Leadership assessment research:
Phase two final report

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HMICFRS Leadership assessment research: Phase two final report

Executive summary

Introduction

In order to develop its approach to assessing leadership within the police forces it inspects, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) commissioned the University of Plymouth (www.plymouth.ac.uk) to conduct a two-phase programme of research. The first phase explored how such assessment is done in policing institutions in the US, Australia and Scandinavia as well as comparable institutions in the UK (the Ministry of Defence (MOD), Ofsted, Care Quality Commission (CQC), and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). In the second phase, different data collection methods were piloted in two UK constabularies. This report describes the approach taken in Phase Two, summarises the findings of this phase and presents recommendations about how HMICFRS might use the findings to inform its approach to future inspections.

Research approach

As a result of Phase One, three different data collection methods which are not currently used by HMICFRS to assess leadership were identified: quantitative surveys, qualitative surveys and focus groups with stakeholders external to the force. Two police forces (Police Force 1 and Police Force 2) agreed to take part in the research. These methods were then piloted with their workforce to discover the extent to which data generated through these methods would enhance HMICFRS's current assessment process. The research was carried out during May and June 2017.

Quantitative and qualitative surveys were designed using HMICFRS's current assessment questions, and supplemented with leadership dimensions not currently included but used by other organisations ('setting direction' 'teamwork' and 'job satisfaction'). Additionally, respondents were requested to provide an overall rating of their force's leadership ('Outstanding', 'Good', 'In need of improvement', or

'Inadequate'). The surveys were available to complete online for 11 days in Police Force 1 and eight days in Police Force 2.

To explore external perceptions and experiences of leadership, focus groups with representatives of each force's external partners were also conducted. As a way to 'sense-check' the findings emerging from both the surveys and external focus group, officers and staff members from each force also took part in a focus group.

The findings relating to the strengths and limitations of each of these data collection methods are presented in this report. Separate reports summarising the responses to the questions themselves have been provided to Police Force 1 and Police Force 2. The purpose of this report is to provide HMICFRS with the information and evidence it needs to decide on its future approach to assessing leadership.

Key findings

Response rates

In Police Force 1, a total of 84 quantitative surveys and three qualitative surveys were completed. The response rate was higher in Police Force 2, with 357 completing the quantitative survey and 72 the qualitative survey. The difference in response rates is largely attributed to how the survey invitation was disseminated: in Police Force 1, the invitation was posted on the staff intranet and refreshed daily so that it remained visible throughout the fieldwork period; whereas Police Force 2 staff members and officers received a direct invitation and reminder via email.

As more people had the opportunity to complete the survey than participate in current inspection methods, internal focus group participants described the surveys as being more 'democratic'. Willingness to complete the surveys as part of the HMICFRS inspection was higher for the quantitative (85%) than qualitative survey (58%); this indicates that the quantitative survey is the more democratic of the two surveys.

Selection of participants

The selection of participants is a key issue in running both internal and external focus groups. Although the participation of officers and staff from

across the force is required to ensure that representative views are captured, availability inevitably shapes a group's composition. In addition, some focus group participants suggested that those with more positive perceptions are more likely to be selected.

It was also found that more senior officers made a greater contribution to focus group discussions and that more junior officers experienced some discomfort in expressing views in front of their superiors. Therefore, focus groups organised by rank and grade are more likely to lead to equitable, and open and honest, discussions.

Quality of the survey data

A high proportion of neutral responses (over 30%) were given to some of the quantitative survey questions, meaning that respondents did not agree or disagree with the leadership statements. Participants in the internal focus group suggested that such a response would have been given if they did not understand a question or did not have the required information to answer it. As the majority (90%) of survey respondents felt that the questions were clear and easy to understand, it appears more likely that a lack of knowledge or information may explain the high proportion of neutral responses. The inclusion of a 'don't know' response option would have allowed those without the required information to answer the question more appropriately.

In general however, the internal focus group discussions were aligned with the quantitative survey data indicating the veracity of this approach.

The data from the qualitative survey was analysed according to two criteria: the extent to which information was 'specific' as opposed to 'generic', and the extent to which comments offered actionable suggestions for improvement within the force. Analysis indicated a large proportion (49-86%) of responses were generic, with only 1-39% offering specific examples or illustrations. Only 1% of all comments received provided actionable suggestions. Internal focus group participants suggested that respondents may not have known which leaders to refer to in their answers. This is supported, at least in part, by the finding that some respondents referred to their immediate line managers in their answers and others to senior leaders in the force.

Quality of the external focus group data

The findings from the external focus groups suggest that this method offers little 'added value'. The discussion in the Police Force 1 external focus group was overwhelmingly positive, with the areas cited as needing improvement being largely outside the constabulary's control (level of turnover among its members). The discussion in the Police Force 2 external focus group generated few insights that were not also discussed within the internal focus group. These findings may be different in other forces in which the working relationships with external partners do not work as well as they do in the two constabularies included in this study.

Time efficiency

Of the three methods, quantitative surveys were seen to be the most time efficient, both in terms of the time needed to complete the surveys and the time required to analyse the data. 90% of respondents in Police Force 1 and 92% of respondents in Police Force 2 took less than 10 minutes to complete the quantitative survey. Given the appropriate software, increasing the amount of quantitative survey responses does not increase the amount of time it takes to analyse it. It took approximately eight hours to analyse the larger data set from Police Force 2. In contrast, analysing 72 qualitative survey responses required 32 hours to analyse.

Survey fatigue and lack of perceived benefits

Survey fatigue emerged as a key discussion point in the internal focus groups. Not only did participants feel that they had been asked to take part in many surveys and focus groups in the past, but information about how the findings had been used had not been shared with them. Therefore, there was a feeling that their participation had few benefits for them. Members of the internal focus groups suggested that more clearly indicating how the results would directly affect their force could mitigate some of the effects of survey fatigue. The comment was also made that if the results would affect their HMICFRS rating, people would be more inclined to respond even more truthfully than they did in relation to this pilot study. Recommendations about how to increase the response rates for quantitative surveys are presented below.

Resource requirement

It is important to consider the resources required by forces to organise the focus groups and survey invitations when planning future inspections. The creation of email distribution lists for the purpose of the survey proved a time intensive process, which could perhaps be removed if all officers

and staff were invited to complete a survey in the future. Of course, the implications of this on data analysis would need to be considered (if the survey asked any qualitative questions).

Although the focus groups required invitations to be sent out and rooms to be booked, the participating forces reported no issues or difficulties associated with this process.

Recommendations:

1. Of the three methods piloted, the use of quantitative surveys is seen to be most promising in meeting HMICFRS's desire to develop its leadership assessment process. Consideration should be given to the following points to maximise the potential value of a quantitative survey:

   - The available findings suggest that direct email communication with officers and staff members is required to obtain a higher response rate. The email should clearly explain the importance of the survey and how the findings will be used;
   - It is also recommended that the surveys should remain 'live' for a minimum of two weeks. This would allow individuals who have been on holiday or who have been dealing with crisis situations to complete the survey following their return to work or after resolution of the crisis;
   - Those completing the survey were unsure of 'who' they should refer to when asked about 'the leadership'. Identifying the band of leaders respondents should refer to (for instance, two levels above you, your direct line manager etc.) is likely to improve the quality of the data;
   - The inclusion of a 'don't know' response option would allow respondents to indicate where they don't have the information required to answer a question. This would reduce the number of neutral responses received; and
   - Relating to the above two points, the survey should be further piloted, following these refinements, to ensure that it is a valid and reliable tool that will add value to the inspection process.

