



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

**Revisiting police
relationships:
progress report**

**Avon and Somerset Constabulary
December 2012**

About this review

In 2011, the Home Secretary asked Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to look at "instances of undue influence, inappropriate contractual arrangements and other abuses of power in police relationships with the media and other parties". The resulting report, *Without Fear or Favour*, published in December 2011, found no evidence of endemic corruption in the Police Service. However, we did not issue a clean bill of health:

- Few forces provided any policy or guidance around appropriate relationships between the police and the media and others;
- There was a general lack of clarity around acceptance of gifts and hospitality; use of corporate credit cards; and second jobs for officers and staff, which could leave forces vulnerable to (at least the perception of) corruption; and
- Few forces and authorities had proactive and effective systems in place to identify, monitor and manage these issues.

We made several recommendations to help the service address these issues, and committed to revisiting forces in 2012 to track progress.

The revisit found that while forces have made some progress, particularly around putting in place processes and policies to manage threats to integrity, more needs to be done. The pace of change also needs to increase, not least to demonstrate to the public that the service is serious about managing integrity issues, which have retained a high media profile over the last year.

A thematic report, *Revisiting Police Relationships: A progress report* is available from www.hmic.gov.uk, and gives more information about what we found across England and Wales. The rest of this report focuses on what we found in Avon and Somerset.

This time HMIC is publishing force-level reports. This is so the public and the new Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) can see how their force has progressed since 2011.

A note on the scope of our review: Since our 2011 inspection, questions around police integrity and corruption have continued to be asked. For instance, the Leveson Inquiry has looked at relationships between officers and journalists (among other things), while investigations into senior officers and into the handling of historic investigations (such as the Hillsborough disaster) have received widespread media coverage. The findings in this report relate only to police relationships with the media and others, rather than broader issues of police integrity.

Findings for Avon and Somerset

Since 2011 Avon and Somerset Constabulary has conducted an integrity 'healthcheck', using the Self-Assessment Checklist provided in HMIC's 2011 report, *Without Fear or Favour*. It has updated 17 force policies, including those on relationships with the media, acceptance of gifts and hospitality, social media use, and police officers having second jobs.

■ How are press relations handled, and information leaks investigated?

The force has updated its media policy: this outlines how relationships with the press should work, and stipulates that staff and officers must notify the Corporate Communications Department of all contact with journalists. This is in line with the national guidance on relationships with the media produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). We found that staff knew about these new rules.

Between September 2011 and May 2012, the force has investigated six instances of inappropriate disclosures to the media.

Since the last inspection the force has produced guidance on how police officers and staff should behave on social networking sites (such as Twitter and Facebook). This covers the standards of behaviour expected when staff are both at work and off duty. The force proactively monitors whether these rules are being adhered to, or if information is being leaked online.

HMIC's independently commissioned research identified two cases of potentially inappropriate behaviour on Facebook or Twitter by officers and staff in Avon and Somerset Constabulary. These have been referred back to the force.

■ Is there more clarity around acceptance of gifts and hospitality, procurement, and second jobs?

In 2011 we found that Avon and Somerset Constabulary was keeping a record of the **gifts and hospitality** received by officers and staff, but this was on multiple registers held in different police stations, which made it more difficult to monitor and identify any problems. Since then, the force has created a central register which is accessible force-wide to all staff.

Expenditure on all force credit and **procurement** cards is monitored through a scrutiny process which is part of the force's procurement processes. While the professional standards department (PSD) does not routinely review procurement (for instance by cross referencing contract and procurement registers with the gifts and hospitality register to ensure the integrity of the procurement process), there are several levels of checking in place which the constabulary is confident ensures the integrity of the procurement process.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary's policy on **second jobs** is owned and managed by PSD. The policy applies to all staff and officers and all individual cases are subject to annual review. Since September 2011 there have been 63 applications for second jobs, all but one of which have been approved.

How does the force identify, monitor and manage potential integrity issues?

The police authority continued to exercise oversight and governance over integrity issues. The newly elected PCC will need to ensure they are satisfied with the governance and reporting mechanisms for integrity issues.

Data provided by the constabulary to HMIC shows that there has been no change in the number of staff working in the anti-corruption unit since our 2011 inspection. Between September 2011 and May 2012, the constabulary instigated 61 investigations into the conduct of its officers and staff in relation to the areas covered by this report.

Training on integrity issues has continued since our last inspection in 2011. Changes to policy are communicated via email and intranet systems, and there are some mechanisms in place to check that officers and staff have read and understood them.

Next steps

HMIC will continue to inspect on integrity issues as part of our existing programme of force inspections.