-quality investigations as officers and staff juggle competing demands. This is particularly the case in response policing teams, where officers are more likely to be called away to deal with emergency incidents.

Forces need sustainable mentoring and training strategies

We found the relative inexperience of newly trained officers is also affecting investigations. [Recent statistics](#) show 31 percent of officers in England and Wales have fewer than five years' service. Of these, 27 percent have less than one year of service. This poses significant challenges for policing.

We found that many newly trained or direct entry detectives carry out high volumes of investigations without any experience in making arrests, building casefiles or attending court. Some detective supervisors told us they mentor new officers to help them develop these essential skills. Other supervisors said mentoring detracts from how well they can supervise investigations and results in excessive working hours to meet deadlines. Some forces have assigned the role of tutor to experienced detectives in specialist investigation departments. But many of these detectives told us they get little respite between trainees, and that the requirement means they are less able to efficiently carry out their own investigations.

Supervisors in several forces told us they are concerned direct entry detectives don't receive enough training. Some supervisors said those detectives are so overwhelmed with the volume and expectations of the work, they leave the job. And some senior detectives told us they arrange extra training to help overcome concerns. These include sessions on golden hour crime scene considerations, automatic number plate recognition database searches, information from telecoms officers, and new rules on the disclosure of case files.

In frontline response policing, tutor constables said they felt stretched. Some also said they felt out of their depth, feeling pressured to take on the tutor role as soon as they finished their two-year probationary period.

The national detective shortage is affecting SAC outcomes and officer wellbeing

In several forces we found specialist teams had been disbanded. This means CID officers face higher demand, and are now responsible for rape and serious sexual assault investigations, as well as burglary and robbery investigations. One CID officer we spoke with felt overwhelmed by their work. And our inspection confirmed a lack of departmental capacity and direction. For example, after one report of domestic burglary, officers identified a suspect, but the investigation was still open after two years. The victim in this case had complained about the lack of progress. Another open investigation being carried out by this officer involved a knife-point robbery. An arrest had taken place, but, despite an inspector's review, the investigation was still incomplete 11 months later.

Although these examples aren't typical across all forces, we found that officers in CID roles often work excessive amounts of overtime to cope with demand. This can adversely impact their wellbeing. Many officers feel disengaged, undervalued and frustrated that they can't give the quality of service victims deserve.

Forces also sometimes allocate SAC investigations to desk-based investigators. This is particularly the case when there are no identified vulnerability factors, and the initial assessment suggests there is no suspect or there is limited value in deploying an officer to the scene. And forces sometimes allocate SAC investigations to

neighbourhood officers, particularly investigations that need long-term problem-solving and partnership support.

Although allocating SAC to a specialist or dedicated team might be preferable, the national detective shortage is a significant barrier. Another consideration is a relatively young in-service workforce, many of whom are overwhelmed by the volume – and, sometimes, the seriousness – of the crimes forces ask them to investigate. To help overcome these challenges, some forces have crime allocation policies that encourage investigators to problem solve with other teams, focusing on the needs of the victim and giving positive results.

Good practice: victim-centred crime allocation and collaborative results

In Norfolk Constabulary, the crime allocation policy means the force allocates investigations using effective processes based on an assessment of threat, risk and harm. These allow the force to investigate a wide range of crimes. The policy follows the principles of a professional victim-centred discussion and providing the right service, rather than being prescriptive about who will eventually own the investigation.

Merseyside Police's Operation Castle is a publicly branded burglary project. The force uses a model that scores crimes based on type, complexity, threat, harm and risk. It allocates burglaries that score 75 with associated threat, risk and harm to the Operation Castle investigation team, and those below the threshold to other investigators. The Operation Castle team works on series of burglaries, which helps the force spot the travelling nature of some criminals. The force has developed strategies to increase community intelligence. Departments within the force also share specialist assets, such as covert surveillance operatives and technologies. In 2019 the force recorded a 25 percent decrease in domestic burglaries. And in 2021 detectives from the team worked with Lancashire and Cheshire police on an investigation into theft offences involving keyless cars. It resulted in the sentencing of five people for more than 23 years in total. The relevant organised crime group is thought to have been responsible for 162 theft and burglary offences.

Investigation standards

Too many investigations have insufficient supervision

All crimes should be managed through a clear investigation plan, which identifies:

- the investigation's objectives;
- the most appropriate lines of inquiry;
- the victim's needs; and
- the impact on the wider community (when necessary).

Supervisors have a critical role in directing and overseeing investigation plans. This should include scrutinising updates, guiding new lines of inquiry, and making sure the plan is proportionate and effective, so it meets the investigation's objectives.

We were concerned to find that in a third of all the SAC cases we examined in our PEEL inspections, there wasn't enough evidence of good-quality and intrusive supervision of investigation plans. Supervisory updates were sometimes out of date and lacked detail and scrutiny.

Many supervisors told us they are under pressure to meet the competing demands of their role. One supervisor explained they didn't have time to add value or direction to investigations. And that person wasn't aware of any guidance on how regularly they should carry out checks. Many said they struggle to give monthly updates to investigations because they need to prioritise allocating crimes. We also found that some supervisors carry a crime investigation caseload themselves, which further detracts from how well they can supervise investigations.

