

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary



Inspection of Northamptonshire Police

Professional Standards

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INSPECTION OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS 2005

A – INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

'Professional standards' within the policing context has evolved significantly in recent years, following the HMIC thematic 'Police Integrity' (1999), the establishment of an ACPO Presidential Taskforce to tackle corruption and the introduction of the ACPO Professional Standards Committee. Since 2000, virtually every force in England and Wales has significantly expanded the activities of pre-existing Complaints and Discipline Departments to include an element addressing anti-corruption, including covert investigation. These larger units are generically known as Professional Standards Departments (PSDs).

The issue of complaints holds a unique importance for HMIC in that legislation¹ creates a responsibility on Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) to 'keep themselves informed' as to the handling of complaints in forces. Traditionally this has involved inspection of individual forces on a rolling programme. The advent of HMIC's annual Baseline Assessment (from 2003/04), the establishment of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) in 2004, and a series of public inquiries have changed the professional standards landscape significantly. In view of this, HMIC decided to carry out a simultaneous programme of inspection of professional standards in all 43 English and Welsh forces to provide a comprehensive picture of current performance and identify any issues of national importance.

2. Inspection scope

While this national programme of inspection of 'Professional Standards' has focused primarily on the operation of the PSDs, and their sub-sections, it has also examined issues of professional standards in the wider policing context, and therefore touched on other departments and areas of responsibility, for example Human Resources (HR). The core elements identified nationally for examination were:

Professional Standards Department

- The umbrella department within which all 'professional standards' activities are delivered, including the investigation of complaints and misconduct and proactive anti-corruption work.

Complaints and misconduct unit

- Responsible for reactive investigations into public complaints as well as internal conduct matters.

Proactive unit

- Responsible for the intelligence-led investigation of vulnerability to or allegations of corruption.

¹ Section 15(1) of the Police Reform Act 2002

Intelligence cell

- Responsible for:
 - Overall intelligence management
 - Analysis
 - Field Intelligence
 - Financial Investigation
 - Managing risks and grading threats

Handling of civil claims, security management and personnel vetting

- Individuals or units responsible for identifying risks to the integrity of the police service manifested within civil actions, civil claims, employment tribunals, breaches of security and infiltration of the service by inappropriate personnel.

Handling 'Direction and Control' Complaints

- Processes for handling complaints relating to:
 - operational policing policies (where there is no issue of conduct)
 - organisational decisions
 - general policing standards in the force
 - operational management decisions (where there is no issue of conduct)

Impact of unsatisfactory performance and grievance

- Relevant personnel within HR and operational departments, to establish that processes exist to identify any conduct issues or organisational lessons.

NB: The above list is not exhaustive nor does every force have each of these units or responsibilities as separate functions. The inspection sought to examine as many of the identified activities as are relevant to each force.

3. Methodology

Since 2003/04, HMIC's core methodology for assessing force performance has been Baseline Assessment (BA), which consists of a self-assessment process supported by visits to forces for validation and quality assurance. BA assesses performance annually across 27² areas of policing via a framework of questions for each area. The mainstream BA process for 2004/05 was completed during spring 2005 and the results published in October 2005.

Professional Standards is one of the BA frameworks and would normally have been included in the mainstream BA activity. With the full programme of professional standards inspections scheduled for October and November 2005, however, the assessment of this framework was deferred to await their outcome.

The programme of inspections has been designed to:

- Provide a full inspection of professional standards in all England & Wales³ forces;
- Gather evidence for Baseline Assessment reports and grading of professional standards in all forces; and
- Identify key issues, trends and good practice that may have implications for professional standards on a national basis.

² Number of frameworks in the 2004/05 assessment

³ Also including British Transport Police and Ministry of Defence Police

The standard format for each inspection has included:

- The completion of self assessment questionnaires by all forces;
- Examination of documents;
- Visits to forces with group and individual interviews;
- Consultation with key stakeholders; and
- Final reports with grade.

4. Baseline Assessment grading

HMIC applies a qualitative grading to the inspection of Professional Standards. These grades are:

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

In allocating individual force grades, HMIC assesses all the available evidence and identifies how well the force matches an agreed set of Specific Grading Criteria. To ensure fairness and transparency in the grading process, HMIC worked with key partners in the APA, IPCC, the Home Office and ACPO to develop and agree these Specific Grading Criteria for Professional Standards.

