

HMI Zoë Billingham's assessment of Surrey Police – Transcript

Hello. I'm Zoe Billingham and I'm Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary for Surrey Police. I am one of five inspectors of constabulary, and our role is to inspect police forces on behalf of the public. Each year we produce an annual assessment of how each force is performing.

In its PEEL inspections this year, HMIC found some areas of serious concern in the performance of Surrey Police in keeping people safe and reducing crime.

In view of these findings, I was in regular contact with the chief constable and I was reassured by the extremely positive way in which she and the force has acknowledged and responded to the issues we have raised.

At the time of our efficiency inspection, the force was going through an internal reorganisation and was in transition, and I judged the force to be insufficiently well prepared to meet its future financial challenges. While recognising that the force has a good track record of financial management, the workforce model made available to us on the inspection was not affordable; there were too many vacancies in frontline roles and this was placing undue pressures on the organisation. I am reassured that the force had already recognised this and has been taking appropriate steps, through its reorganisation, to protect neighbourhood policing, which has the prevention of crime and anti-social behaviour at its core.

The force is undoubtedly committed to protecting vulnerable people but our vulnerability and child protection inspections raised some serious concerns. The quality and consistency of child protection investigations and the way in which the force handles reports of missing children are both causes of concern. To its credit, the force has responded positively to these issues and has addressed historic underinvestment in these areas by allocating additional resources to help safeguard vulnerable victims and improve the standard of investigations. I commend the force for the significant improvements it has made since our child protection inspection, but I do not underestimate the time that it will take for some of the changes to take effect.

The chief constable, who has now left the force to take up a national position in policing, provided strong leadership and was both visible and approachable. The chief officer team has worked to make ethics an important part of the force's

everyday culture and is committed to the wellbeing of the workforce, responding positively when pressures were apparent in some front line areas.

The force communicates well with communities in Surrey, particularly through social media.

In the year ahead, I will be particularly interested to see how the force maintains the existing strong preventative neighbourhood policing approach with the planned reduction of officers. I will also be interested to see how the force improves its service provided to vulnerable victims, particularly involving children that are victims of abuse or missing from home. I will also be monitoring how the force improves the way it tackles serious and organised crime.