A lack of capability and capacity hinders SAC investigations

In April 2021, we stated in our [Policing in the pandemic](#) report that backlogs in the examination of forensic exhibits and digital media had worsened.

The demand for digital evidence retrieval is growing, and forces have responded by:

- increasing the size of the teams that do this work;
- outsourcing; and
- introducing digital hardware kiosks to remove the need for formal laboratory processes.

But some forces have struggled to keep pace with demand and industry standards. We found that basic examination of mobile phones continues to delay investigations, in some cases by several months. In many forces there aren't enough officers trained and available to use kiosks that allow downloads from mobile phones.

Some members of the workforce told us forensic submission processes are bureaucratic, and this delays file submissions to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). We found evidence that in some forces fingerprint identifications can take more than six months to return results. In some cases, this rules out any potential prosecution in a magistrates' court, due to statutory time limits.

Later this year, we are due to publish the report from our thematic inspection of digital forensics. But it is clear many forces would benefit from reviewing their investigators' access to remote forensic triage equipment, and making sure sufficient people are trained to use it. This would help support timely SAC investigation.

Disclosure requirements are causing additional pressures

The [Director's guidance on charging – sixth edition \(DG6\)](#) came into effect on 31 December 2020. It coincided with significant changes to disclosure processes, set out in the [Attorney General's guidelines on disclosure 2020](#). Disclosure means giving the defence copies of, or access to, all material capable of undermining the prosecution case and/or assisting the defence. DG6 aims to ensure cases referred to the CPS for a charging decision contain the right material and information so prosecutors can make immediate charging decisions.

High-quality case files and robust disclosure processes are vital. But in many forces we found evidence the changes brought about by both guidance documents are putting additional pressures on investigators and supervisors. Some officers told us that even when a suspect admits an offence or indicates a guilty plea, presenting a full case file of evidence can include several hours of viewing and preparing CCTV and body-worn video evidence. And some supervisors told us DG6 feedback from evidence review officers and CPS caseworkers on the same case was often inconsistent. They said that standardising requirements would make it easier to progress cases and reduce duplication of work.

Many forces continue to work hard to make sure their officers and staff have the training and skills they need to meet disclosure requirements. For example, Lancashire Constabulary has trained more than 100 disclosure champions and has appointed specialist disclosure case-file builders.

CPS interim charging guidance introduced during the pandemic is delaying justice

In our 2021 report [Policing in the pandemic](#), we found some forces said it was more difficult to get charging decisions from the CPS, other than when they wanted to remand a suspect. In May 2022 the Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates published a progress report, [The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the criminal justice system](#). The report says that now restrictions have eased, some parts of the system aren't responding quickly enough to reverse changes or restore performance to pre-pandemic levels. This is largely due to a lack of staff capacity.

Individual partners in the criminal justice system have taken action to improve operational recovery. But during our inspections, many police personnel told us they felt frustrated that [interim CPS guidance](#) to overcome pandemic-related delays was still in place. In some areas this causes delays in decision-making, exposing victims of SAC to greater risk of repeat victimisation and leaving suspects on bail for longer. Without prompt consequences, some SAC offenders may not be deterred from further offending. Delays can also affect how well victims can recollect events and how willing they are to attend court.

The joint inspectorates' progress report calls for a co-ordinated whole-system plan, particularly as the backlog of cases was in a parlous state before the pandemic. It warns that recovery is still elusive and whole-system recovery will take a lot longer than initially anticipated.

Many forces need to do more to give victims a better service

The [Code of practice for victims of crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\)](#) is a set of 12 minimum standards that must be provided to victims of crime. These include:

- the right to be given information, including updates;
- the right to be referred to support services;
- enhanced rights for vulnerable and intimidated victims;
- the right to be assessed for special measures for giving evidence; and
- the right to receive information about compensation.

We were disappointed to find that in the burglary files we reviewed, there was only 71 percent compliance with the Victims' Code. This means nearly 30 percent of burglary victims may not have been given their entitlements. And most forces routinely failed to carry out a victim needs assessment for burglary and theft crimes.

Good practice: improving the victim experience

In better-performing forces we found examples of police personnel going beyond the minimum standards to consider victims' needs. In Hertfordshire Constabulary, investigators refer some vulnerable victims to an older person liaison officer. This officer visits elderly residential burglary victims who may have been targeted due to age and have experienced significant financial loss, or whose vulnerability puts them at risk of exploitation. The officer also works with victims of other offences, taking into account the unique circumstances of the victim.

Forces are accountable for the decisions they make on the closure and disposal of reported crime, which should follow the [National Crime Recording Standard \(NCRS\)](#). This includes recording closure outcome codes. It should also reflect victims' concerns and views, making sure they are consulted and made aware of the closure of their reported crime.

During our 2021/22 PEEL inspections, we found that just 13 of the 20 forces inspected before the end of April 2022 could show sufficient evidence in their recorded outcomes on consulting burglary victims and effectively recording their views.

Most forces have given officers a good level of training to ensure audit and scrutiny of outcome 15 under the NCRS (where the victim does support police action but there are evidential difficulties) and outcome 16 (where the case is closed due to evidential difficulties as the victim doesn't support police action).