2. Internal focus groups may provide additional benefits to the existing inspection approach in that they can clarify and elaborate on discrepancies in the quantitative data. The internal focus groups conducted in Phase Two allowed for in-depth exploration of the findings emerging from the other forms of data collection.

    Consideration should be given to the feasibility of conducting a series of focus groups, with participants being grouped by rank/grade to ensure open and honest discussion can take place.

3. Based on the findings presented here, qualitative surveys should not be included in the HMICFRS inspection process. The quality of the data does not justify the resources required to collect and analyse it.

4. To overcome the lack of perceived benefits associated with participation in surveys and focus groups, and survey fatigue more generally; findings from the different inspection methods and how they are used should be carefully communicated with the forces.

    It is also important that those forces that have taken part in the Phase Two research are informed about how the data will be used in the development of HMICFRS's assessment of leadership.

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the research

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) is responsible for evaluating the performance of police forces in England and Wales. Through the Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) Programme, each force is inspected annually across three pillars: effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy. Although leadership has been incorporated within the PEEL Programme of inspections as a fourth pillar since 2015, a lack of evidence on effective approaches to leadership inspections has proved challenging. This has limited the ability to analyse, and therefore grade, the data collected. To develop HMICFRS's understanding of what constitutes an effective approach, the University of Plymouth was commissioned to research leadership assessment methodologies. The findings from this research are to be used by HMICFRS to inform their future approaches to the assessment of leadership.

The research involved two phases: in the first, a literature review of leadership assessment was conducted alongside interviews with other organisations who have assessed leadership. The findings from this phase were used to identify and develop three comparative methods of assessment in Phase Two (see Phase one final report (University of Plymouth, April 2017) for full details). This report describes how the comparative methods of assessment were conducted and presents the findings of their use in two participating constabularies: Police Force 1 and Police Force 2.

1.2. The research approach

In the first phase of the research, a rapid review of academic and grey literature was conducted to identify and review the available evidence on leadership assessment. The review aimed to identify how leadership is assessed by other UK based organisations as well as in police authorities in a selection of countries (Canada, United States, Australia and Scandinavia). A total of 65 relevant documents were identified and reviewed. In addition, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from organisations that assess leadership, are assessed on leadership or have expertise of such assessment methods. These

organisations included the College of Policing, Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, the US Justice Department and HMICFRS.

The findings from the first phase of the research were presented in the University of Plymouth report 'Leadership assessment research: Phase one final report' (April 2017). Following discussions of these findings between the research team and HMICFRS, it was agreed that the focus of the second phase would be on testing the method rather than content of assessment. The methods tested were:

- A qualitative online survey of officers and staff members;
- A quantitative online survey of officers and staff members; and
- Two focus groups, one with external stakeholders and a second with police officers and staff members to feedback and 'reality check' the findings emerging from the external group.

All three of these methods were tested in two police forces, Police Force 1 and Police Force 2. Testing multiple methods in a force sought to minimise any potential bias arising from particular social, economic or physical environments; and the inclusion of two forces aimed to provide insight into how the methods may work in forces across England and Wales. Police Force 1 and Police Force 2 were chosen due to three key reasons: their geographic area of operation (representing both the North and South), the timing of the pilots would not overlap with or be proximate to the routine HMICFRS inspection, and their ability and willingness to engage within the research timeline.

The leadership sub-diagnostic questions used by HMICFRS as part of their 2017 Spring PEEL inspection cycle were used to inform the development of both surveys and focus group topic guide. Further details on the design and application of each of three tested methods are provided below.

Quantitative survey
HMICFRS's existing leadership sub-diagnostic questions were converted into 5-point Likert scale response items. These questions explored the following dimensions of leadership:

- Fairness and respect;
- Modelling values;

- Ethical decision making;
- Openness to feedback;
- Wellbeing;
- Fair and transparent selection;
- Current leadership capabilities;
- Talent recognition and development;
- Innovation;
- Future leadership capabilities; and
- Leadership development.

Three additional dimensions of leadership, which are not currently part of HMICFRS's existing leadership sub-diagnostic questions, were also included because of their presence in many of the leadership assessments examined during the literature review in Phase One:

- Setting direction;
- Teamwork; and
- Job satisfaction.

Although in this pilot study these three items did not yield particularly distinctive information about the force's leadership (for instance, the 'Teamwork' item was rated 'neutral' by 42% of Police Force 1 respondents and 33% of Police Force 2 respondents), it is recommended that they be retained in future surveys until their lack of importance can be more robustly established. As well as the decision to omit them being taken on the basis of limited data, these items could also helpfully be cross-referenced against other items in order to create a more sophisticated understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a force's leadership.

A question exploring perceptions of the force's overall leadership rating was also included. Response options were those used by HMICFRS to grade forces in the PEEL inspection process: outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

In addition to questions on leadership, the survey asked respondents to rate the survey in terms of its ease of completion and willingness to complete it. The questions included in the survey are provided in Appendix One.

The survey was developed using the software package SNAP and was available for completion online for 11 days in Police Force 1 and eight days

in Police Force 2. In Police Force 1, details of the quantitative survey were posted on the force's internal website, and refreshed daily so that the post remained visible to staff and officers as they logged into the site. The link was live for 11 days. Of the 4,969 members of Police Force 1, 84 completed it (a 1.7% response rate)[1].

In Police Force 2, a total of 6,117 police officers and staff members were emailed an invitation to complete the quantitative survey. A reminder email was then sent out to the same officers and staff six days later. A total of 357 surveys were completed by Police Force 2 respondents (a 5.8% response rate). An additional 57 responses were received from officers and staff members from another force, who are part of Police Force 2 joint units. These responses were excluded from the analysis.

Qualitative survey
The same dimensions of leadership assessed in the quantitative survey were also used in this survey. However, unlike the quantitative survey, all questions were open-ended to ensure that each of the leadership dimensions were explored in depth. The questions are presented in Appendix Two.

Again the survey was developed using SNAP software and was available for completion online for 11 days in Police Force 1 and eight days in Police Force 2. Given that the focus of qualitative research is in obtaining depth rather than breadth of data, the invitation to complete this survey was sent to a smaller sample in both forces.

Determining who would complete the quantitative survey and who would complete the qualitative survey was handled slightly differently in the two participating forces. In Police Force 1, the invitation to complete the survey was posted on their intranet and was therefore visible to all staff and officers accessing the intranet during the fieldwork period. The intranet article invited three divisions (including their HQ) to complete the quantitative survey and a fourth division was invited to complete the qualitative survey. In Police Force 1, the survey information was available to the 4,969 staff members and officers via the force's intranet. Only three qualitative surveys were completed. Due to the small number of

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[1] Please note, it is not known if all staff members and officers saw the survey notice during the fieldwork period. It is therefore difficult to calculate an accurate response rate.

responses, they have been excluded from the analysis presented in this report.

In Police Force 2, a targeted email distribution list was created so that 75% of the force was invited to complete the quantitative survey and the remainder was invited to complete the qualitative. Local Police Areas and Departments were used to create the two email groups. A total of 1,945 police officers and staff members were invited by email to complete the qualitative survey, with 72 responses received. A further 22 responses were received from officers and staff members from another force, who are part of Police Force 2 joint units. These were removed from the analysis.

The differences in the two response rates are likely due to the survey invitation being shared via a notice on the force's intranet in Police Force 1 and it is not known how many officers and staff members read this information in the fieldwork period. In Police Force 2, force members were sent an email alerting them to the survey and telling them about its importance. The different approaches to disseminating the survey invitations show the importance of a direct communication, such as email, with officers and staff members to maximise response rates.

