

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary



Inspection of Northumbria 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

Northumbria Police covers a diverse area, combining the geographically remote rural area of Northumberland with the densely populated inner city areas along the river corridors of the Tyne and Wear. It also contains areas of relative prosperity with areas of significant deprivation.

The Force performed very well in 2004/05. Despite undertaking a significant change process the Force continued to deliver significant reductions in crime and maintained a high detection rate. Furthermore, the Force delivered very strong levels of performance in other operational areas.

Northumbria is progressing six areas of reform over the next five years to deliver a Force which provides a 'total policing' service. They are: leadership, performance management, marketing, partnership, training, and strategic resource management.

The main challenge for the Force in 2005/06 is to maintain and improve its high level of overall performance.

Professional Standards

The deputy chief constable is the portfolio holder for professional standards. Northumbria Police professional standards department is headed by a chief superintendent, supported by two detective superintendents, one reactive, one with the remit of operational security. The department has:

A pro-active integrity unit - headed by detective superintendent (operational security) and consisting of one detective chief inspector, one detective inspector, three detective sergeants, four detective constables, two police staff investigators, one analyst, one research assistant, and a WPO/administrative assistant.

An information security unit - which reports to detective superintendent (operational security) consisting of one detective chief inspector, one information security officer, one information security assistant, one vetting officer and two vetting assistants.

An information compliance unit - which reports to the detective superintendent (operational security) headed by the information compliance manager and consisting of four disclosure assistants.

A reactive team - reporting to detective superintendent (reactive) consisting of one detective chief inspector, four detective inspectors, eight detective sergeants and four case workers.

A case manager - (detective chief inspector) and one case assessor (police staff) reporting to the detective superintendent (reactive).

The business co-ordinator - is part of the professional standards department senior management team, and departmental administrative support is provided by 10 police staff.

GRADING : GOOD

Findings

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

Strengths

- The Force conducts an annual strategic assessment of corruption, which is forwarded to NCIS. The issues embodied in the strategic assessment are in line with those identified at the national level; information security, inappropriate associations, and drug misuse. The professional standards department also produces an assessment of complaints and misconduct.
- The professional standards departmental plan identifies key priorities and objectives and is supported by an action plan which identifies lead officers/actioning officers and target completion dates. Lead officers are appointed at management level for each objective and a database has been developed to ensure effective monitoring and implementation. The plan is available on the Intranet and liaison officers for each area command/department provide direct lines of communication.
- The integrity unit follows national intelligence model (NIM) principles and is intelligence-led. Weekly tasking and co-ordinating meetings (TCG) have been introduced, with appropriated actions detailed. All meetings are minuted.
- Work plans are a product of the relationship between the departmental business plan and NIM processes. Activities linked to the development of the issues in the strategic threat assessment are allocated within the integrity unit through tasking and co-ordination. The reactive complaints investigation unit is more work controlled than intelligence-led; however work is being done to develop this area.
- In addition to the strategic assessment of corruption the integrity unit assesses the vulnerability of the Force to corruption. Both documents are used to produce the counter corruption control strategy.

Areas for Improvement

- The professional standards department is using the manual analysis of information to identify areas for improvement. This activity would be better supported by an effective IT solution and analytical support, which could provide a structured approach to identifying lessons to be learned. The IT would also enable the department to identify longer term trends and establish links to effective intervention and action planning.
- The head of professional standards acknowledges the need to develop the use of NIM principles in respect of complaint investigations. The lack of appropriate analytical processes is hindering progress in this area.
- The Force needs to develop appropriate processes in order to identify the needs and expectations of its customers.

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

Strengths

- Strategic management is strong with clear and active involvement at chief officer level. The deputy chief constable demonstrates a high level of personal interest in all matters relating to professional standards.
- The deputy chief constable chairs the professional standards and information security management group, which provides the strategic overview for professional standards issues. All professional standards policy is developed through this group with members having a voice in policy development.
- Effective use is made of internal publications including the Force newspaper 'Grapevine' to raise awareness of professional standards issues.
- The Force have introduced a set of ethical principles to which members of staff are expected to adhere:
 - attentive: by listening to communities;
 - responsive:- by responding to the needs of communities;
 - reliable:- by not letting people down;
 - skilled:- with the right tools to do the job;
 - polite: to members of the public; and
 - fair: in carrying out duties.
- Staff/support associations are represented at appropriate committee meetings and are actively engaged in policy development. Members of staff throughout the organisation have attended a presentation by the Chief Constable and the deputy chief constable highlighting ethical principles and standards.
- The publication of the Northumbria Police Charter 'Raising the Standard' highlights the Force commitment to improving quality of service.
- The Police Authority takes an active involvement to the area of professional standards and holds the Force to account as appropriate.
- Northumbria is putting significant investment into the area of information security and data protection. A number of new members of staff have been appointed to key positions and good progress is being made, however, there is acknowledgement that a lot of work is in progress and more needs to be done.
- Processes are in place to ensure relevant conduct issues are being identified from civil claims. There remains a need however, to maximise the opportunities for lessons learnt to be shared with staff across the whole organisation.
- The professional standards department is proactive in providing training to staff across the organisation on complaints matters and expected standards of behaviour. To enhance the training and knowledge of staff secondments to the department are encouraged.
- The Force produces a strategic assessment of complaints and misconduct on a quarterly basis, which highlights key trends by area command; the assessment