But many forces didn't routinely audit and scrutinise other disposal outcomes, so they can't be confident they understand what drives some outcomes, whether they are appropriate and what improvements might be needed. We identified occasions where some supervisors used inappropriate closure codes. The reasons for this are unclear but may include a lack of training. This was particularly the case in lesser-used outcomes such as outcome 17 (prosecution not possible as the statutory time limit has expired), outcome 21 (further investigation isn't in the public interest) and outcome 22 (further action not taken due to diversionary, educational or intervention activity.)

Recommendation 2

By March 2023, all forces should ensure SAC investigations are subject to effective supervision and direction. This should focus on:

- making sure supervisors have the capability and capacity to meaningfully supervise investigations;
- making sure investigations meet the necessary standard and achieve suitable outcomes that consider the voice or opinion of victims;
- applying investigative outcome codes appropriately; and
- complying with the Victims' Code and recording evidence of compliance.

Some forces are using out-of-court disposals to tackle the root causes of SAC

We found some forces are using more [out-of-court disposals \(OOCs\)](#) as an approach to tackling SAC. These are responses to crime that the police can administer as an alternative to prosecution. The adult OOCs are:

- simple cautions;
- conditional cautions;
- penalty notices for disorder (PNDs);
- cannabis and khat warnings; and
- community resolutions.

These disposals can be a valuable tool when tackling low-level crime, representing a proportionate and effective response to offending. They focus on the victim's and public's needs, while avoiding criminalising those who admit guilt and are willing to take action to stop offending.

OOCs are generally not widely used as an outcome for SAC (see above, [Defining the problem](#)). But there is evidence that some forces are starting to use OOCs for SAC to address the root causes of offending.

Innovative practice: using OOCs to tackle root causes

In anticipation of the enacted [change in legislation](#) in the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#), South Yorkshire Police has taken steps to make sure all eligible adult cautions have an element of condition attached. These conditions tackle the causes of offending and help bring about compliance. This year, the force introduced bespoke interventions to support female offenders and offenders who are veterans of the armed forces. It will take a trauma-informed approach to reviewing their needs. Examples of some other options already in place include interventions to support offenders with issues relating to substance misuse, health, mental health and learning disabilities.

The force has also produced extensive guidance for its officers and staff, using a digital interactive outcomes assistant. This gives a series of building blocks to support decision-making. It helps make sure disposals are ethical and victim led. And, when the victim is reluctant to engage, it helps make sure the disposal is what the public would expect. There is also a library of links to help practitioners and a tool in app form to help with decision-making when it comes to setting appropriate conditions.

The force's decisions are also subject to independent scrutiny by a panel made up of CPS professionals, youth offending team members, magistrates and victim support. It takes a random dip sample of OOCs and the panel assesses them against the rules and the outcome given. This informs training and guidance, and it helps maintain victim confidence.

Good practice: using OOCs to tackle root causes

Operation Checkpoint is a Durham Constabulary deferred prosecution scheme designed to prevent reoffending. It works with perpetrators to address the underlying causes of their offending, and theft, burglary and drugs offences can be considered. If selected for the scheme, the offender agrees to a four-month contract. This includes a commitment not to offend, taking part in restorative activity, and engaging in voluntary or community work. Successful completion results in no prosecution; failure to engage results in prosecution for the original offence and the court being told about the offender's failure to engage. Independent evaluation shows those who complete the scheme are less likely to reoffend.

Our findings: The prevention and deterrence of serious acquisitive crime

The best way to stop crime is to prevent it happening in the first place. But crime prevention isn't the sole responsibility of the police. Forces need to work effectively in partnership with other agencies.

The NPCC's national policing prevention strategy says forces must address underlying causes of crime and use partnership-oriented problem-solving. To achieve the aims of preventative policing, forces need to be good at the three main types of prevention:

- Primary prevention aims to stop problems before they happen. It typically means strengthening communities and social structures.
- Secondary prevention targets people at high risk of offending or reoffending, to divert them from involvement in crime. For example, this might be through integrated offender management (IOM) schemes.
- Tertiary prevention means reducing or preventing existing and reoccurring problems by tackling the vulnerability of the victim or location. This is usually through evidence-based problem-solving.

In this section we consider how well forces are working with partners to reduce SAC through prevention measures.

Offender management

Forces are embedding the new approach to IOM, but there are capacity issues

Reoffending rates for SAC are high. And most SAC offenders who are caught are known prolific offenders. IOM was introduced in 2009 as a cross-agency approach to crime and reoffending. It allows the police, Probation Service and other partner agencies to prioritise and jointly manage the most prolific and problematic offenders. Our [joint thematic inspection of IOM](#), published in 2020, found it had in many areas lost its way, and that it had a low profile within forces and partnership working arrangements.

In 2020 the Ministry of Justice and Home Office published a new [IOM strategy](#), which seeks to manage offenders through three groups known as fixed, flex and free cohorts. Forces use a common methodology to identify and score offenders for inclusion in each cohort. SAC offenders should comprise a large proportion of the fixed cohort. (The target is 60 percent.) Whereas the fixed cohort criteria are rigid, the flex cohort allows for professional judgement. It may also include SAC offenders who

have low or medium risk-of-reoffending scores, but police and the Probation Service judge them as needing management. The free cohort is locally defined.