Focus groups

Phase One of the study identified that Ofsted engage with external organisations in their leadership assessment activities. Phase Two therefore tested this method to discover its potential to provide further insight into leadership across the two participating forces.

Each participating constabulary was asked to invite representatives from partner organisations to attend an hour-long focus group held at their headquarters. Within Police Force 1, potential participants were identified from the force's external partner distribution lists. An email was sent out which briefed recipients about the purpose of the focus group and invited anyone who was available to attend. In the first instance, the response was poor, which was attributed to the timing of the email (it went out during half term). Personal phone calls undertaken by our Police Force 1 contact ensured good attendance at the group. In Police Force 2, our contact sought to achieve a balanced representation from partner organisations and approached particular individuals personally.

The Police Force 1 focus group was attended by representatives from nine organisations including the NHS, the local council, the Council of Mosques, and the fire service. Six external partners attended the Police Force 2 focus group, representing the local council, the NHS, and the fire service. Each focus group lasted for an hour and was run by two members of the University of Plymouth research team.

The external focus groups aimed to explore how partners experienced the leadership of each force, and to evoke an 'outsiders' view. The topic guide for the focus group discussion can be found in Appendix Three. The meetings were not audio recorded but one member of the University of Plymouth team was responsible for taking notes, and the themes arising from the meeting were identified by the research team directly following the meetings. These themes were then summarised and included in the reports sent to each of the participating constabularies.

In addition to the external focus groups, focus groups with officers and staff members from each of the participating forces were held. The purpose of the internal focus groups was to sense-check the results of the quantitative and qualitative surveys, and feedback a summary of the discussion with the external partners. In discussing these findings, it was possible to judge the extent to which they aligned with officers and staff members' own perceptions of the forces' leadership. In addition, conflicting findings were presented and the reasons for the conflict explored. Each force invited officers and staff members to attend the internal focus group and aimed to secure representatives from different ranks and grades.

In Police Force 1, eight people attended the internal focus group, representing Detective, Inspector, Sergeant and Police Community Support Officer ranks. No staff members were present. At Police Force 2, 12 people attended the focus group, and as well as the aforementioned ranks, four people in support roles attended. A University of Plymouth research team member recorded the key points of the discussion using hand written notes.

Together, these interventions have provided a rich source of information about the leadership within Police Force 1 and Police Force 2. Each force has received a summarised account of the findings of the surveys and focus groups. Because the purpose of this report is to assess the

strengths and limitations of the piloted methods (rather than the leadership of the participating forces), none of the findings are included in this report to HMICFRS. Instead, the remainder of the report identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and makes recommendations based on these findings concerning their appropriateness for inclusion in future HMICFRS leadership assessment activities.

1.3. Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section Two outlines the advantages and disadvantages of using quantitative or qualitative surveys as part of the inspection process;

- Section Three discusses the merits and limitations of using focus groups as a way of inspecting a constabulary's leadership; and

- Section Four presents the key recommendations emerging from these findings.

2. Key findings: The use of surveys to assess leadership

2.1. Introduction

During Phase One of the study, the use of surveys was identified as a way in which the MOD in the UK and police forces in the US assess leadership. The quality of the data collected in both the qualitative and quantitative survey, and the strengths and limitations of these methods, is discussed in this section of the report. Please note, due to the small number of qualitative surveys completed in Police Force 1, the discussion of the qualitative data relates only to that collected in Police Force 2 (unless otherwise stated).

2.2. Data quality

One of the key aims of the research was to determine if and how other forms of data collection would enhance the quality of the data currently generated by the HMICFRS inspection process. Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative survey data identified key areas of strength and weakness. For example, the promotion process emerged as an aspect of leadership that was more commonly rated poorly, with respondents questioning the fairness of the process. In contrast, understanding of 'mission and direction of the force' was very high. These perceptions were corroborated in the internal focus groups as the issues of most concern and most satisfaction, respectively.

However, despite producing such findings, the available data suggests that not all questions were clearly interpreted or understood. For the quantitative survey, a key indicator of this is the high number of neutral responses (i.e. respondents did not agree or disagree with the presented statements on different dimensions of leadership). For example, 49% of Police Force 2 survey respondents gave a neutral rating to the statement 'in this force the development of future leaders is carefully planned'. Other statements receiving a relatively high proportion of neutral responses (that is, 30% or more of responses in the Police Force 1 and Police Force 2 quantitative surveys were neutral) were:

- In this force, we look externally for innovation and best practises;

- This force has effective workforce planning systems to ensure that its leadership skills and capabilities match need;
- I believe leaders in my force live through our values;
- In this force, new talent is recognised and given the appropriate development opportunities; and
- Leaders in this force encourage collaboration and teamwork.

The high numbers of neutral responses were explored in both internal focus groups; participants explained that such a response would have been given if they either did not understand the question or have the information required to be able to answer it. Quantitative survey respondents were asked if they thought the questions were clear and easy to understand. Despite the high number of neutral responses, 90% of quantitative respondents thought that they were clear and easy to understand. This suggests that a lack of knowledge or information required to answer the question may be more likely to explain the high proportion of neutral responses. The inclusion of a 'don't know' response option would have allowed respondents to indicate a lack of knowledge and therefore reduce the number of neutral responses.

Regardless of the factors leading to neutral responses, the ability of these questions to produce the quality of data required to assess leadership is unclear. Further assessment of their validity and reliability would be needed to inform a decision on their inclusion in any future survey.

Two key criteria were used to analyse the benefit of the qualitative survey data: the extent to which the surveys generated specific information, and the extent to which actionable suggestions were offered. As shown in Table One below, most responses were 'generic' rather than specific. The term 'generic' is used to describe very 'general' comments, such as the single words, 'good', or 'poor' without the provision of any further detail to support their perceptions. Between 35 (49%) to 62 (86%) were generic and only 1 (1%) to 28 (39%) specific. Examples of these types of 'generic' comments include:

- **How do leaders communicate the direction and strategy of the force? (q7)**
  Badly
- **In what ways (if any) do leaders demonstrate the values expected of the force? (q10)**

By their actions

Table One: Number of generic and specific comments made

Question/ Leadership Dimension	Generic Comments		Specific Comments	
How do leaders communicate the direction and strategy of the force? (Q7)/ Setting Direction	62	86%	7	10%
How do leaders show their respect for people in this force (if at all)? (Q8)/ Fairness & Respect	55	76%	11	15%
How do leaders treat people fairly in this force (if at all)? (Q9)/ Fairness & Respect	48	67%	11	15%
In what ways (if any) do leaders demonstrate the values expected of the force? (Q10)/ Modelling Values	42	58%	11	15%
What do leaders in your force do (if anything) to ensure they take an ethical approach to decision making? (Q11)/ Ethical Decision Making	39	54%	10	14%
In what ways is the workforce able to challenge and feedback to leaders? (Q12)/ Openness to Feedback	47	65%	15	21%
In what ways (if any) do leaders contribute to your wellbeing at work? (Q13)/ Wellbeing	35	49%	28	39%
How do leaders identify high potentials in your force? (Q14)/ Fair & Transparent Selection	50	69%	11	15%
How fair do you think the approach to identifying high potential members of the workforce is (Q15)/ Fair & Transparent Selection	53	74%	4	6%
What does the force do (if anything) to ensure that selection for leadership roles is fair? (Q16)/ Fair & Transparent Selection	47	65%	7	10%

