

The right measure in the right place

– police work in vulnerable areas

Summary and recommendations

The situation in vulnerable areas makes particular demands on police capability. The crime rate is higher than in other areas, and those living there are less secure. Often there is a culture of silence and those exposed to or witnessing crimes may be afraid to speak to the police. The Police Authority therefore needs to ensure that there are police officers who can work long-term, using adapted and proven working methods in these areas. For several years, the Riksdag and the Government have had a clear ambition to reverse the trend in vulnerable areas. In light of this, the Swedish National Audit Office has audited whether the police work in vulnerable areas is appropriate.

Audit findings

The overall assessment of the Swedish NAO is that the police work in vulnerable areas is not fully appropriate. The Police Authority's method for identifying vulnerable areas provides support for local police areas in the work to create local status reports. However, the audit shows that the method has shortcomings. It is partly based on subjective estimates, which means that similar problems can be assessed differently depending on who makes the assessment. In addition, there are no procedures for uniform application of the method and local application varies.

The Police Authority has distributed a third of recent years' additional resource to local police areas that contain vulnerable areas, but since the Authority does not follow up the allocation of resources to these areas, it is not possible to report how much of the additional resources have actually reached vulnerable areas. For the same reason, it is not either possible to determine whether the National Police Commissioner's decision that there should be at least one community police officer per 5,000 inhabitants in vulnerable areas has been implemented. According to the Swedish Police Authority, community police officers must be able to work long-term with crime prevention, relationship building and security-building activities in order to reverse the trend in vulnerable areas.

In order to monitor the outcome of the National Police Commissioner's decision, the Swedish NAO sent out a survey to the local police areas concerned. The result shows that the decision that there should be at least one community police officer working long-term with crime prevention, relationship building and security-building activities per 5,000 inhabitants has not been implemented in a third of the local police areas that contain vulnerable areas. Nevertheless, the Government has greatly strengthened appropriations for the Police Authority, and also required that local police areas be staffed with community police officers who work in this way.

The local police areas that have received additional resources believe that it has increased their ability to adapt their working methods, which among other things has led to fewer attacks on the police. The Swedish NAO concludes that the Police Authority needs to ensure that resources actually go to the vulnerable areas, in order to create the conditions for the police to conduct long-term and adapted work in these areas.

The Police Authority has produced relevant guidelines and documentation on how the police should work in vulnerable areas. The Swedish NAO's assessment is that the police officers who serve in vulnerable areas have adapted their working methods and work according to proven methods to the extent possible given the resource situation. However, the Swedish NAO has identified some changes that would make it easier for the police to become more effective in vulnerable areas.

It is important to facilitate police work by making it easier to share information between the police and social services. Several members of the social services and police testify that confidentiality leads to uncertainty about what may and may not be shared. This uncertainty limits the effectiveness of collaboration. The police and social services should therefore receive better support in how the regulations should be applied. A first step may be to clarify how the provisions on information sharing between the police and social services should be interpreted. However, the Swedish NAO notes that this issue may be the subject of an ongoing government assignment to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, and therefore refrains from making any recommendation in this respect.

In conclusion, the audit shows that there is a lack of technical equipment in the form of surveillance cameras and body-worn cameras in vulnerable areas. The Police Authority should ensure that the police have access to the technical equipment needed to be able to work effectively in vulnerable areas.

Recommendations

Based on the audit findings, the Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations to the Swedish Police Authority:

- Increase the reliability of the process used to identify vulnerable areas. This may involve, for example, reviewing the assessment criteria and developing procedures for how method support should be used consistently.
- Follow up on how many community police officers are allocated to vulnerable areas, both to ensure that the decision to have at least one community police officer per 5,000 inhabitants in vulnerable areas is implemented and to analyse the need.
- Ensure that the police have access to the technical equipment needed to be able to work effectively in vulnerable areas. For example, this may involve accelerating the expansion of surveillance cameras and the distribution of body-worn cameras.