



Public Sector
Commission

Agency Capability

Western Australia Police Force

Executive summary



November 2024

Introduction

A review of the Western Australia Police Force as part of the [Agency Capability Review Program](#) was carried out from August 2023 to July 2024.

The agency is tasked with policing the world's largest geographical policing jurisdiction covering 2.5 million square kilometres.

At a time when the complexities in and expectations from the community continue to increase, the review explored the importance for the agency to articulate a long term strategic vision to stakeholders so it can successfully deliver services in collaboration with other public sector agencies and delivery partners.

The agency is actively working to design and implement initiatives to support its capability now and into the future. Its focus on workforce attraction and retention is acknowledged in the context of the challenges the broader public sector is facing.

The agency is recognised for its use of data and technology in service delivery, and its collaboration and co-location with delivery partners to ensure optimal outcomes for the community.

The commitment of the senior executive and activities to date are evidence that the agency can drive the changes and improvements set out in this report.

About the Agency Capability Review Program

The Agency Capability Review Program takes a comprehensive, whole of sector approach to improvement. It sets standards based on a clear understanding of what constitutes a high performing public sector agency in Western Australia (WA).

Agency Capability Reviews (the review) provide valuable insight into how agencies can improve and deliver the quality of services expected of them. They also contribute to the development and improvement of the sector.

Reviews are conducted by independent lead reviewers with public administration expertise and experience. Lead reviewers are supported by senior executives from the government sector who are co-opted for each review as well as the Agency Capability Review team at the Public Sector Commission.

Each review is conducted against a standardised [Agency Capability Framework](#) (the framework) of the 5 most significant areas of public sector management and administration. The framework is relevant and applicable to all agencies regardless of their remit, purpose, functions and services.

The framework is applied acknowledging the specific and unique operating context of each agency. It supports agencies to ask themselves 4 key questions:

- What are we meant to achieve?
- How well are we currently doing it?
- How do we know?
- Where can we do better?

Agency background

The agency's vision is to be an exceptional police force for the Western Australian community with interactions underpinned by 4 values: duty, team, integrity and care.

As a frontline agency, its core operations centre on 3 functions:

1. Enforcing the law
2. Preventing crime
3. Managing and coordinating emergencies

These functions describe the agency's roles as part of a government wide approach to community safety and security with priorities across 3 key areas of people, partnerships and performance. These priorities are actioned through delivering 6 policing fundamentals¹ which underpin service delivery to the people of WA. The agency communicates these publicly to demonstrate its commitment to community safety and upholding trust and confidence.

The *Police Act 1982* (Police Act) establishes the agency and Commissioner of Police position. The agency is not like most other WA public sector agencies in that the larger proportion of its workforce, 'sworn officers', are not governed by the *Public Sector Management Act 1994* (PSM Act). The PSM Act is the guiding Act for 'unsworn officers' (public servants) who support the agency's primary functions, with the Commissioner the deemed Chief Executive Officer for this cohort.

For the purposes of clarity, in this executive summary:

- 'sworn officers' are referred to as 'officers'
- 'unsworn officers' are referred to as 'staff'
- 'employees' refers to officers and staff.

The agency is led by Commissioner Col Blanch APM who was appointed in 2022 by the WA Governor under section 5 of the Police Act. The Police Act gives the Commissioner wide ranging powers over the officer workforce as well as control and management of policing activities throughout the state. The Commissioner is the State Emergency Coordinator under the *Emergency Management Act 2005*.

Two deputy commissioners and 10 assistant commissioners support the Commissioner, and an executive director oversees corporate services. Collectively this leadership group is referred to as the 'senior executive' in this report.

The Road Safety Commission was made a business unit in the agency as part of government reforms in 2017. However, given the deliberate distance in the relationship, operations, structure and activities, the Road Safety Commission was largely excluded from this review and no assessment made against the Agency Capability Framework.

At June 2024, the agency employed 10,664 people. In 2023-24, the agency received an appropriation of \$1.8 billion from the WA Government.