Question/ Leadership Dimension	Generic Comments		Specific Comments	
In what ways (if any) do the workforce influence and inform innovation and change in the force? (Q17)/ Innovation	51	71%	7	10%
How would you describe the leadership skills and capabilities within your force? (Q18)/ Current Leadership Capabilities	53	74%	3	4%
How does the force recognise and develop new talent? If the force does not do anything to recognise and develop new talent, please state this (Q19)/ Talent Recognition & Development	55	76%	1	1%
Where does your force look (if anywhere) for examples of innovation and best practice? (Q20)/ Innovation	49	68%	3	4%
How does your force implement new ideas and working practices (if at all)? (Q21)/ Innovation	53	74%	2	3%
What does the force do (if anything) to ensure that its leadership skills and capabilities match its needs? (Q22)/ Future Leadership Capabilities	43	60%	3	4%
How would you describe the force's approach to succession planning in leadership development? (Q23)/ Leadership Development	43	60%	3	4%
What do the leaders in your force do (if anything) to ensure that there is collaboration and teamwork across the force? (Q24)/ Teamwork	48	67%	6	8%
In what ways (if any) do leaders in your Police Force contribute to your job satisfaction? (Q25)/ Job Satisfaction	47	65%	8	11%
What do you think about the leadership in your force? (Q26)/ General Opinion	52	72%	7	10%

Base: All Police Force 2 Qualitative Respondents (n=72)

As shown in Table One, question 13 received more specific comments than any other question. This question asked respondents to provide examples of how leaders contribute to their wellbeing at work and therefore explored a leadership dimension relevant to all force officers and staff members. In doing so, respondents had a clear frame of reference on which to base their response. Although the reliability and validity of the survey questions have not been tested here, the available evidence suggests that a question of this type is more likely to capture data of a higher quality.

Furthermore, very few comments provided a suggestion or recommendation (15 out of 1440 comments made). The proportion of N/A responses was however much higher and ranged from 3% for Question 7 to 26% for Question 24. Qualitative survey respondents were also asked if they thought the questions were clear and easy to understand, 57% (compared to 90% of quantitative respondents) thought that they were. Without an understanding of the question meaning, it would be difficult for respondents to provide specific and actionable information in their answers.

The high proportion of N/A responses and lack of suggestions were also explored in the internal focus group. Participants suggested that survey respondents may not have known which leader (or leaders) to refer to when answering a question. Supporting this assertion, the qualitative comments provided in the survey suggested that some referred to their line managers and others the senior leaders in the force. Perhaps reflecting these different interpretations of leaders, half of the qualitative questions produced a balanced number of positive and negative comments. This represents a key challenge to the assessment of leadership within police forces; although the HMICFRS inspection does not aim to assess individual leaders, survey respondents require a clear definition of a 'leader' when answering questions. In the absence of this, questions are likely to be interpreted differently across a force and may therefore undermine the data quality.

2.3. Strengths of using surveys

Democratic way of inspecting

A key strength of using surveys is their ability to reach a wide range of organisational members. In the internal focus groups, surveys were described as a more 'democratic' means of collecting perceptions about the force's leadership, and as such, would be preferable to that currently used by HMICFRS. Focus group participants felt that as a small proportion of officers and staff members were selected to share their views with HMICFRS inspectors, it was possible that their views did not reflect those held more widely across the force. For example, those aiming to be promoted may express more positive views. Surveys were thus seen as more capable of representing a 'fair' view of the force and its leadership.

In considering the breadth of data collected by the two surveys, and in particular their success in engaging with officers and staff of all ranks and grades, it is of interest to note the difference in response rates between the quantitative and qualitative surveys. As shown in Chart One below, a higher proportion of staff members than officers completed the qualitative survey in Police Force 2 (17 (24%) out of 72 respondents were officers). In contrast, a higher proportion of officers than staff members completed the quantitative survey (65% of all respondents). This difference may reflect the increased time required to complete the qualitative survey; officers may have less desk time than staff and therefore unable to commit to completing a longer survey. The time taken to complete both surveys is discussed further below.

**Chart One: Survey responses by officer and staff member role**
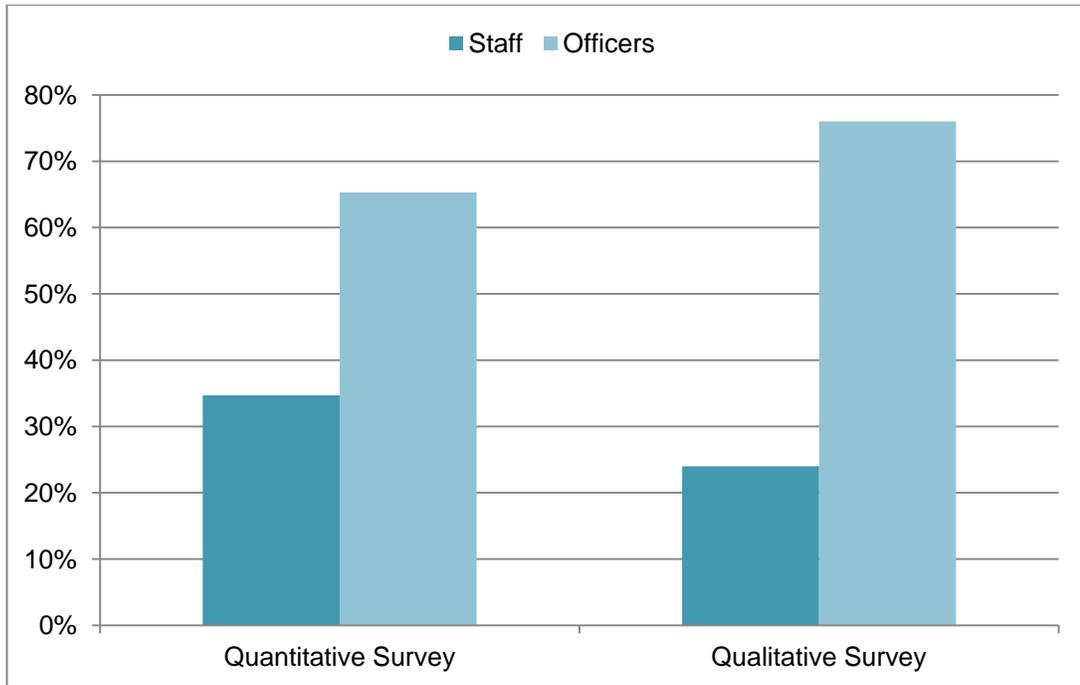
Base: All Respondents (qualitative survey = 72; quantitative survey = 441)

Charts Two and Three below show the success of the surveys in engaging with officers and staff members of different ranks and grades. Please note, as Police Force 1 and Police Force 2 use different grading systems, Chart Three presents data for Police Force 2 only. Although the surveys were completed by representatives from most ranks (with the exception of Superintendent) and grades, the qualitative survey was completed by a higher proportion of Sergeants and Broad Band 3 staff than any other rank/grade. Broad Band 3 staff also represented the largest proportion of quantitative staff respondents in Police Force 2, but a higher proportion of Police Constables completed this survey than any other rank. The majority of Police Force 1 quantitative survey staff respondents were Grades 4-6 (44%) and Grades 7-9 (44%).

In the absence of a breakdown of officer and staff numbers by rank and grade from both participating forces, it is not possible to assess how representative these response patterns are. It does however indicate that those with more limited desk time (Police Constables) are more able and willing to complete a quantitative than a qualitative survey. Therefore, the quantitative survey appears to be more 'democratic' than a quantitative survey.