We found most forces have a good understanding of the new IOM arrangements. Forces are using the new framework and contributing to the national steering group as the model becomes more established. Some forces told us they had always kept a focus on SAC offenders in their IOM schemes, staying true to the original objective of the schemes. But the formal inclusion of SAC offenders means all forces should focus on pathways out of reoffending, as well as actively supervising desistance (the process of abstaining from crime by those with a previous pattern of offending).

Including SAC offenders in the IOM fixed cohort has meant many forces have had to reorganise structures or invest more resources into offender management teams. The size of IOM cohorts is determined locally by the chief constable, head of probation and the local Criminal Justice Board. But in some forces, we found SAC caseloads affect how well IOM teams can effectively manage other priority offenders. Capacity issues also limit how well some forces can carry out proactive work to identify breaches and further offences.

Measuring the effectiveness of IOM is important to help those managing schemes understand the value of investment and the effect it has on reducing crime and improving outcomes for offenders. Impact evaluation is part of the national IOM strategy, but this isn't a substitute for local evaluation. Local IOM schemes should collect good-quality data to monitor their performance. They should also carry out impact and process evaluations to continually improve their approach.

In April 2021, IOM schemes received operational guidance and access to an evaluation toolkit. This means that at the time of our inspection, forces may not yet have had a full year of performance data. We encourage forces to incorporate IOM performance into their own strategic performance boards.

Several IOM schemes have taken part in the Government's acquisitive crime GPS tagging project, which started in April 2021. It aims to tag up to 26,000 extra offenders over a three-year period. In Hampshire Constabulary, one of the pathfinder forces, the scheme uses electronic monitoring for offenders released on licence in the fixed cohort and who have served sentences of 12 months or more for robbery, burglary or vehicle crime. The electronic tag tracks the location of the offender and the force can share data with the Ministry of Justice to check their location in relation to a report of crime. It is too early to measure long-term outcomes, but this technology could help reduce crime and bring offenders to justice.

In our PEEL inspections, other pathfinder forces also showed positive examples of some of the most prolific acquisitive criminals abstaining from crime. The project also presented intelligence opportunities to target and secure convictions of those who carried on being criminally active.

A few forces have already shown achievements in reducing burglary through IOM. Bedfordshire Police, for example, reported an 82 percent reduction in burglary offences by its cohort in 2020/21. Derbyshire Constabulary also evaluated its IOM performance and recorded a reduction in offending of its cohorts by 33 and 53 percent in the county and city, respectively.

Some forces have taken positive steps to monitor IOM performance at both strategic and operational levels. For example, in South Yorkshire we saw that IOM is fully integrated into the force's THRIVE risk management meetings. This includes:

- monitoring IOM performance and attrition from the scheme;
- managing outstanding suspects;
- carrying out compliance checks for those on bail or subject to gang injunctions; and
- policing SAC hotspots.

Partnership working is critical, but a lack of co-location can be a barrier

To support desistance, it is crucial that IOM schemes offer access to rehabilitation pathways and services that can address underlying causes of criminal behaviour. Examples are support with housing, employment, benefits, drugs, alcohol and mental health. These have all been identified as primary factors of criminality in those who commit SAC. Rehabilitation pathways give significant partnership opportunities to support crime prevention, and they should include behaviour change programmes and the commission of other practical support.

Co-location of IOM schemes (where IOM staff from different agencies share a single building) provides many benefits, one of which is rapid information sharing between partners to effectively manage offenders. In 2020 we highlighted in our joint thematic inspection of IOM a concern that some schemes were no longer co-located. More recently we found that a few forces are still not co-located with their IOM partners. This may have a negative impact as they work to embed the new model. But where this is due to geographical challenges, some IOM schemes are making better use of virtual team meetings to try to mitigate some of the disadvantages.

We have found good examples of partnership working in some forces. In Merseyside Police, IOM is centrally managed, but the teams are co-located with partners across five district sites. This facilitates rapid information sharing. There are good levels of partnership commitment and investment by public health departments. This means professionals working on the scheme understand the needs of offenders, such as drug misuse support, through joint visits before those offenders leave prison. The scheme focuses on a variety of aspects. For example, team members ask the offender why they offended, and they encourage them to consider the feelings of those affected. In one of the five districts in Merseyside, offenders can also access a mentoring service given by reformed and trained ex-offenders.

Homelessness is another significant factor in repeat offending, particularly for those who repeatedly serve SAC prison sentences and misuse drugs and alcohol. In Hampshire, the police and crime commissioner funds support workers in three dedicated IOM houses. Under a strict policy of no drugs or alcohol, residents work to a timetable of activities with support workers, who help identify the causes behind their cycle of offending. Residents then receive support to help them gain the education, skills and practical support they need to make positive progress. In one [case study](#), an offender, who repeatedly committed acquisitive crime to fund a drug addiction, developed skills and qualifications, as well as securing full-time employment. This led

to them securing a tenancy and becoming free from addiction, and has given them a foundation to re-establish access to their child.

Some forces recognise the benefits of a joined-up approach to tackling organised crime and SAC

Organised crime is a driver of SAC. During our PEEL inspections we found variations in how well forces identify and manage the links between SAC and serious organised crime (SOC). However, we found some good examples.

For the past two years, Gloucestershire Constabulary has had an operations team that deals with SAC as well as SOC offending, including county lines and drugs crimes. The team works closely with the force's investigation team and carries out the 'pursue' activities of [4Ps](#) plans.