¹ (1) Timely and Quality Responses to Calls for Help; (2) High Visibility Policing; (3) Respectful Engagement; (4) Victim Safety; (5) Timely and Quality Investigations; (6) Accountable Prosecutions

Ministers, boards and committees

The agency reports to the:

- Hon Paul Papalia CSC MLA, Minister for Police; Corrective Services; Racing and Gaming; Defence Industry; Veterans Issues
- Hon David Michael MLA, Minister for Mines and Petroleum; Ports; Road Safety; Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport.

The agency does not have responsibility or reporting requirements for statutory boards but several executive staff are members of government committees.

Future operating environment

The Australian Federal Police's [The Future of Federal Policing](#) report notes that the impact of crime on everyday Australians is changing. There is less likelihood of traditional state based crime (such as theft and property damage) and increases in drug related harm, active targeted crime by those outside of the Australian borders via cybercrime, and a widening of the vulnerable community groups subject to harm.

Increasingly, the ability of officers to do their jobs successfully is being driven by the capability of the agency in areas such as cybercrime, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. These crime types require skilled employees in the areas of data intelligence, data analytics and forensic science to support high quality detection and prosecutions. Training and re-training are needed for the agency to attain the skills required as, for some officers, this represents a significant shift in focus from past approaches to policing.

With technology constantly developing and changing, the agency needs to work effectively with interstate and international counterparts if the community is to be kept safe from the damage cybercrime can cause. The agency needs to keep abreast of new technologies as they emerge and procure the assets necessary for the business of policing.

Much has been written about the impact of the pandemic on social cohesion in western societies and WA is not immune. Added to this is the effect of alcohol and other drug use in terms of social violence, domestic violence, road safety and mental health. Maintaining community safety in this environment remains a challenge.

A changing and growing population and the challenges outlined above mean it is essential for the agency to maintain robust and enduring partnerships with key government agencies to focus on diverting young people away from the criminal justice system. Without this, reducing the level of crime in the community is going to be difficult to achieve.

The review process

The review was undertaken by Emeritus Professor Margaret Seares AO as the independent lead reviewer with support from Hannah Tagore as senior reviewer co-opted from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

Professor Seares is Chair of the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal. She has previously held positions as Chief Executive Officer of the former Department of Arts and Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor at The University of Western Australia.

She has been a member of several boards and committees including the Synergy Electricity Corporation, Education Investment Fund, Western Australian Museum and Art Gallery of Western Australia. She has also been Chair of the Perth International Arts Festival and Australian Government's Australia Council. In 2003 she was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia in recognition of her work in arts and education.

Professor Seares was the Lead Reviewer on the agency capability reviews of the [Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions](#); and [Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries](#). She was a member of the panel that completed the [Review of WA's COVID-19 Management and Response](#).

The review

The review looked at all 21 capabilities and identified 3 lines of inquiry for in depth investigation. This involved close engagement with the agency, and investigation, research and information collection including:

- consultation with 51 stakeholders consulted
- corporate executive self assessment against the Agency Capability Framework
- senior executive workshop, and several briefings and meetings with Police Commissioner and senior executive team
- interviews with each senior executive member
- meetings and workshops with staff, management tiers and various internal committees
- regional visits to Albany, Broome, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Katanning, Mandurah and Northam
- comprehensive questionnaire gauging staff perceptions of the agency's capabilities and 'Have Your Say' tool inviting staff to share what the agency does well, what can be improved and ideas for improvement.

Key observations

- The agency operates in a complex environment where the nature of crime changes rapidly and new threats emerge. The agency has sound foundational processes, system governance and effective resource use that position it well to continue developing its capabilities to meet these challenges.
- The agency is widely regarded as capable, with a principal focus on frontline policing. While its Strategic Framework is well known and understood, the absence of a long term view means that employees, stakeholders and the community are uncertain about future priorities, aspirations and challenges.
- The review heard employees refer to the agency as having a 'chop and change culture' stemming from reforms being introduced without clear communication. It is difficult for employees to see the future direction of the agency, impacting morale and attrition. A communications plan to accompany future improvements may keep employees engaged and give direction during periods of change.