Chart Two: Survey responses by officer rank
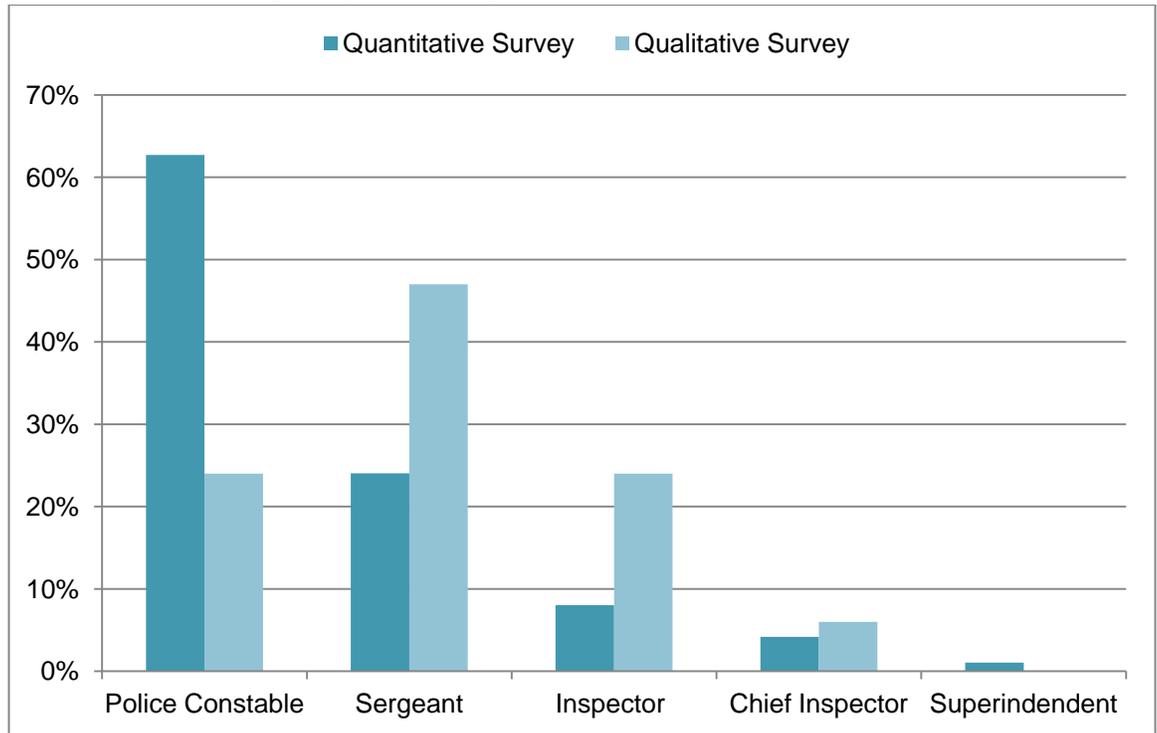
Base: All Respondents Answering the Question (qualitative survey = 17 quantitative survey = 287)

**Chart Three: Survey responses by staff grade**
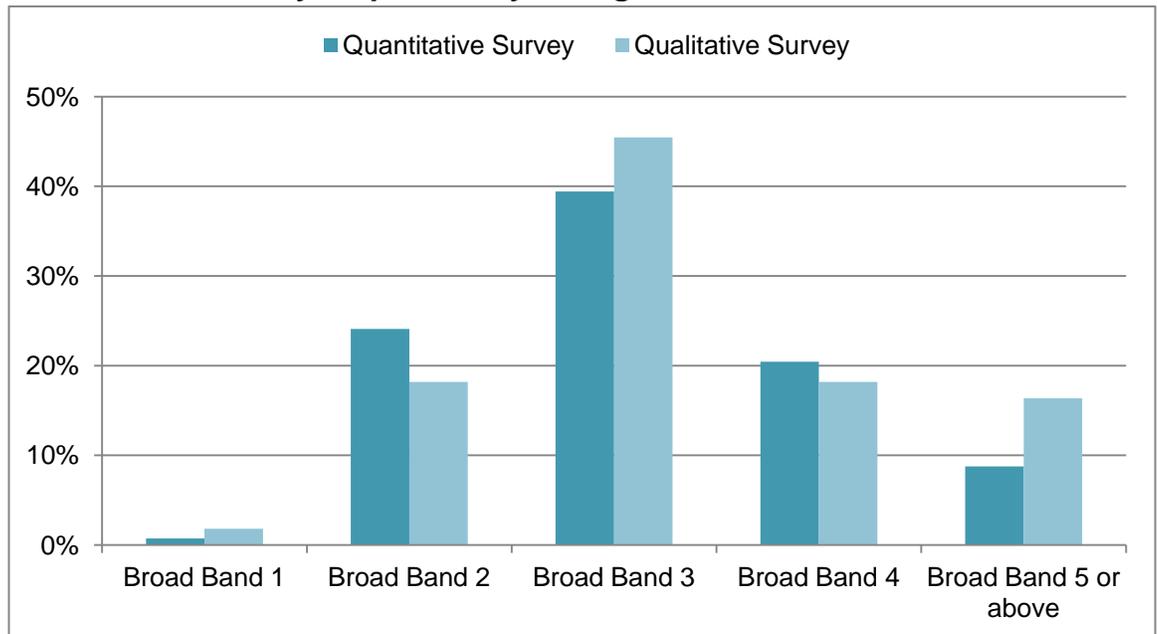
Base: All Police Force 2 Respondents Answering the Question (qualitative survey = 55 quantitative survey =137)

In addition, in obtaining responses from across the force, survey data can be used to identify and explore relationships between variables by different ranks and grades. Analysing responses by rank and grade could identify whether or not emerging findings are unique to certain roles within the organisation.

Time efficiency

The quantitative survey is more time efficient than the qualitative survey, both in terms of the time required by officers and staff members to complete it, and for the research team analysing it. Chart Four below shows that a large majority (92%) of quantitative survey respondents completed it in less than 10 minutes. In contrast, only a third of respondents (35%) were able to complete the qualitative survey in less than ten minutes and almost a quarter (24%) took 20 minutes or longer.