Merseyside Police shares information with partner agencies to tackle complex crimes, making sure it has a co-ordinated approach to people, places and problems. In one example, the actions of the neighbourhood teams, operations and intelligence departments, working closely with British Transport Police, helped to identify youth suspects in a series of car key burglaries. These suspects were linked to organised crime group (OCG) offenders, and the force established that these vulnerable youngsters were coerced into committing the crimes. A multi-agency approach, including education and social care departments, worked to safeguard the individuals and close down the push-and-pull factors that influenced the criminal behaviour. This let the police focus on tackling the organised criminal elements.

The Government's [Beating crime plan](#) recognises that much of the harm associated with SOC manifests in communities as homicide, serious violence, neighbourhood crime and street-level drug supply. The Government is tackling this with a pilot strategy known as Clear Hold Build (CHB), an approach that aims to make sustainable reductions in SOC and related crime.

Innovative practice: reclaiming Bradford Moor

Since 2020 West Yorkshire Police has piloted Clear Hold Build (CHB) in the ward of Bradford Moor. The phases of CHB are:

- **Clear:** interventions that target OCG members, their networks, business interests, criminality and spheres of influence.
- **Hold:** interventions such as disrupting known criminals, diverting those on the cusp of criminality, education in schools, high-profile patrols by police and partner agencies, and community clear-up projects to consolidate and stabilise the Clear phase.
- **Build:** a single, whole-system approach to delivering community-empowered interventions that tackle drivers of crime, exploitation of vulnerabilities, and geographic places where harm takes place. This includes continuing communication strategies, training and employment opportunities, creation of green spaces, and outreach to support and empower vulnerable people.

Prior to this intervention, residents described perceptions of lawlessness in the streets and feeling intimidated by the “blatant drug dealing”. Other residents felt scared to report crimes because of a fear of reprisal and a lack of trust in police. Formal evaluation hasn’t yet taken place, but interventions and outcomes include:

- An intelligence-led project called Breaking the Cycle reached 853 young people with a 92 percent engagement rate.
- Targeted youth work took place 24/7 when necessary to divert young people into programmes of activity, such as using volunteers from the private sector to train young people in motor mechanical skills.
- There was a staggering reduction of burglary offences in the ward from 877 in August 2020 to 0 in October 2021.
- There was a 27 percent reduction in the severity of crime types during the same period, as measured by the [crime severity score](#).

The early pilot findings are set out in a report by academics at Loughborough University. It shows that CHB needs continuous monitoring, adaptation and learning, and that reactive policing on its own doesn’t work. CHB doesn’t stand alone from other crime reduction methods. Rather, it is complementary to the 4Ps, adding particular value to sustainable prevention. The pilot is due to be extended to several other forces in 2022.

In 2019, responding to the links between SOC and SAC, the NPCC developed [Opal](#), a national intelligence unit for serious organised acquisitive crime that affects two or more force areas. The Opal team identifies and assesses active investigations across the whole of the United Kingdom, and debriefs successful law enforcement and partner activity. This helps all forces improve professional practice through evidence-based problem-solving approaches to organised crime.

Crime reduction approaches

Problem-solving is a cultural imperative

Tertiary crime prevention through problem-solving approaches involves police working with a wide range of partners. Structured problem-solving models that focus on understanding the root cause of the crime and vulnerability can achieve [sustainable results](#). But they need an understanding of threat and risk. This comes from effective and informative analysis, which goes on to direct activity.

To effectively reduce crime, forces need to embed a problem-solving mindset in their culture. Officers and staff should consider:

- why a crime took place;
- what can be done to reduce the harm caused; and
- how to tackle the drivers and vulnerabilities in the physical environment.

It is crucial that police personnel understand how this applies to their roles, no matter what capacity or specialism they work in.

Most forces train officers in problem-solving methodologies such as OSARA, the most widely used model in policing. It stands for objective, scanning, analysis, response and assessment. It helps forces identify issues in communities and develop solutions to recurring problems such as SAC.

Although crime prevention is a priority in most forces, we found that many have struggled to build a problem-solving culture across departments. Some of this is related to training priorities and delays caused by the pandemic.

We found problem-solving and crime prevention tactics often used by neighbourhood officers are a main training requirement. But forces shouldn't just see crime prevention and problem-solving as a neighbourhood policing activity. We found many officers outside neighbourhood policing, such as investigators, don't have a good enough understanding of the relationship between crime investigation and prevention – and, most importantly, how this applies to their role. Crime prevention and problem-solving are often sub-structures within neighbourhood policing directorates. This may be reinforcing the view that they are less relevant to specialist investigators.

We are encouraged to find that some forces, such as Lancashire Constabulary, see crime prevention as their main activity. They incorporate prevention, partnership working and problem-solving into relevant policies, practices and training for all police personnel. Some forces are also realigning their models to make sure crime prevention is integrated as a golden thread that runs through force structures, rather than being a standalone function. And relevant training now features in many forces. To help forces meet a national standard, the College of Policing will roll out national problem-solving training later in 2022.

More needs to be done to evaluate activity and share good practice

Many forces have invested in creating the right structures to support effective crime prevention through problem-solving. This includes:

- specialist crime prevention tactical advisors;
- a library of good practice, with good links to evidence-based practice; and
- a shared database to manage problems across multiple partnerships.