- The agency has traditionally provided services for, and in collaboration with, other agencies in the human services sector. Some of these services fall outside the agency's stated remit, compromising its focus on frontline policing. Without shared agreement on who else will fulfil these roles, gaps in service delivery to the community will continue to emerge.
- The agency is recognised for real time use of data and intelligence to inform and improve service delivery. This increases the need for strong cyber security controls. It wants to exchange data with other agencies however, there are barriers such as legislation, privacy concerns, system interoperability and receiving agency capability that may not be easily resolved. This limits the delivery of a coordinated response to support community and government objectives.
- There is a strong drive in the agency to achieve Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Some activities are not directly captured by KPIs such as crime prevention, de-escalation and positive community engagement, leading to a de-prioritisation of these activities where they may have achieved better outcomes. Improved indicators incorporating these deliverables would highlight their importance to employees and stakeholders.
- The agency's senior executive is highly regarded and respected by stakeholders. Collectively they bring substantial experience and dedicated service. The Commissioner is strengthening the executive team's focus on shared responsibility for organisational performance. A new governance framework broadens their involvement in planning, prioritisation and decisions.
- The agency has a 'command and control' management style, largely necessary in a high risk, high tempo operational environment. However, this influences its approach to decision making in other circumstances. Employees expressed that decisions are made quickly, and often without consultation, leading to a lack of clarity and change fatigue. A system level change management framework may identify opportunities where it is appropriate to engage more widely.
- The agency is experiencing persistent workforce challenges. It has applied considerable effort to address employee attrition, particularly for officers. Despite this, it has not yet resolved unsustainable shortages across the business. Without resolution, the agency risks failing to meet its community safety, law and order responsibilities, and obligations to state, federal and international partners.
- The agency's values are understood and recognised by employees, with a prominent emphasis on integrity. The values are strengthened by having embedded processes for managing certain areas of poor behaviour, such as sexual misconduct, which result in immediate removal from the agency if substantiated.
- Bullying is taken seriously in the agency, but it remains a significant issue and employees are less likely to report it than those working elsewhere in the public sector. The senior executive will need to determine the extent to which bullying exists in the absence of reporting and the real impact it has on culture and performance.

Lines of inquiry

Three lines of inquiry were developed to inform areas of focus and direct performance improvement efforts.

Line of inquiry 1: Clarifying police functions in the human services sector to minimise service gaps

The agency has a central role in responding to and addressing many of the state's significant social issues and government priorities. With a 24/7 operational model and large footprint across the state, the agency maintains a constant on the ground presence with powers to intervene to safeguard public safety.

Within the human services sector, the agency intersects with several public sector agencies and delivery partners. Over time, officers have defaulted to attending incidents in lieu of other agencies, or at the very least attending alongside, in matters that do not necessarily fall within the agency's remit. Examples include attending security risks in schools, transporting at risk patients in rural locations, responding to mental health incidents and responding to security issues in regional courts.

With strong expectations from the community and government on frontline policing, the agency is prioritising its focus on the 6 policing fundamentals and redirecting resources away from activities it deems outside its core functions.

Virtually all stakeholders engaged by the review were sympathetic, if not entirely supportive, of the agency's rationale for focusing its efforts. There is also recognition of the risk that stems from the agency reactively filling gaps in service delivery such as not having suitably trained or qualified officers to attend in specialised areas of mental health and the opportunity costs in police resources that could otherwise be allocated to responding to crime and protecting the community.

While there are shared protocols and memorandums of understanding for certain activities, there are no overarching shared engagement protocols for collaboration where there are intersecting responsibilities in the human services sector.

Without agreement of roles and responsibilities, and in the absence of a medium to long term strategic approach to areas of policing that involve collaboration with partners in the human services sector, gaps in critical service delivery for vulnerable communities will continue to emerge. These gaps are likely to be particularly pronounced in regional areas where the agency and other service providers struggle to fill positions to the levels required.

An agreed plan is needed with partner agencies detailing how and who delivers services that the community and stakeholders have come to expect. A shared understanding of how this collaboration should work and clarity on the agency's role are crucial.