Chart Four: Time taken to complete the surveys
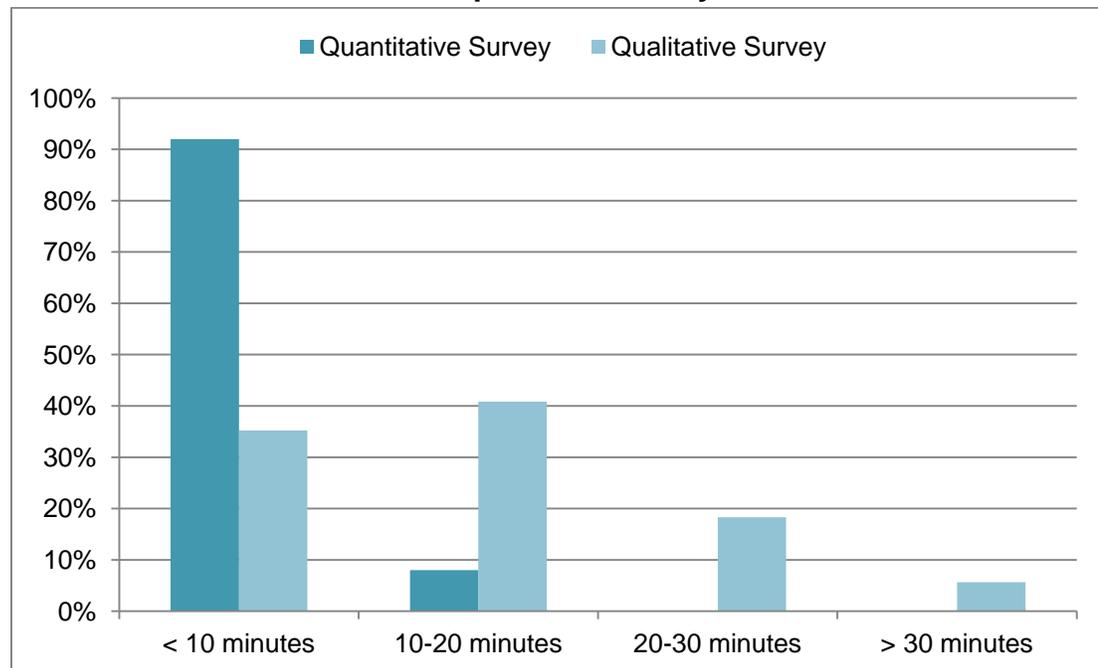
Base: All Respondents (qualitative survey = 71 quantitative survey =441)

Reflecting the differences in completion time, only 56% of qualitative respondents felt the survey length was 'about right' and 42% thought that it was 'too long'. In contrast, only one quantitative respondent thought that their survey was too long, with 89% stating that its length was 'about right' and 11% even stating that it was 'too short'.

Given appropriate software, large amounts of quantitative data can be analysed very efficiently (in this case, 357 quantitative surveys took between 8-10 hours to analyse, which included 'cleaning' the data and dealing with security protocols which took more time than would be needed by someone analysing the data from within the policing structures). Furthermore, as the quantitative analysis process is the same regardless of the number of responses received, the analysis time would not increase with the number of completed surveys.

In contrast, qualitative data requires considerably more analysis time (for instance, the analysis of the 72 surveys for Police Force 2 took approximately 32 hours). It is difficult to predict the amount of resource needed for its analysis; respondents will provide responses of varying depth and clarity. Therefore, doubling the number of completed qualitative surveys may not necessarily equate to double the analysis time (it could be more or less).

Capacity to collect qualitative data in a quantitative instrument
Another benefit of quantitative surveys is that they can include the option for respondents to explain or provide more information on particular issues. The quantitative survey used in this study included a space for respondents to make additional comments. Almost half of quantitative survey respondents in both forces provided such comments (38 out of 84 respondents in Police Force 1 (45%) and 150 out of 357 in Police Force 2 (42%).

2.4. Limitations of using surveys

Survey fatigue:
'Survey fatigue' emerged as a key issue. Although the qualitative and quantitative survey response rates were higher in Police Force 2 than in Police Force 1, the quantitative Police Force 1 response rate of 1.7% is not uncommon for online surveys. It is important to note that such a small response rate still represents a larger percentage of a force's population than would normally be engaged in an HMICFRS inspection through focus groups and reality testing methods. However, where such low response rates are obtained, the extent to which the data may be biased cannot be determined. That is, it is possible that the respondents' views and experiences are not representative of those held across the force. For

example, an individual with a particular grievance or issue may be more motivated to complete a survey.

Survey fatigue was discussed in both internal focus groups, with participants noting the high number of surveys they are asked to complete. Completing a survey would inevitably be a lower priority activity than attending to routine work or of course a crisis situation.

Given the increased time required to complete a qualitative survey (see Chart Four), they are more likely to be affected by survey fatigue than quantitative surveys. This assertion is supported by the proportion of respondents who said that they would be happy to complete a survey as part of the HMICFRS inspection process. A large majority of quantitative respondents (85%) would be happy to complete a quantitative survey but only 58% of qualitative respondents would be happy to do so.

Lack of perception of benefits:
Related to the issue of survey fatigue, and as discussed in both internal focus groups, individuals were reluctant to complete either survey because they do not perceive there to be any personal benefits arising from their participation. Participants described how they had previously completed surveys but not told how the data would be used. It was felt however, that if a survey's results would impact on an HMICFRS inspection grading and the use of the survey data was clearly understood, they would be more likely to participate. When asked in the focus group if they would provide truthful answers to HMICFRS as they did to this survey, participants indicated that they would be even more truthful if they knew it would have an impact in the force.

Resource requirement
It is important to acknowledge the time requirements of disseminating either a qualitative or quantitative survey. In this study, both Police Force 1 and Police Force 2 disseminated the invitation to complete the surveys amongst their staff members and officers. In Police Force 2, where the invitations for the qualitative and quantitative surveys were targeted at specific staff groups (to ensure a smaller and larger sample was achieved), it is estimated that survey dissemination required six hours of work (personal email communication from Police Force 2).

The time requirements could be reduced through the dissemination of the survey invitation through other communication mechanisms – such as the force's intranet as used in Police Force 1. However, this approach led to a smaller response rate. Dissemination of an email to all force members would reduce the administrative requirements associated with communications targeted at a specific sample. Consideration should be given to the anticipated volume of qualitative data to be collected in a survey though; although an increase in quantitative data does not lead to increased analysis time, the same is not true for qualitative data.

3. Key findings: The use of focus groups to assess leadership

3.1. Introduction

Focus groups are a key part of Ofsted inspections, and it was considered of interest to discover the kind and quality of data that could be elicited from their use in the inspection of police constabularies. Two focus groups were conducted in each participating constabulary: one with external partners, and the other with officers and staff members. Focus groups are a qualitative method of collecting data, this means that they are capable of collecting rich, in-depth information from a group of people. This section of the report considers the quality of the data collected in the two focus groups as part of the review of their strengths and limitations.

3.2. Strengths of using focus groups

Exploring emerging themes and conflicts
The internal focus groups in particular proved valuable in allowing for in-depth exploration of findings emerging from the other methods of data collection. The focus group data allowed the research team to interpret and advance their understanding of the findings emerging from these methods.

The skilled facilitator was able to use probing questions to provide rich data on leadership experiences but also to identify why conflicts may have emerged from the survey data.

Ability to engage with external parties
Engaging with externally based partners allows for an 'outsiders' view of Police forces to be revealed. This information would not have been available had data only been collected from staff and officers. The particular 'added value' offered by such focus groups is that they provide an opportunity to discuss policing and leadership within its wider context, with those directly affected by how the police engage.

Although HMICFRS inspections are to inspect forces internally, the police must work with others in order to address issues, problems and concerns in the wider environment. As partners are such a significant part of day to

day policing, assessing how the police interact with them and work across all the themes of PEEL is seen to provide a more holistic view of a force's strengths and limitations. The themes that emerged from the focus groups (although not quantifiable in the first instance) often echoed themes arising in the internal focus groups, but provided additional nuance as they were presented from differing viewpoints.

3.3. Limitations of using focus groups

Selection of participants

A key limitation of focus groups concerns how participants are selected to take part. Although representatives from across the force are preferable to ensure that a breadth of viewpoints is captured, availability will always be a factor. The nature of police work itself means that operational situations will also limit the ability to participate.

In addition, it is acknowledged that there is the potential for only those with positive perceptions to be selected to ensure that an inspection grading is not adversely affected by more negative viewpoints.