The criteria set out expectations for a “Good” force. Grades of Fair, Good and Excellent all represent acceptable performance levels but indicate the degree to which the force has met the grading criteria. An Excellent grade indicates ‘benchmark’ performance including significant implementation of good practice.

The full grading criteria are set out in HMIC’s website at:
www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk.

The key elements appear under four headings, namely:

- **Intelligence** - *what a force knows about the health of professional standards*
 - **Prevention** - *how the force tries to improve and prevent the abuse of standards*
 - **Enforcement** - *its effectiveness in dealing with emerging problems*
 - **Capacity and Capability** – *having the resources and skills to address reactive and proactive challenges (including timely and proportionate response to lapses in professional standards)*
- The remainder of this report is set out under these headings, for ease of reference to the evidence presented.

B – Force Report

Force Overview and Context

The midland county of Northamptonshire covers an area of 914 square miles and has a population of 642,708 (265,582 households). The main town is Northampton with other large towns of Corby, Brackley, Daventry, Kettering, Rushden, Towcester and Wellingborough. The employment rate for the county is high at 80.3% and is above the national average (74.9%). The proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) population living in Northamptonshire is 4.87%, compared with 6.51% for the East Midlands region, with the majority living in the Northampton and Wellingborough areas.

Peter Maddison, Northamptonshire's Chief Constable, took up his position in May 2003 following the departure of Chris Fox to take up the post of Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) president. ACC Derek Talbot covered the position of deputy chief constable (DCC) when DCC Frank Whiteley departed in October 2004. The new DCC, Davina Logan, was appointed in November 2004. Since October 2004 the force has had an additional temporary ACC, Alan Featherstone, responsible for territorial policing. Mrs Linda Charker is director of resources and has executive responsibility for financial management, procurement and property resources for the force. The police authority (PA) consists of 17 members and is chaired by Dr Marie Dickie who has held office since 1995. A very good working relationship exists between the force executive and the PA.

Operational policing is delivered via four basic command units (BCUs) referred to locally as Areas – Eastern, Northampton, Northern and Western – each managed by a chief superintendent.

The force executive officers are based at police headquarters (HQ), which is located just outside Northampton town centre, at Wootton Hall. As at 31 March 2005, there were (FTE) 1,288.8 police officers, 972.54 police staff, 242 special constables, 37 police community support officers (PCSOs) and 3.5 traffic wardens. The force's annual budget for 2005/06 is £107.34 million, an increase of 5.4% on the previous year.

Professional Standards

The ACC holds portfolio responsibility for Professional Standards (PS). The Professional Standards Department (PSD) consists of a detective superintendent Head of Department (HoD), a detective chief inspector managing the integrity unit, a detective inspector managing complaints investigations, a civil litigation officer, an information compliance officer, an information security and vetting manager all supported by an office manager and administration support team. The department consists of 25 staff members split with 5 staff in complaints investigations and 3 staff in the integrity unit. The complaints team consists of experienced detective officers, three of whom are investigating officers (IOs) who work with police staff case workers. The integrity team consists of two police officers with good pro-active and covert criminal investigative skills. An experienced system analyst works within the PSD and is used to support the integrity team. The civil litigation officer manages a small team, as does the information compliance officer, and together with the information security and vetting manager sits within PSD.

Findings

Intelligence - *what a force knows about the health of professional standards*

Strengths

- The HoD and the chief inspector in the integrity unit have CID backgrounds and are trained as senior investigating officers (SIOs) and informant controllers. The integrity unit staffing includes a trained source handler, again with a CID background.
- Intelligence received concerning potential corruption is entered onto a secure, stand-alone database.

Areas for Improvement

- Recent progress has been made towards the implementation of the national intelligence model (NIM). For example, there is a weekly tasking meeting which undertakes several of the functions of a tasking and co-ordination meeting, and an analyst has recently been assigned to the department on a part time basis. This process can only be improved by the recent strategic assessment and control strategy (October 2005). However application of the NIM is still very new, and the structures of the department are to be reorganised in December 2005.
- The analyst does not attend the weekly tasking and co-ordinating meetings, and problem/offender profiles are yet to be completed.
- There was a low level of knowledge within the department of the vulnerability to corruption assessment, completed in December 2004. The assessment has effectively been replaced by the strategic assessment for professional standards, which had only just been completed at the time of inspection.
- Whilst staff within the department have received general diversity training, they have not received additional training in the investigation of racial complaints or Race Relations Act training specific to professional standards activity.

Recommendation 1

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that staff investigating misconduct and conducting corruption enquiries for police officers and staff receive diversity training specific to professional standards activity.

