



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

**Revisiting police
relationships:
progress report**

**West Mercia 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 West Mercia.

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 West Mercia

Since 2011 West Mercia Police has conducted a force-wide integrity 'healthcheck' against the recommendations in HMIC's 2011 report, *Without Fear or Favour*. This formed the basis of a detailed plan for improvements in each recommendation area.

One of the resulting actions was to review force policies around integrity issues. West Mercia Police is doing this jointly with Warwickshire Police (as part of the forces' move towards a strategic alliance) and comparing the results against national standards, with the intention of adopting more streamlined joint policies.

In the interim, the force either has updated or is in the process of reviewing and communicating to staff policies covering relationships with the media, acceptance of gifts and hospitality, use of social media and police officers having second jobs.

How are press relations handled, and information leaks investigated?

The force does not have a specific media policy. However, there is information on the intranet about how relationships with the press should be managed, and this is in line with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance. The force intranet guidance has been updated since 2011 to incorporate lessons learned from the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practice and ethics of the British press, and from the findings of HMIC's 2011 *Without Fear or Favour* report. We found that staff were aware of guidance relating to media contact, and knew how to seek advice from the Corporate Communications Department (CCD).

Between September 2011 and May 2012, the force investigated one instance of inappropriate disclosure to the media.

A new social media policy is being developed with Warwickshire Police, which gives advice on developing police-related networks on sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and outlines expectations around staff standards of behaviour when they are off duty. In the interim, however, operational staff highlighted as an issue the absence of specific guidance on their use of social media outside work. The CCD monitors local and national media for force-related stories and indications of information leaks. Currently the force does not have the IT capability to monitor social networking sites in house, although there are plans to introduce this in the future.

HMIC's independently commissioned research identified four cases of potentially inappropriate behaviour on Facebook or Twitter by officers and staff in West Mercia 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 West Mercia Police was keeping a record of the **gifts and hospitality** received by officers and staff, but this was logged on multiple registers held in different police stations, which made it more difficult to monitor and identify any problems. The force is working to merge these into one electronic register, overseen by the single Professional Standards Department (PSD), as part of the strategic alliance with Warwickshire.

There is currently no monitoring in place to cross-reference contract and **procurement** registers with the gifts and hospitality registers in order to ensure the integrity of the procurement process (e.g. by looking out for cases where a company provides hospitality, and is then awarded a contract). However, the force plans to be able to do this when the alliance with Warwickshire Police is in place.

West Mercia Police's policy for **second jobs** and business interests has been revised to ensure it complies with ACPO guidance and relevant legislation and recommendations, including HMIC's *Without Fear or Favour* report. In particular, staff who want to let out property now are required to put in place management by a third-party agent. There is also increased scrutiny of applications, and approved applications are reviewed every two years to ensure they are still in line with policy. Since September 2011 there have been 67 applications for second jobs, 57 of which have been approved.

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

The strategic alliance between West Mercia and Warwickshire Police has been formally agreed and is now moving into the implementation phase. The recently elected PCCs will need to be satisfied with the governance and reporting mechanisms for integrity issues, both within their forces and within the alliance.

It has been decided that the alliance between West Mercia and Warwickshire will include a single PSD, with a single anti-corruption unit, vetting team and case management. The target start date for the single PSD business area is March 2013.

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. Between September 2011 and May 2012 the force instigated 120 investigations into the conduct of its officers and staff in relation to the areas covered by this report.

The chief officer team regularly promotes integrity and the values of the organisation. For instance, since 2011 the Chief Constable and Deputy Chief Constable (DCC) have led on a number of roadshows and briefings across various areas of the business, and taken the opportunity to reinforce expectations around integrity themes in the news (for instance, talking about press relations in connection with the Leveson Inquiry). The DCC has also held seminars with over 300 sergeants and inspectors in order to reinforce values and standards in the force.

Media training is given to the staff (including neighbourhood officers and community support officers) who are most likely to engage with the local press.

Next steps

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