Peer pressure

Even where focus group participants are representative of the wider force, it does not necessarily mean that each participant will make an equal contribution to the discussions or when they do speak, do so openly and honestly. This is especially the case when officers of differing ranks are present (as was the case in both focus groups). Although the facilitators aimed to ensure that there was a balance of voices in the discussion, some individuals (often the most senior officers) made a greater contribution than did their more junior colleagues. We also perceived the obvious discomfort of more junior officers to speak within the focus group, especially when their views differed from the majority of those being aired.

Resource requirements

Both forces were required to organise the internal and external focus groups. This involved inviting participants, room booking and liaising with each participant to provide the required details. The research team acknowledges the support provided by the forces in facilitating this data collection method. Although both forces reported no difficulty in organising the focus groups, it is important that this resource requirement

is acknowledged when considering the potential use of focus groups in future inspections.

Emerging findings

The external focus groups generated few findings that were additional to the internal group or related to factors within the control of the police force. Although the discussions were largely positive, a different response could be obtained in other areas with different working relations with external partners.

4. Summary and recommendations

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this research was to make recommendations to HMICFRS about how they might improve their processes for assessing leadership within the forces that they inspect. In Phase Two of the research, the use of quantitative and qualitative surveys and focus groups were piloted to determine the extent to which data collected via these methods could enrich the current inspection processes. In this final section of the report, the results of the study are summarised and the recommendations emerging from them are presented.

4.2. Summary of results

It is clear that each of the piloted methods have both strengths and weaknesses. Table Two summarises each of these by rating each method across the key factors discussed in Sections Two and Three. Although the positive (+) and negative (-) ratings are subjective, they serve to illustrate the key strengths and weaknesses of each method. As shown in Table Two, quantitative surveys provide more strengths and fewer weaknesses than any of the other piloted methods.

Particular strengths that suggest that quantitative surveys may have the potential to enhance the inspection process are:

- In capturing the views of a broader range of respondents, quantitative surveys are perceived as 'democratic' by force officers and staff. The anonymity offered by them can potentially generate an open and honest description of leadership within forces;
- They are time efficient both for those completing them and those analysing them. They are more time efficient than week-long inspection processes, particularly given that the inspection captures the views of a smaller sample of the officers and staff members;
- As the analysis process remains the same, the time required to analyse quantitative data does not increase with the number of responses;
- Most survey software packages allow for the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative questions in a survey. This means that

there is the opportunity to capture more in-depth or qualitative data through the inclusion of open ended questions;

However, the quality of data captured by some questions is unclear. Generally within the quantitative surveys, there was a high proportion of neutral responses: (for Police Force 1, there were six items out of 16 which achieved 30% or more respondents using the 'Neutral' category, and for Police Force 2, 50% of the items received 30% or higher 'Neutral' scores). As the majority felt that the questions were clear and easy to understand, it is suggested that people did not have the information required to answer the question (there was no 'don't know' option) or simply did not have a strong opinion on those particular leadership dimensions. As the purpose of this research phase was to test the method of data collection rather than content, the survey questions were adapted forms of HMICFRS's own inspection questions and their validity and reliability was not tested. The available evidence however suggests that the questions will require refinement if the survey is to capture robust data that can inform HMICFRS's approach to assessing leadership.

Table Two: Strengths and weaknesses of data collection methods

	Quantitative Survey	Qualitative Survey	External Focus Group
Democratic Way of Inspecting	+++	+++	-
Time Efficiency	+++	-	++
Survey Fatigue	++	- -	n/a
Lack of Perception of Benefit	+ +	++	n/a
Response Rate	+ +	-	n/a
Quality of Data	++	+	+
Exploring Emerging Themes and Conflicts	- -	+	++
Ability to Engage with External Parties	-	-	+++
Resource Requirement	-	-	-

4.3. Recommendations

1. In developing its assessment of leadership, **HMICFRS might consider including quantitative surveys**. To maximise their value, the following points should be actioned:

   - To increase the response rate, force members should receive a direct communication about the survey, its purpose and how the findings will be used. Care needs to be taken in choosing the 'Subject Line' for the email. If the findings will be used to determine HMICFRS's inspection grading, the subject line should reflect this. More generally, people need to understand what value completing a survey has for them so that it is perceived as a good use of their time.
   - The research conducted here indicates that disseminating an invitation through more indirect means, such as the intranet, is likely to yield a lower response rate. Wherever possible, the survey should remain available for completion for a minimum of two weeks. Although those who are going to complete a survey will usually do so when they first open the email (in this instance, 60% of respondents from both forces did so within the first three days), a longer fieldwork period will provide an opportunity for those returning from leave or on different shift patterns to read the email. In addition, a longer fieldwork period will allow one or two reminders to be sent out.
   - Based on inputs from the internal focus groups, we would recommend that HMICFRS, rather than the force, send the direct survey invitation by email. Participants in the internal focus groups indicated that the independence of HMICFRS, and the knowledge that the survey would affect the force's rating would encourage force members both to take part and to answer questions truthfully.
   - The internal focus groups also indicated that there is not necessarily a 'best time' for such surveys because of the unpredictable nature of police work. However, effort should be taken to avoid known busier periods of work wherever possible.
   - Creating email distribution lists specifically for the purpose of the survey is likely to be time intensive. This could be overcome by inviting all officers and staff members to complete the survey, although careful consideration should be given to the ability to analyse the responses to any open ended questions included in the

survey. Regardless of the approach to disseminating the survey, the required sample size should be calculated for each force to ensure that the number of completed surveys will provide data representative of the wider force; and

- Further piloting is required to ensure that the survey is valid and reliable. The available evidence suggests that the inclusion of a 'don't know' response option would reduce the ambiguity of 'neutral' responses and identify where respondents did not have the information required to answer the question. Perhaps more fundamentally, the survey piloted here did not define the level of leadership at which respondents were expected to refer to. Instead the introduction to the survey stated 'the survey is not assessing individual leaders so please think about leadership across your force more generally when answering the questions.' This information was not repeated in each question. The responses to the qualitative survey indicated that some respondents referred to their more direct line management when answering a question, and others to the force's senior leadership. It is likely that there were similar differences in interpretation in the quantitative survey. In the absence of a definition of a leader in each question, the term is potentially ambiguous and therefore limits the potential to collect quality data. We acknowledge that HMICFRS do not want the inspection process to assess individual leaders, however, consideration should be given to which level of leadership they would like respondents to refer to.

2. **Consider the inclusion of focus groups with officers and staff members.** The internal focus group proved to be an effective way of clarifying and adding depth to the data collected through the surveys. Collecting data through more than one method is an effective way of verifying its quality. However, as with any qualitative data collection method, the depth of data is dependent on the willingness and ability of the participants to engage. A particular challenge in the internal focus groups was facilitating a balanced discussion, with participants of all ranks and grades being able to contribute equally. As might be expected, more senior officers tended to make a greater contribution than their colleagues. Therefore it is recommended that focus groups should be conducted with representatives of similar ranks and grades. The number of focus groups required should be determined by the size of the force and the number of officers and staff at each rank and

grade. We acknowledge that there are clear resource implications of conducting more than one focus group in each force but believe that the improved quality of data would strengthen the assessment of leadership.

3. **Do not use qualitative surveys.** The time required to complete and analyse such a survey is longer than that of a quantitative survey, yet the survey piloted here did not provide the quality or depth of data required to justify these additional resources. A large proportion of responses were generic and provided only limited information that could be used to inform an assessment of leadership.

   Furthermore, the proportion of respondents willing to complete a qualitative survey as part of future HMICFRS inspections was lower than that for quantitative surveys. As stated above, there is scope to include some key qualitative questions within a quantitative survey, this would add the insight and depth required but demand fewer additional resources.

