



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

**Revisiting police
relationships:
progress report**

**Essex 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 Essex.

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 Essex

Since 2011 Essex Police has carried out an integrity “healthcheck”, using the Self-Assessment Checklist provided in HMIC’s 2011 report, *Without Fear or Favour*, and progress on the actions agreed as a result has been overseen by a group which is chaired by the deputy chief constable. Several policies covering relationships with the media, acceptance of gifts and hospitality, social media use and second jobs have been updated or are in the process of being reviewed. Staff have been made aware of these changes and understand them.

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. Neighbourhood officers have been trained to deliver standard media briefings. For more complex issues, they are supported by a team of specialist media officers based at force headquarters. The new policy 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 two instances of inappropriate disclosure to the media, which were continuing at the time of the inspection.

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. The force carries out some monitoring to check whether these rules are being followed, although this only tends to happen when a particular concern is raised. HMIC’s independently commissioned research identified nine cases of potentially inappropriate behaviour on Facebook or Twitter by officers and staff in Essex 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 Essex Police was recording **gifts and hospitality** received by officers and staff – but this was on multiple gift and hospitality registers, held in different police stations, which made it more difficult to monitor and identify any potential problems. The force has recently introduced a single electronic register, overseen by the Head of the Professional Standards Department (PSD). This is making it much easier for issues to be identified and addressed at an early stage.

People bidding for contracts with the force are required to declare any potential conflicts of interest. However, Essex Police currently only cross-references contract and **procurement** registers with the gifts and hospitality register to help ensure the integrity

of the procurement process (e.g. by identifying any instances of a company providing hospitality, and then receiving a contract) if specific concerns have been identified.

Essex Police's policy for **second jobs** requires all requests to be assessed by the PSD. This helps ensure consistency and scrutiny of the process. In 2011, we found that Essex Police did not routinely review applications for second jobs once they had been approved. The force has now amended its policy to ensure that these are now reviewed annually. Since September 2011 there have been 71 applications for second jobs, all 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. The police authority had a lead member for professional standards who met regularly with managers from the force and kept up to date on a range of integrity issues. However, the police authority was not included in the group which oversees progress on the issues raised in *Without Fear or Favour*. The authority reviewed its own policies and procedures relating to integrity to ensure that they were fit for purpose prior to the election of the first PCC in November 2012. The recently elected PCC will need to be satisfied with the governance and reporting mechanisms for these issues.

Data provided by the force to HMIC shows that there has been no change in the number of staff working in the anti-corruption unit since our 2011 inspection. Indeed, the force has recently agreed to establish a new team within the Kent and Essex serious crime directorate to assist in the prevention and investigation of corruption. The force instigated 116 investigations between September 2011 and May 2012 into the conduct of its officers and staff in relation to the areas covered by this report.

The force has carried out a significant programme of training in relation to its new media policy. Staff have been informed about other changes to policy by email and through the force intranet. Computer-based training has also been used, which has allowed the force to check that officers and staff understand the new policies and guidance.

Next steps

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

© HMIC 2012
ISBN: 978-1-78246-051-0
www.hmic.gov.uk