Prevention - *how the force tries to improve and prevent the abuse of standards*

Strengths

- The PA has assisted the PSD to revise a customer satisfaction questionnaire, which will be sent to complainants to obtain feedback on how complaint handling can be improved.
- The PA recently put on a seminar to consult with the public regarding police powers to 'stop and search'. The learning from this seminar was fed back to the force, and stop and search is subject to robust monitoring by the force.
- Complainants can access the complaints system by email, letter, visits to police station, telephone and fax. Complainants also have access through other 3rd parties such as IPCC, Police Authority, Race Equality Council (REC) and solicitors. The department attempts to reach small groups by having IPCC booklets available for those who do not speak English, however there are no specific plans to improve access to the system for those with disabilities.
- The HoD has started the process of forming better links with outside organisations such as the local REC and force independent advisory group to improve trust and confidence within diverse communities.
- The force operates a confidential reporting line for its staff, but issues and intelligence are also routinely referred in person to the departmental staff, which is then entered into the intelligence system and acted upon. Support groups are confident in reporting issues and concerns with the department through formal and informal meetings.
- The ACPO vetting policy has been adopted and introduced during 2005. The force has developed an electronic security vetting process, which has improved current arrangements for recruitment vetting significantly. The system ensures that the process is carried out in a timely and thorough manner, with an audit trail of checks undertaken. There is still some progress to be made on management vetting of existing staff, according to a prioritised list compiled by the force.
- Strong informal links exist between the heads of vetting, information security and anti-corruption within PSD, with information being passed between them as required.

Areas for Improvement

- Whilst there are examples where the force have learned lessons from the complaints it has received, there is no formal process that ensures that such lessons are captured from complaints investigations, local resolutions, civil claims, 'near misses', grievances and employment tribunals. The head of PSD has developed a new communications strategy to further spread knowledge of 'lessons learnt'/best practice (including utilising the Intranet). The analyst is working with investigators to produce a database of 'lessons learned'.

Recommendation 2

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that a 'lessons learned' database is completed, capturing organisational learning from complaints investigations, local resolutions, civil claims, 'near misses', grievances and employment tribunals. These then need to be communicated to areas and departments, and incorporated into policy and future training.

- There is no central point of contact for professional standards advice on areas, and skills levels are reported to vary from officer to officer. There is also reported to be a lack of consistency in the way complaints are handled on areas. Training regarding PSD and integrity is provided to inspectors, sergeants and probationers, however there are greater opportunities to widen the training net, e.g. custody officer courses, and the effectiveness of existing training needs to be evaluated. Consideration is still being given as to how best to develop professional standards training for police staff.
- The professional standards website is not user-friendly, impactful or readily informative. The head of PSD is aware of this, and has specific plans to improve the website in the near future.
- The force has only recently implemented a scheme whereby the ethnicity and gender of complainants is recorded and assessed routinely. The PSD do not have easy access to information held on the force HR system to identify the ethnicity/gender of staff complained about or who make complaints. Therefore there has been no assessment of any disproportionate effect within the complaints system.

Recommendation 3

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the force puts in place a system for monitoring the ethnicity (as well as the other strands of diversity) of those subject to complaints as well as complainants, with appropriate action to ensure that there is no disproportionality in the delivery of services

- The PSD structure includes data integrity/corporate risk manager, in addition to force information security and vetting manager, and the weekly tasking and co-ordination meetings include the above staff. Significant steps have been taken in improving vetting arrangements in force, for example, and the data security officer deals with database information in accordance with the ACPO Community Security Policy. However there is no security policy aimed at protecting the force's physical IT intelligence assets and data protection, with an effective and co-ordinated approach to managing these requirements. To a degree the strategic assessment for professional standards incorporates such requirements, but the force needs to ensure that the assessment comprehensively covers all

issues commonly found in security management programmes of forces, including building/physical security and the protective marking scheme.

- The force does not yet have specific plans to introduce alcohol and substance abuse testing for its staff.
- The auditing of key IT systems is more reactive rather than routine. An amount of flagging takes place to track specific activity, but there is no comprehensive auditing of force systems to detect misuse. Transaction monitoring of the Police National Computer (PNC) had not been completed for some time (before being recommenced in November 2005), as required by the ACPO data protection protocol.

Recommendation 4

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the force puts in a process to ensure that key IT systems are routinely monitored (proactively) to detect misuse and information leakage. The force should also recommence transaction monitoring of the PNC.