makes a number of recommendations and provides an update on recommendations from previous assessments.

- The Force has identified that a significant number of conduct investigations are generated following a lack of confidence in the grievance procedure. In order to address this issue the Force are developing a capability in mediation quality assured by ACAS as a first step in resolving problems. This is seen as a positive initiative.
- NIM processes are being used to develop a tactical menu of preventative interventions.

Areas for Improvement

- Implementation of the ACPO vetting policy has been incorporated into the professional standards departmental business plan and is due for completion in December 2005. At the present time all new recruits/staff and staff in vulnerable posts are vetted. The Force needs to ensure that it is satisfied that current and planned vetting requirements will effectively meet the needs of the organisation. There remains a need to ensure appropriate formal processes are in place to co-ordinate the effective implementation of Force policy on vetting involving all relevant departments.
- The Force needs to ensure staff across the organisation are informed of the outcome of criminal/discipline hearings in order to ensure all possible lessons are learnt and that staff are informed of the Force's stance in respect of professional standards issues. This is mirrored in the need to inform staff of the outcome of civil claims made against the Force and the potential economic cost of those claims.

Recommendation 1

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends the Force ensures the implementation of the vetting procedures for all members of staff and contractors to an appropriate standard, in line with the national policy.

Enforcement - *its effectiveness in dealing with emerging problems.*

Strengths

- Following the Best Value Review of Integrity, the Force has established a number of performance indicators on professional standards issues, which are monitored through the corporate review process.
- In order to build trust and confidence in the community, and reduce crime and disorder Northumbria Police has introduced 'Total Policing'. Since its introduction the number of public order arrests have doubled and violent crime has reduced by 20%. However, the rise in complaints over the same period has been very

small. This has been achieved through a strong emphasis on professional standards issues.

- The professional standards department has realigned the role of a chief inspector to act as a risk manager to review cases at an early stage and identify a proportionate means of achieving the most realistic outcome. The CPS is consulted at an early stage of investigations.
- All area commands/departments were given training in preparation for the introduction of IPCC. The training included an input in relation to 'direction and control' matters, local resolution and recording procedures. Following introduction, a further input was provided to area command inspectors to address identified training needs.
- The integrity unit has introduced a number of key policies and procedures aimed at ensuring appropriate standards including; an integrity testing policy; a lawful business monitoring policy; a service confidence procedure; and a management intervention procedure.
- Force policy takes the position of recording complaints as a matter of course, ensuring an early assessment takes place, followed by a proportionate investigation. There is an acknowledgement the stance taken may result in an increase in the number of complaints recorded and this has been communicated to the Police Authority.
- The Force suspension policy ensures that all cases in which a member of staff is suspended are reviewed by the chief officer lead to assess the appropriateness of the suspension and the state of the investigation. The staff associations expressed some concerns over the number of staff suspended at the time of the inspection, however, processes are in place to ensure both the chief officer lead and the Police Authority can be satisfied correct measures are in place and that the action taken is appropriate.
- In agreement with the staff association the Force undertakes early disclosure of the likely outcome of a discipline hearing. This ensures greater transparency and results in the effective management of the investigation process.
- The Force is making use of all possible sanctions open to them around the key area of the inappropriate use, and disclosure from information systems. This includes the use of superintendent warnings and a review of competency threshold payments.

Areas for Improvement

- The overall proportion of complaints locally resolved has reduced from 59% (April-September 2004), to 30% for the same period in 2005. There is acknowledgement within the Force that the area commands need to take ownership of this issue.
- HMIC is concerned regarding the high level of appeals to the IPCC and the number of these appeals that are upheld (50%). The Force needs to satisfy itself that this situation is not symptomatic of procedural flaws in the accurate recording of all complaints.
- The disproportionately high number of complaints and investigations involving members of staff who are from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities has

been highlighted by the Force. An independent assessment has been undertaken in respect of the disproportionality. The issue has been highlighted in the strategic assessment and is being developed as a problem profile in line with the NIM. The black police association (BPA) would like to see further analysis undertaken in line with that being carried out by a number of forces throughout England and Wales.