As police services in other jurisdictions have encountered similar issues in diverting resources away from core functions, there are models demonstrating the importance of a coherent, considered and staged approach to implementing changes to policing in the human services area. Two examples are Queensland's Mental Health Co-Response initiative and the United Kingdom's 'Right Care, Right Person' program.

Whether in the health, community services, justice or education sectors, careful planning and implementation are key to a more effective and joined up approach to human services delivery. This will ultimately support better outcomes for the community, strengthened collaboration between agencies and potentially more effective crime prevention and diversion initiatives.

Line of inquiry 2: Strengthening employee retention

Since the commencement of this review there has been considerable discussion in the public arena on the need to attract new officers and address attrition. In recent years, rates of officer attrition have risen from 1.9% in 2019-20 to 6.8% in 2023-24 with a peak of 8.5% in the 2022-23 period. This peak was due to factors including COVID-19 and the introduction of the *Police Amendment (Compensation Scheme) Act 2021* that provides compensation to medically retired police officers while retaining other benefits. Challenges surrounding attraction, retention and attrition of police officers is not unique to WA; and retention remains an issue nationwide.

The agency has made substantial efforts to address the issue including a commissioned review in 2023 on attraction that led to international and domestic recruitment campaigns to increase officer numbers. While the agency has put a number of processes in place to address attrition, ongoing effort is required.

The agency is facing similar attrition and retention issues with staff. Efforts like those for officers should be applied to retain staff.

Retention issues are complex and systemic – and require greater reflection and scrutiny. The review found there was no single cause but rather multiple contributing factors compounding retention challenges. In all of these, the agency has implemented (or is in the process of implementing) activities to address these challenges.

1. Resources and expectations

Officers are being increasingly tasked with additional responsibilities. They are grappling with the breadth of their responsibilities and the resulting demand for their services with associated complexities. This is further exacerbated by workforce shortages and misaligned expectations.

While realistic job previews are incorporated into recruit training, the transition to real world experiences in the job of policing is reported to be confronting for new recruits. To better prepare and train new recruits, an Academy Field Officer oversees and supports each squad transition to probationary constable rank.

The agency has taken steps to address the impact of workload expectations on officers and is finalising a strategy for employee health, safety and welfare.

2. Regionality

Regional policing districts have difficulty filling positions and this impacts service delivery. The vastness of the state increases the complexity of managing rostering solutions that maintain the availability of sufficient officers. The agency deploys officers on a rotational basis, managing this centrally. Supplementary remuneration

and improved conditions fall short of incentivising officers to work in regional areas, especially given the rising cost of living and the housing crisis affecting the availability of stock in regional towns.

To better understand regional issues, the agency is engaging with its regional employees more actively. An Inspector led process is bringing operational regional frontline perspectives and issues to the attention of the senior executive.

3. Support and wellbeing

Working environments pose a high risk of officer fatigue and burnout due to constant exposure to other people's distress and trauma. Effective workforce and wellbeing assistance are critical to support officers dealing with emergencies, crime and trauma on a 24/7 basis. The agency has in-house psychology services (the only police service in Australia with this), an incident coordination service with welfare support 24/7 and 6 chaplains across the state. Other services include counselling through an employee assistance program, external psychology services and relationship counselling.

Bullying and harassment have had significant impacts on retention. The agency has taken steps to improve the reporting process to be more victim centric. Recent data suggests a decrease in reported incidents.

4. Diversity and inclusion

While the agency has increased employee representation of youth and cultural and linguistical diversity (CALD), there is greater representation required of First Nations people, people with disability and women at the senior executive level.

The agency has made efforts through engaging with CALD community leaders to discuss impediments to recruitment, conducting sessions at the Academy specifically for CALD recruits, establishing an Aboriginal Cadetship Program, restructuring the Aboriginal Employee Network and introducing a new Community Liaison Officer model. The agency is on the right trajectory to have a workforce reflective of the community it serves and would benefit from other actions.

5. Elements of the workforce system

The agency's performance development system is paper based and is not used or applied consistently. Consequently, it fails to inform the promotions process and has tokenistic functionality. Proposals have been made to digitise the Employee Management Files and this enhancement would improve access to employee data during performance conversations and inform learning and development needs across the agency.