Enforcement - *its effectiveness in dealing with emerging problems*

Strengths

- The ACC lead for PS issues conducts a monthly minuted meeting with the HoD where performance, outstanding suspensions and proactive investigations are discussed.
- Initial complaints are scanned onto e-mail by Area staff and sent through to the department, who respond within the day with a decision on whether the complaint is suitable for local resolution. Timeliness performance by the force is very high, with an average closure time of 44 days.
- The PSD office manager reviews all complaints, including those suitable for local resolution against a set template to ensure consistency in recording, categorising and allocation for early investigation. In addition the department has recently created a policy regarding the early assessment and direction of complaints, called a proportionality matrix.
- The force demonstrated an electronic documentation management system (in operation for 1 month) which allows for paperless files within PSD, the scanning of documents into the system and allows for improvements in case file management.
- The Federation and Unison get advance notification regarding a potential arrest or suspension and are thereby able to ensure that the relevant support is available if required. The Federation chair is sent a copy of all regulation 9 notifications that a complaint has been received/instigated against an officer, again allowing for support/assistance to be provided if required.

- The PSD office manager ensures that there is consistency in panel misconduct hearing proceedings, and all panel members are trained to ensure fairness and compliance with Home Office guidelines.
- Direction and control complaints are recorded and managed by the PSD who carry out analysis on the results. The head of PSD discusses such complaints with each BCU commander at a quarterly meeting and there is evidence that learning is disseminated.
- The relationship of the force with the IPCC is good. IPCC members have attended the force conflict resolution training provided to frontline staff in an effort to increase the knowledge of IPCC staff of force procedures. More shadowing is planned for the future.
- The PA has oversight of the PSD through its performance monitoring committee and the regular dip sampling of files. The PA receives early warning of high profile cases.

Areas for Improvement

- Administration staff regularly review the PSD IT database (Centurion) to identify all cases where complainants and/or staff require an update as to the progress of their case. However in reality these remain unactioned by the investigation team for a number of weeks through pressure of work, as this process is combined with a management review of each case's progress. The force should consider dividing these two tasks so that complainants and staff can receive timely updates on their cases, although the wider issue of management capacity also needs to be addressed.
- There is a perception that there is a disparity in the suspension decision in cases involving police staff and police officers, with police staff more likely to be suspended for similar offences. If true, this may be as a result of differing terms and conditions, and the different ways in which complaints of misconduct are investigated (PSD for police officers, HR for police staff). This should be investigated to ensure consistency of complaint outcomes of police officers and police staff.

Recommendation 5

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the force reviews its misconduct investigations against all staff to ensure that they are carried out in a consistent manner by trained and experienced staff, with staff members being kept updated regularly.

Capacity and Capability – *(Having the resources and skills available to address the reactive and proactive challenge and providing a timely and proportionate response to lapses in professional standards)*

Strengths

- The force has a corruption and intelligence policy in place and integrity/corruption enquiries are underway. The force is of a small size and some anti corruption operations do call for additional expertise. This requires calling on outside organisations for assistance particularly in the area of covert operations. Northamptonshire has used a range of covert resources, mainly from other forces/agencies. Operation Garland is a recent example of the investigation of corruption by staff in Northamptonshire.

Areas for Improvement

- The PSD re-organised on 1 December 2005 for an experimental period, affecting both the complaint and proactive investigation capacity of the department. This will be reviewed after 3 months. As yet it is unclear as the impact this will have on the capacity of the force to conduct anti-corruption enquiries. An additional caseworker will be recruited. However the dedicated proactive capacity of the department will be reduced to one detective constable (acting as the intelligence cell), together with a proportion of the analyst's time, with PSD investigators undertaking both reactive complaints and proactive anti-corruption enquiries. Management resilience in the department will also be reduced.

Glossary

ACC	Assistant Chief Constable
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
BA	baseline assessment
BCU	basic command unit
BME	black and minority ethnic
DCC	deputy chief constable
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
HR	human resources
IO	investigating officer
IPCC	Independent Police Complaints Commission
NIM	National Intelligence Model
PA	police authority
PCSO	police community support officer
PDR	performance development review
PNC	Police National Computer
PS	professional standards
PSD	professional standards department
RES	race equality scheme
SGC	specific grading criteria

SPI(s) statutory performance indicators (SPIs) are used to monitor key aspects of police performance and form a critical component of performance assessments. SPIs are set each year following consultation with partners in line with powers under the Local Government Act 1999. SPIs are also known as 'best value performance indicators'