4. **Clearly communicate how the data collected through the different methods chosen will be used to inform an assessment of leadership.** A key complaint made by focus group participants was that nothing appeared to have been done with the information they had provided in surveys or focus groups. Therefore, they perceived that their participation had few benefits and that their time had been wasted. To mitigate this, and to help ensure participation in inspection activities, HMICFRS should consider how best to provide feedback on the purpose of any data collection methods used and how the data will be used.

   Similarly, the outcome of this research should be shared with Police Force 1 and Police Force 2 to ensure that they understand how the data collected from within their forces has been used to inform HMICFRS's approach to inspections.

4.4. Conclusion

The University of Plymouth has conducted research into different methods for assessing organisational leadership to inform HMICFRS's future inspection processes. Phase One of the study indicated that the current

processes HMICFRS uses are not out-of-line with best practices identified and used by similar inspecting bodies throughout the UK, the USA, Australia and Scandinavia. The findings from Phase Two suggest that HMICFRS might consider the use of quantitative surveys in its inspection process. Such a method allows for higher levels of participation and greater time efficiency than the current inspection methods. However, the survey used here should be refined (as described in the recommendations set out in 4.3) and then its reliability and validity tested to ensure the implementation of a robust tool. A particular challenge will be defining which leaders respondents are to refer to in their responses.

In addition, the research findings have highlighted the importance of informing participants in any assessment process about the way in which their data will used. Achieving this may help to tackle the survey fatigue currently experienced in the forces participating in this research.

Overall, the research findings indicate that a robust quantitative survey instrument has the potential to enhance HMICFRS's current approach to assessing leadership. Therefore, the survey used in this research should be further refined and tested to maximise its potential to capture data that can be used as part of the inspection process.

Appendices

Appendix One – Quantitative survey questions

About you

Please indicate which force you work for:

Are you:

An officer
A member of police staff

[IF OFFICER] What is your rank?

Police Constable
Sergeant
Inspector
Chief Inspector
Superintendent
Chief Superintendent
Assistant Chief Constable
Deputy Chief Constable

[IF STAFF] What is your grade?

4-6
7-9
10-12
13-15
Other

How long have you worked in the force?

Less than 6 months
6 months – 1 year
1 - 3 years
More than 3 years

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements regarding leadership in your Police Force:

Response options: strongly agree/ agree/ neutral/ disagree/ strongly disagree

I have a good understanding of the mission and goals of my Police Force

In this force, I am treated with fairness and respect
I believe leaders in my force live through our values
In this force, our decisions take into account our ethical values
In this force, I feel free to challenge and give feedback to my leaders
In this force, leaders support my wellbeing
I am satisfied with how members of the force are promoted to leadership roles
In this force, selection for leadership roles at all levels is fair
Leaders in this force look at me for suggestions and ideas of how to do things better
I believe I have the right leadership skills and abilities to do my job well
In this force, new talent is recognised and given the appropriate development opportunities
In this force, we look externally for innovation and best practices
In this force, we often implement new ideas, approaches and working practices
This force has effective workforce planning systems to ensure that its leadership skills and capabilities match need
In this force, the development of future leaders is carefully planned
Leaders in the force encourage collaboration and teamwork

What do you think about the leadership in your force?

Outstanding
Good
Requires improvement
Inadequate

Please use this box to provide any additional thoughts you have about the leadership in your force:

Survey opinion

Was this survey:

Too long
About right
Too short

How long did it take you to complete this survey?

 Less than 10 minutes
10-20 minutes
20-30 minutes

More than 30 minutes

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

The questions in this survey were clear and easy to understand?

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

I would be happy to complete a survey like this one as part of the annual PEEL inspection process

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

Please use this box to provide any additional thoughts you have about your experience completing this survey:

Appendix Two – Qualitative Survey Questions

About you

Please indicate which force you work for:

Are you:

An officer
A member of police staff

[IF OFFICER] What is your rank?

Police Constable
Sergeant
Inspector
Chief Inspector
Superintendent
Chief Superintendent
Assistant Chief Constable
Deputy Chief Constable

[IF STAFF] What is your grade?

4-6
7-9
10-12
13-15
Other

How long have you worked in the force?

Less than 6 months
6 months - 1 year
1 - 3 years
More than 3 years

Please use the boxes below each question to provide your responses. The questions ask about different aspects of leadership in your force. If you don't have an opinion or don't feel that you know enough about an aspect, please state this in your answer.

How do leaders communicate the direction and strategy of the force?

How do leaders show their respect for people in this force (if at all)?

How do leaders treat people fairly in this force (if at all)?

In what ways (if any) do leaders demonstrate the values expected of the force?

What do leaders in your force do (if anything) to ensure they take an ethical approach to decision making?

In what ways is the workforce able to challenge and feedback to leaders?

In what ways (if any) do leaders contribute to your wellbeing at work?

How do leaders identify high potentials in your force?

How fair do you think the approach to identifying high potential members of the workforce is?

What does the force do (if anything) to ensure that selection for leadership roles is fair?
In what ways (if any) do the workforce influence and inform innovation and change in the force?

How would you describe the leadership skills and capabilities within your force?

How does the force recognise and develop new talent? If the force does not do anything to recognise and develop new talent, please state this.
Where does your force look (if anywhere) for examples of innovation and best practice?

How does your force implement new ideas and working practices (if at all)?

What does the force do (if anything) to ensure that its leadership skills and capabilities match its needs?

How would you describe the force's approach to succession planning in leadership development?

What do the leaders in your force do (if anything) to ensure that there is collaboration and teamwork across the force?
In what ways (if any) do leaders in your Police Force contribute to your job satisfaction?

What do you think about the leadership in your force?

If you'd like to make any other comments on leadership in your force, please use the space provided below:

Survey opinion
Was this survey:

Too long
About right
Too short

How long did it take you to complete this survey?

Less than 10 minutes
10-20 minutes
20-30 minutes
More than 30 minutes

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
The questions in this survey were clear and easy to understand?

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree
I would be happy to complete a survey like this one as part of the annual PEEL inspection process

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

Please use this box to provide any additional thoughts you have about your experience completing this survey:

Appendix 3 – External focus group topic guide

Opening questions:

- Could you give us a few examples of how you work together with the Police Force?
    - Who do you work most closely with on these occasions?
    - Are the people you work with empowered/supported by the force to make decisions?
    - What works particularly well in your dealings with the force?
    - What could be improved in your dealings with the force?
    - Do the force respond well to new ideas/approaches and other feedback? (testing leaders appetite for innovation and change)
    - Generally speaking, how would you rate the force in terms of ensuring you have access to the people at the right level, both in terms of the skills/knowledge to understand your needs, and in terms of the authority to make decisions?*

How the partnership works: To what extent does the Force take the lead in team (partnership) approaches?

Fairness: To what extent do those in the force seem to take the partnership seriously?

Innovation: Can you think of instances when the leadership of this force demonstrated openness in the way in which they engaged with you?

Trust and support: How trustworthy is the force's leadership in relation to their dealings with you as an external partner? In what ways do they support your work? How might they support you better?

Setting direction: How does the leadership of the force make its strategic intent known to you?

Integrity: How does the force's leadership demonstrate integrity in the way they work?

General Questions:

- What is it like to work with the leadership of this force from an external perspective?
- What could this force's leadership do to enhance your working relationship?
- As an external partner to this force, what do you appreciate about the force's leadership?

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