

Essex Police assessed as good in how legitimately it keeps people safe and reduces crime – HMIC

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has assessed whether Essex Police legitimately keeps people safe and reduces crime. This is the second year running HMIC has carried out inspections of this kind, which makes up part of HMIC's annual PEEL inspections.

HMIC considers a police force to be legitimate if it has the consent of the public, and if those working in the force consistently behave in a way that is fair, ethical, and within the law. The force must also generate the trust and cooperation of the public.

To assess this, HMIC has inspected how well forces treat the people they serve; ensure their workforce acts ethically and lawfully; and treat their workforces with fairness and respect. The findings of this inspection are included in a report, published today.

This inspection also included, for the first time, an assessment of how well forces tackle the problem of abuse of authority for sexual gain by members of its workforce. This serious form of corruption betrays the trust of the public and, while we identified some examples of good practice, there remain significant areas where forces must improve. The service needs to be more proactive in seeking out and preventing this form of corruption, and referring cases of abuse of authority to the IPCC.

HMIC found that Essex Police:

- is good at identifying and understanding issues that might undermine confidence and satisfaction and works hard to improve these areas;
- has a clear focus on wellbeing that is perceived to be authentic by the workforce, including good plans and governance arrangements; and
- has effective personal performance arrangements in place but the use and quality of these is mixed and could be improved.

HM Inspector of Constabulary Zoë Billingham said:

“I have judged Essex Police to be 'good' in how legitimately it keeps people safe and reduces crime. Our findings this year are consistent with how it performed in 2015, when it was also judged as 'good'.

"The force uses a wide range of methods to communicate with the public, and is good at identifying and addressing areas which might undermine public confidence. It works hard to gather feedback from those who identified as having less trust in the police, in order to learn and improve.

"We found positive examples of where the force had communicated with both the public and its own workforce regarding the outcomes of misconduct and corruption cases. This helps to improve confidence both inside and outside the force, which encourages people to come forward with issues and concerns they might have. The force could however do more to communicate what action it has taken when issues are raised by its workforce.

"Essex Police and its workforce have a good understanding of abuse of authority for sexual gain (taking advantage of a position of power to exploit vulnerable victims of crime) and it is treated as serious corruption.

"I was encouraged to find a clear focus on wellbeing. This is particularly demonstrated by its open and positive approach to supporting staff including LGBT and its emphasis on removing stigma of mental health issues. The force could do more to improve the quality of its performance development process. It does however offer excellent support to staff with performance or attendance issues.

"Overall, the force has performed well. I have identified a number of areas the force should address in order for it to improve, and will monitor this closely."

HMIC has also published individual assessments of the leadership within each police force in England and Wales. These, along with individual reports on the legitimacy of all forces in England and Wales, are available on HMIC's website.