But we found some forces fail to routinely assess and evaluate problem-solving plans, despite having access to the right training and, in some cases, problem-solving tactical advisors. This means some forces can't be confident they are investing in the right approaches, and some don't have a good enough understanding of what works.

An example we saw involved an urban street gang committing a range of SAC offences. As an area priority, the force was monitoring these offences monthly in a tasking meeting set by the local inspector. The officer who owned the problem-solving plan ensured there had been a good analysis of the crimes, which resulted in several individuals being identified. The force assigned various tasks to officers and partners, and it monitored those tasks in monthly meetings with input from the IOM team. But despite the serious nature of some of the offending, there appeared to be little liaison between the officer who owned the problem-solving plan and the detectives responsible for some of the investigations. And the force didn't tell its SOC team about the operation. There wasn't a good enough understanding of what would constitute success to formally close the problem-solving plan. And there were no measures to assess and evaluate it by.

Lancashire Constabulary is improving its understanding of problem-oriented policing (POP) plans through police constable degree apprenticeships. These officers evaluate POP plans as their third-year degree project, ensuring a consistent approach to evaluation. It helps identify learning and best practice, and it embeds problem-solving as a priority in the future workforce.

South Wales Police has eight crime reduction tactical advisors, who work closely with neighbourhood teams on POP plans. Tactical advisors have quarterly meetings to discuss crime trends and share good practice for reducing crime such as catalytic converter thefts.

Many forces make good use of evidence-based crime prevention approaches

There is a growing body of evidence about what works to reduce SAC. The College of Policing website gives access to extensive crime reduction resources, including a [toolkit of potential interventions](#). There are eight evidence-based interventions to tackle burglary, of which six are listed as having an overall reduction effect on crime.

Evidence shows cocooning is an effective burglary prevention activity, which reduces the chances of repeat victimisation and the targeting of immediate neighbours. It involves giving crime prevention advice to residents of burgled properties, as well as surrounding addresses. In our inspections, we found good examples of cocooning in many forces.

Through Humberside Police's Operation Gallant, response officers attend burglaries to carry out golden hour enquiries. Police community support officers (PCSOs) then provide cocooning support in the immediate neighbourhood. They revisit the victim and make door-to-door enquiries to raise awareness. They give reassurance and advice, and increase community intelligence through networks such as Humber Talking. This is a police and public information exchange messaging system, which helps the force better understand the impact of crime on the community. Humberside Police is also working with academics to develop a predictive policing app to help identify where the next crime location could be, based on a predictive algorithm. The force hopes this will help it give targeted crime prevention advice through further cocooning in predicted hotspot areas.

We found many forces use hotspot policing well. This is where forces focus resources and activity on the places where most crimes are taking place, or where emerging patterns of crime are occurring. Some forces make good use of this tactic and can show reductions in burglary in their hotspot areas. They use effective reduction plans, monitor them through strong governance arrangements, and put in place interventions supported by community intelligence.

South Yorkshire Police calculated the cost of a single burglary to the force as £530, and the cost of police intervention in a hotspot is £556. So, if the force's activity prevents one burglary, proactive hotspot intervention pays for itself, when also considering the costs of reoffending and offender management. Understanding the policing and social costs of SAC can give a compelling argument for action. South Yorkshire Police analysed its problem-solving interventions in burglary hotspots and is confident they contributed to a 31 percent decrease in burglaries in 2021, compared to 2019. Though many forces also saw noticeable reductions during the pandemic, the force identified the cause of its success was engaging with homeowners in the hotspots to prevent further crimes. It is also publishing its GPS foot patrol activity on its neighbourhood media streams to reassure and maintain community confidence.

Good practice: problem-oriented policing

In Humberside Police, neighbourhood teams work with partners to create problem-oriented policing (POP) plans to reduce the demand in hotspots. They direct the POP plans towards those people who call the police most frequently and those who create the highest demand for officers.

Each neighbourhood team has mapped its areas to identify not just high demand but also hard-to-reach communities, who may be less likely to report crime and have lower levels of trust and confidence in police. They create links with key members of the public and enhance their local knowledge. The force further develops this through its Human Library, whereby representatives from diverse communities are invited into local police stations to speak to members of the force on local issues and raise cultural awareness.

The force has a demand profile for its neighbourhood officers and staff that includes OSARA problem-solving, targeting repeat offenders, supporting repeat victims, addressing the needs of repeat callers, and working with partners to support the community's needs. They have carried out enhanced cocooning and put in place preventative measures near houses that have been burgled. They have also introduced the My Community Alert system, which allows each neighbourhood policing inspector to access the public's responses to live concerns.

We found other good examples of crime reduction projects forces are using to tackle SAC, including:

- West Yorkshire Police is piloting a Home Office-funded project that uses predictive analytics to target resources to burglary hotspots and areas of volume crime.
- North Wales Police has invested in a two-way community messaging system that allows officers to alert neighbourhoods to crime, and invites users to share information on their concerns and priorities. It includes multilingual message settings, and the force can explore demographic profiles to better understand and meet communities' needs.
- In South Wales, an OCG was targeting high-value campervans left vulnerable at surf sites on the coast. Problem-solving at the local level by neighbourhood police officers with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and Her Majesty's Coastguard resulted in them installing a locker system and supplying floatation devices, which solved the issue and prevented further crime.
- In hotspot areas, some forces are using technological solutions such as CCTV doorbells and live GPS tracking of the SIM cards in stolen cars to support investigations. Some forces are using social media to encourage communities to share images of suspicious individuals they capture on doorbell cameras.
- Several forces, including West Mercia Police, Cheshire Constabulary and South Yorkshire Police, use SmartWater. This is an ultraviolet forensic property marking liquid, used to deter burglary and theft in hotspot areas. And West Mercia's We Don't Buy Crime project is designed to improve the links between the force and second-hand dealers. It allows the force to share images of stolen goods directly with dealers and to scan property for SmartWater.