Improvements could also be gained through strengthened mentoring practices. There is no formal internal mentoring program for officers so establishing a program would support ongoing career development, growth and employee engagement. Given ongoing recruitment difficulties and increasing challenges in retaining talent, investing in mentorship could yield significant benefits.

6. Career development

The review found a recurrent sentiment among staff of feeling less valued than officers. Compounding matters, the agency faces staff shortages in crucial areas like procurement and contract management. Commendably, the agency is reviewing staff classifications to assess whether they appropriately reflect the expected work value and seniority.

The review heard that performance assessment of officers often concentrates on areas for improvement rather than career pathway planning and progression or aspirations. Changes in 2023 to the officer promotions process introduced a self nomination approach for sergeant and senior sergeant ranks where qualified candidates participate in a 2 day scenario and skills based assessment. The approach has been received positively by officers to better and more objectively assess suitability for senior roles and bring greater equity to the promotions process.

Line of inquiry 3: Instituting long term strategic planning and change management for stronger future capability

The agency's one page [Strategic Framework](#) anchors its work in 3 core functions. While it is familiar to employees and provides a focus for their day to day work, it does not specifically consider the agency's longer term aspirations and associated human, financial and physical resource capabilities needed to achieve the 3 functions into the future.

While the agency operates independently from government, it remains highly responsive to the priorities of successive administrations. When these priorities shift, the agency adjusts accordingly. This is not unique to WA; similar dynamics exist in other policing jurisdictions. However, while other police agencies including New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia have undertaken long term planning and have articulated strategies with a time horizon, the agency has yet to create its own strategic plan that fully considers the opportunities and challenges ahead.

The review heard that new leaders introduce reforms without consistent widespread communication to ensure employees are informed, brought along and supported as change is implemented. Officers and staff report difficulties in keeping up with the pace of change and understanding the implications for their work. The absence of established change management practices exacerbates the situation.

The pace and implementation of change can lead to considerable disruption if the intent behind the change has not been well communicated. Additionally, there seems to be a disconnection between leadership's aspirations for change and frontline realities and impacts of these changes. Employees are less likely to embrace new initiatives if they perceive them as short term and inconsistent.

The absence of this long term outlook hampers the agency's ability to anticipate emerging trends and plan for the capabilities it requires in the future. Critical questions about the scope of policing roles in the community, regional policing, asset and workforce management, strategic budget frameworks and consistent investment in employee development remain unresolved.

A long term strategy together with a more effective change management process would lay the groundwork for the agency to be well prepared to have a real impact on more complex, entrenched issues confronting our communities. A balance between short term and longer term strategic planning allows the agency and its partners to better understand the future demands and pressures it must be ready for.

Areas of strength

Sharing areas of good practice is an important element of the Agency Capability Review Program as it contributes to the development of the WA public sector. The body of knowledge and data collected through reviews creates a bank of valuable learnings and resources to help develop solutions to common themes that can be shared across the sector.

Area of strength 1: Recognising data as a strategic asset

Policing is a highly complex environment requiring the agency to consider the diverse needs of the community and key partners. It uses data to support current and future policing needs and demonstrates a good understanding of the requirements of its service delivery. The review heard the agency is recognised for its innovative use of intelligence and data to prevent crime and enforce the law; and stands out as exemplary in using data as a strategic asset.

It is difficult to underestimate the volume of data the agency is tasked with collecting and generating. Every traffic stop, prosecution, welfare check, arrest and general incident that officers engage in across regional and metropolitan districts represents a distinct data point. Despite the sheer volume of police interactions, the agency stores and processes large amounts of data effectively.

The Data Science and Analytics Division and Office of Information Management play central roles in ensuring high quality, operationally reliable data. They are responsible for processes related to data quality, security and appropriate accessibility. Through these functions, the agency is well positioned to disseminate data analytics efficiently and effectively. This is complemented by geospatial data produced by the Geographic Information Systems business unit.

