



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

**Revisiting police
relationships:
progress report**

**Bedfordshire Police
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 Bedfordshire.

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 Bedfordshire

Since 2011 Bedfordshire Police has conducted an integrity “healthcheck”, using the Self-Assessment Checklist provided in HMIC’s 2011 report, *Without Fear or Favour*, and reported regularly to the former police authority on actions it had taken as a result. Several policies covering relationships with the media, acceptance of gifts and hospitality, social media use and second jobs have been reviewed and where necessary updated. In general there was good awareness of this and staff understood their responsibilities in relation to these policies.

The Professional Standards and Procurement Departments are now collaborated units and work across three forces: Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. As a result the policy and processes in relation to some of the integrity issues we inspected are identical across these forces.

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

Since 2011 the force has completed a review of its media policy and is satisfied that it clearly outlines how relationships with the press should work. It also stipulates that staff and officers must notify the Media Office 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 had not investigated any instances of inappropriate disclosure to the media.

The force has reinforced its guidance to staff on how they should behave on social networking sites (such as Facebook and Twitter). This covers the standards of behaviour expected when staff are both at work and off duty. HMIC’s independently commissioned research identified five cases of potentially inappropriate behaviour on Facebook or Twitter by officers and staff in Bedfordshire Police, which 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 Bedfordshire Police recorded **gifts and hospitality** received by officers and staff on multiple registers, and that because there was little monitoring of them potential problems were not identified. A single register has now been introduced and is overseen by the Head of the Professional Standards Department (PSD) and is well managed. The force intends to publish the register externally on its website.

To help ensure integrity of the **procurement** process, monitoring is in place to cross-reference contract and procurement registers with those of gifts and hospitality and second jobs. A new IT system to track purchase orders and procurement to the point of payment is being introduced. This will improve the efficiency of procurement management within the force.

Bedfordshire Police's policy for seeking approval to have a **second job** requires that all applications are assessed and approved by PSD. This helps ensure there is consistency and scrutiny in respect of the application process. All registered second jobs are subject to an annual review. Since September 2011 there have been 54 applications for second jobs, 51 of which have been approved.

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

We found that the police authority had arrangements to monitor and govern integrity issues. A working group was established to identify the process by which the PCC will oversee and monitor the force's response to police integrity issues and the method by which the PCC will report findings to the public. The recently elected PCC will need to be satisfied with the continued governance and reporting mechanisms for these issues.

The Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire anti corruption units have been brought together to work collaboratively as one. While this has led to an overall reduction in staffing levels, this has been offset by the benefits of working in collaboration and having a joint department, with sharing of good practice and better opportunities to task resources across the three counties. The force instigated 12 investigations between September 2011 and May 2012 into the conduct of its officers and staff in relation to the areas covered by this report.

There has been no specific training on integrity issues since our last inspection in 2011. Changes to policies and guidance are communicated via email and intranet systems but there is no mechanism 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.

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