- Police forces and their partners have submitted bids to the Government’s Safer Streets fund, which in 2021/22 focused on reducing SAC. And many forces have made good use of their designing out crime officers. These officers work with partners and local authorities in the early stages of planning to reduce opportunities for crime. Efforts to design out crime in hotspots include installing CCTV, gating off unsafe alleyways and improving lighting.

Good practice: using behavioural science to inform problem-solving

In 2017, many burglary victims in the city of Durham were from the student population. [In collaboration with the University of Huddersfield, Durham Constabulary tackled this problem through an academic project](#) with a behavioural science approach. Evidence suggested students were vulnerable as this was often their first time away from the family home. Many reported offences involved insecure property, suggesting students weren’t behaving responsibly. Changing this behaviour was therefore the focus.

The theory was applied to the 12 streets with the highest number of burglaries. The force developed a survey to raise awareness of the high burglary rate and carried out face-to-face surveys with student occupiers to highlight vulnerabilities.

Across the 12 streets, the force saw a reduction of burglary by 83 percent during the 2017/18 period, compared to the previous year. They also saw an overall reduction of 27 percent in burglary across Durham City in the same period. This shows the number of burglary victims in those 12 streets significantly reduced without any displacement to other areas in Durham. The solve rate of burglary during that time also increased from 14 percent in 2016/17 to 20 percent in 2017/18. Several forces have begun to replicate this practice as part of their problem-solving methods.

Forces aren’t consistently using early intervention as a primary crime prevention approach

A broad body of academic evidence, including [research by the Early Intervention Foundation \(EIF\)](#), suggests disadvantaged backgrounds, trauma and adverse childhood experiences often contribute to the criminal behaviours of repeat offenders. Early intervention can help prevent those who have had difficult early-life experiences from being drawn into crime. Sir Thomas Winsor’s [2021 State of Policing](#) report highlighted the value of early intervention in prevention, as well as evidence-based models of crime prevention.

The EIF defines early intervention as “taking action as soon as possible to tackle problems for children and families before they become more difficult to reverse”. Forces need to carry out this work together with other agencies and have a commitment from them.

In our PEEL inspections, we were pleased to see more forces recognising the value of early intervention as a primary approach to preventing SAC, and transitioning to

new prevention and intervention models. But we found the use of early intervention is inconsistent. Too often, we found there was no clear early intervention strategy.

In some forces, early intervention isn't clearly defined. This means there is no clear understanding of what constitutes success. We saw forces use the concept of early intervention in PCSO training, showing them that focusing on early intervention actions can prevent the need for enforcement. But beyond that, the action PCSOs take is open to interpretation. A good force takes a more comprehensive approach, with a strategy that clearly defines:

- what early intervention is;
- the force's aims;
- what resources are available;
- how the force can use early intervention; and
- what should constitute a positive partnership response.

Good practice: early intervention training

North Wales Police has taken a thematic approach to improving the knowledge of its workforce through an early intervention programme. The force has delivered training to 1,100 frontline officers, including neighbourhood policing teams, response, CID, and 300 staff from partner organisations. This was delivered as a one-day training package and covered legislation and research, systems, referrals processes, tools, and resources available from each local authority. Examples and case studies were used with a performance framework to assess uptake. Three early intervention digital modules have been developed to support ongoing learning and development together with an additional e-learning module which has been embedded into training.

We found some positive examples of forces working with partner agencies on early intervention projects, including:

- educational resources and programmes of age-appropriate lessons for schools on topics such as crime prevention, personal safety, sexting, and respect for women and girls. These approaches can help safeguard young people, address the concerns of bystanders to crimes that may be in danger of becoming normalised, and help bring about positive changes in attitude, behaviour and moral citizenship;
- PCSOs working in local authorities' early-help hubs;
- mental health triage services and trauma-informed approaches to diversion in police custody units. Some forces are using these approaches to reduce the likelihood of some young people being drawn further into SAC and other related crime; and
- Edge of Care, a project that identifies and addresses the risk factors associated with children on the edge of the care system.

Most forces analyse data effectively to support crime prevention

Good data analysis is fundamental to reducing SAC. Forces need to analyse their own data, and that of partners, to establish high demand, as well as vulnerable locations, people and suspects, including repeat victims. They must use the results of this analysis to support their prevention approach.

We found some forces make good use of data analysis to track daily SAC trends. They use this analysis to direct hotspot patrols, especially where the intelligence has identified areas that might be at risk of multiple burglaries. Outcomes from this approach include burglary and drug arrests, as well as less reoffending.