The Commissioner is driving a strong data and technology agenda. The agency is widely recognised as a leader in the sector for providing and sharing reliable, high quality data with other agencies. Its effectiveness in collecting and leveraging data demonstrates the significant public value the agency delivers through its proficient use of data. The agency uses data in its decision making and resource allocation, providing evidence to support operational activities and emergencies.

This area of strength highlights the agency's use of operational data as a strategic resource. It benefits not only the agency but other government operations and is an example that could be adopted by other agencies.

Area of strength 2: Co-location for enduring collaborative relationships with state and federal agencies

The geographic spread of the WA public sector often makes collaborating with other agencies a challenge that would otherwise be built into daily engagement when working in the one precinct or building. The agency has taken significant steps to enhance collaborative interagency relationships through productive co-location.

In February 2024, the agency opened its new State Operations Command Centre (SOCC), replacing its former Maylands facility. The SOCC's contemporary design and considered fit out provides the agency with an ideal facility to support frontline officers across the state through enhanced incident management, tactical real time intelligence and technical capability.

Crucially, at the instigation of the agency, staff from the Department of Justice, Department of Communities and Department of Education are based at the SOCC working alongside officers to further collaboration between the parties.

The review heard of several instances where different agencies have leveraged real time data for an integrated service delivery approach. Examples include responses to breaches of conditions by offenders with GPS tracking and effective emergency management during incidents (including a shooting in a regional location).

It is anticipated these partnerships can be built on into the future to further extend and consolidate operational responsiveness and shared approaches. A recent successful pilot initiative, Operation Keelia, saw key community partners and aligned state agencies co-locating at the SOCC to support victims of family and domestic violence during the Christmas period when support services are usually less available. Participants were very supportive of the pilot as part of a larger aspiration to improve shared community service outcomes.

The agency partners with the Australian Federal Police via the Joint Anti-Child Exploitation Team (JACET). Since the creation of the JACET in April 2023, collaboration has led to a significant number of charges, cases being referred to other law enforcement agencies in Australia and internationally, and victim identification.

The agency is recognised for these collaborative approaches to sharing data and physical locations. In an era when the most intractable problems are manifest in the community, such joint approaches show the potential to yield the best outcomes for government and the public.

Good practice case studies

The review identified specific initiatives as positive examples for other agencies to learn from. These initiatives highlight the agency's successful approach in building stronger relationships with citizens and promoting a sense of community and inclusion. This, in turn, helps create a more engaged workforce.

Good practice case study: Strengthening connections with citizens through the Yarning App

The Aboriginal Affairs Division, in partnership with Microsoft Partner Akkodis, created a mobile application to enhance fairness and equality in officers' interactions with Aboriginal people across the state.

The Yarning App equips officers with spoken Aboriginal language interpretations related to rights during custody (and formerly COVID-19 requirements). The application supports 8 Aboriginal languages with plans to add 3 more.

It allows officers to select an Aboriginal language and play essential messages aloud, facilitating better understanding for Aboriginal people who use English as a second, third or fourth language. Since its release in August 2021, there has been a 25% increase in requests for language assistance.

This is a model that could be used in other agencies that engage with Aboriginal people in regional and remote locations where English is most likely not the first language. It could also have wider application to other diversity groups where the primary language for communications is not English.

Good practice case study: Exceptional Women in Policing in the Goldfields

In the Goldfields District, local officers organised an Exceptional Women in Policing seminar with the support of senior executive. The seminar aimed to benefit female officers personally and professionally, and address critical matters related to dealing with and reporting sexual harassment.

Originally designed for a group of 12 female officers, the seminar's success exceeded expectations and was expanded to include approximately 94 female officers from the south and east of the state. In subsequent seminars, topics have included empowerment, connections, mentoring, promotions, sexual harassment, sources of support, work-life balance and mental health. Additional activities have become platforms for discussions around flexible work arrangements.

The agency has reported that several officers were empowered to apply for promotion as a result of attending the seminars and attendees are still speaking positively about them. This model could be a blueprint for fostering inclusivity and empowerment among other diverse groups in the agency and more widely in the public sector.



We are proud to deliver our services from Whadjuk Noongar boodja. We acknowledge and pay respect to Elders, Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to land, sky, waters and community.

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