



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

**Revisiting police
relationships:
progress report**

**Northumbria 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 Northumbria.

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 Northumbria

Since 2011 Northumbria Police has conducted a force-wide integrity 'healthcheck', using the Self-Assessment Checklist provided in HMIC's 2011 report, Without Fear or Favour. The force has either updated or is currently reviewing several policies, including on relationships with the media, accepting gifts and hospitality, social media use and police officers having second jobs. However, more needs to be done to check staff have read and understood these changes.

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 let the Corporate Communications Department know about 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). HMIC found that staff were aware of these rules.

Between September 2011 and May 2012, the force investigated two instances of inappropriate disclosures to the media. Both were continuing at the time of the inspection.

Northumbria Police has a policy 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 monitors whether these rules are being adhered to, or if information is being leaked online. HMIC's independently commissioned research did not identify any cases of potentially inappropriate behaviour on Facebook or Twitter by members of staff in Northumbria.

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

In 2011 we found that Northumbria Police was keeping a record of **gifts and hospitality** received by officers and staff – but this was on multiple registers, held in different locations, which made it more difficult to read across all the data to monitor and identify any problems. The force has now created a single electronic register, overseen by the head of the Professional Standards Department (PSD).

There is monitoring in place to cross-reference contract and **procurement** registers with the gifts and hospitality register, in order to ensure the integrity of the procurement process (e.g. by looking out for instances of a company providing hospitality, and then being awarded a contract).

Northumbria Police's policy for **second jobs** requires all requests to be scrutinised and managed by PSD. Since September 2011 there have been 59 applications for second jobs, all but one of which has 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 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 a reduction in the number of staff working in the anti-corruption unit since our 2011 inspection. However, it still has greater capacity and capability than most forces of a similar size. Between September 2011 and May 2012 the force instigated 71 investigations into the conduct of its officers and staff in relation to the areas covered by this report.

There has been training on integrity issues since our last inspection in 2011. Changes to policy and procedures are communicated via email and the force intranet, 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.