Progressive forces take a comprehensive approach to their IT strategies, so they meet current and future needs. Many invest in collaborative platforms and some make good use of newer technologies to innovate. For example, Northamptonshire Police has recently developed its prevention and intervention strategy with a five-to-ten-year delivery plan. It is a radical whole-system approach, involving the force and local authorities. The aim is to move to a single co-ordinated data inventory that contains highly detailed information. The force is also reviewing the cases of 842 people coming into the criminal justice system for the first time. It aims to better understand where prevention and intervention opportunities could improve outcomes.

All forces have access to the Police National Database (PND), an information management system that allows police to manage and share intelligence and operational information. It helps to prevent and detect crime and make communities safer. The PND lets police search, access and share information electronically, overcoming artificial geographical and jurisdictional boundaries. During our PEEL inspections, we found many forces use the PND to share and research information on high-harm violent and sexual offenders. But the platform also gives forces the opportunity to use other technologies to tackle crime. For example, Cheshire Constabulary is trialling facial recognition technology on the PND to identify suspects.

However, in some forces we found inefficiencies in the design and procurement of IT systems, which fail to meet forces' needs in many ways, including data analysis. For example, we found one force lacked a basic IT mapping tool to support the analysis of a series of car key burglaries. This meant the force couldn't make the most of its assets because the IT framework didn't provide critical functionality, and it couldn't easily share intelligence with other forces.

Innovative practice: understanding the dynamics of harm

[Leicestershire Police has worked with academics to carry out research](#) using the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (CCHI) on offenders who also report as victims of crime. The CCHI is a tool used to measure the seriousness of crime harm to victims, and many forces consider it reliable. The research gives good evidence that a major subset of the most harmful and harmed individuals in Leicestershire is made up of victims who are also known offenders. This sped up policy changes for both police and partner organisations in terms of victimisation, targeting and IOM. It has given the force and its partners an evidence-based approach to prioritising its resources. It aims to use the evidence to reduce both the victimisation and offending of people who it hadn't previously identified for intervention through IOM or the Strengthening Families programme.

Tackling SAC needs a whole-system approach

Community engagement, problem-solving and partnership working are key to creating a successful whole-system approach to early intervention, prevention, deterrence and investigations. This includes a sophisticated understanding of what causes harm and generates demand on forces, particularly in respect of the most vulnerable people and places. It also means appropriately using and recording techniques and tools for problem-solving, safeguarding and community engagement.

All police forces are statutory members of local crime and disorder reduction partnerships or community safety partnerships. Forces work with partners including local authorities, National Health Service trusts and fire and rescue services to prevent crime and keep communities safe. They also need strong governance structures, which place prevention at the heart of policing.

All forces have structures in place to work with partners. But we found the use and success of these partnerships isn't always consistent or clear. Forces can span several local authority boundaries. This can make working with partners complex, and it creates inconsistencies in interventions and outcomes. This makes partnership working complicated and time consuming. Better-performing forces have broad strategic partnerships. They are also keen to consider current evidence-based approaches, and work in co-located teams that share information and tackle issues together.

Shared data helps forces and their partners establish a single version of the truth and work on collective priorities. Many forces already have good arrangements for sharing partner data. They use meeting structures, such as multi-agency risk assessment conferences, that reduce the harm and risk to vulnerable people.

To improve further, some forces are engaged in ambitious partnership projects to create data warehouses (data management systems designed to analyse relationships and trends within the data). For example, Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies have signed a data collaboration agreement with the Norfolk and Suffolk Offices of Data and Analytics. This collective endeavour between two counties' organisations aims to use data to give insights into public services and the

needs they serve. One of the Norfolk priorities is to give police vulnerability data to help reduce crime and exploitation.

Similarly, the Essex Centre for Data Analytics is a joint venture between Essex Police, the county council and the University of Essex. The venture is supported by an ethics framework, which gives scrutiny and challenge through an independent ethics committee.

The focus of these examples is to protect vulnerable people, but we anticipate they could also give insights that can help tackle the complex factors of SAC.

But not all forces have access to good levels of partner data. This is because there is no consistent national agreement on data sharing, and incompatible IT systems make it difficult to connect, compare problems and find similarities that would help address SAC.

Nevertheless, in some forces officers and staff have forged good relationships with professionals in partner organisations, and have designed practical approaches to sharing information that prevent and tackle neighbourhood-based crime. Humberside Police, for example, is working to reduce reoffending through a partnership intelligence framework. In one example, tasks set through the framework were allocated to a housing officer, whose actions led to the recovery of three stolen motorbikes. Other forces and local authority partners use collaborative case management systems such as [ECINS](#) to help with problem-solving.

Conclusion

This spotlight report shines a necessary light on the complex and harmful nature of serious acquisitive crime (SAC) and the worryingly low levels of offences brought to justice.

The renewed focus on SAC through the Government's [*Beating crime plan*](#) is welcome. But to support the national objective, forces need to see SAC as a priority and tackle it effectively at all levels. While this report sets out some good and innovative practice, we are concerned that too often there is a failure to get the basics of investigation and prevention right. Forces need to do more to ensure there is justice for victims, and to harness the wealth of evidence-based practice that can help prevent SAC.

We intend to continue our focus on reducing and preventing SAC through our PEEL inspections and the recommendations we make in this report. But the case for change must start at the top, through curious leaders and progressive partnerships doing the right thing to tackle the pernicious nature of SAC.

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