- There remains a need to ensure the six strands of diversity are incorporated into all aspects of professional standards. A draft diversity plan has been produced to action and monitor the issues raised in the CRE report, Morris Inquiry, and the Taylor Review, under the lead of the detective superintendent.
- Whilst Force policy takes the position of recording complaints as a matter of course there is a need to ensure processes are in place within the area commands to make this happen so as not to result in under recording. There is a need to ensure the timely registration of all complaints within the professional standards department.
- A confidential reporting line is in place however, this is not effective and alternative methods of reporting, including third party reporting, need to be considered.
- The Force needs to consider the way in which it manages employment tribunals and associated investigations. There is a need for a clear definition of standards and proportionality.
- There is a need to ensure integrity, independence and transparency in the investigation of all complaints, this position may be compromised by BCUs undertaking some investigations, other than local resolutions, relating to their own members of staff.

Recommendation 2

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends the Force reviews the use of the local resolution process and ensures staff within the area commands have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities.

Recommendation 3

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends the Force reviews the practice of a complaint being subject of a full investigation within the area command in which it originates in order to ensure the impartiality of the investigation.

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

- In order to promulgate best practice the chief officer lead has regular communication with other forces on an informal basis over specific professional standards issues. The next stage has been identified as the development of a regional forum aimed at improving standards. Staff within the professional standards department are actively involved in developing professional standards issues at a regional and national level.
- The Force enjoys a professional and effective working relationship with the IPCC at all levels.
- A Best Value Review of Integrity has been undertaken and a detailed improvement plan produced. The plan identifies key milestones showing significant progress in a number of areas.
- The professional standards department has undergone significant change in recent months including changes to the senior management and an increase in staff. This has had an impact on the ability of the department to increase its effectiveness. The redesignation of a chief inspector post is seen as a positive step. The review has taken full account of the professional skills and competencies of staff.
- The Force has set an ambitious target of 90 days for the completion of the investigation of all public complaints. Key to the successful achievement of this target is the investment made in resources allocated to the early assessment of cases.
- Area commands have appointed a single point of contact within the senior management team to co-ordinate all matters relating to complaints. There is a need to ensure effective protocols are in place to support the process.
- The Force has devolved the investigation of Category C complaints (cases suitable for local resolution; dispensations; and withdrawals) to the area commands in order to ensure local ownership. The situation also applies in respect of employment tribunals with the area commands appointing a case liaison manager at chief inspector level. There is a need to ensure impartiality and that appropriate training and support is provided to staff who undertake the investigations.
- The integrity unit provides a comprehensive and professional service. Members of staff are skilled and experienced in proactive investigations including covert methods. The unit has introduced a dedicated intelligence unit, which drives activity using NIM principles.
- The head of professional standards is a member of the Force strategic independent advisory group (IAG). IAGs have been utilised during the course of complaints investigations to provide reassurance and additional links to the community.

- The professional standards department has a business co-ordinator post to ensure the effective management of devolved budgets. Appropriate databases are in place to ensure the effective management of the different processes including misconduct complaints and direction and control issues.

Areas for Improvement

- Whilst Northumbria uses IAGs on a critical incident basis there is a need to have a consistent and informed input from an IAG which aids the development of the philosophy of standards and quality across the organisation.
- The mixture of staff within the professional standards department does not fully reflect that of the Force/community at this time.
- There is a need to ensure there is adequate administrative support available within the professional standards department and in the area commands in respect of complaint matters. The development of administrative and analytical capability could be achieved through efficiency gains within the professional standards department.
- The integrity unit is looking to introduce a case management system in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

GLOSSARY

ACC	assistant chief constable
ACCAG	ACPO Counter-Corruption Advisory Group
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
ACPO PSC	ACPO Professional Standards Committee
BA	baseline assessment
BCU	basic command unit
BME	black and minority ethnic
CHIS	covert human intelligence source
CID	criminal investigation department
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
DCC	deputy chief constable
DSU	dedicated source unit
ESU	ethical standards unit
FTE	full-time equivalent
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
HoD	head of department
HQ	headquarters
HR	human resources
IAG	independent advisory group – a body advising a force or BCU on race and diversity issues
IIP	Investors in People

IPCC	Independent Police Complaints Commission
LR	local resolution
MMR	monthly management review
MSF	most similar forces – a way of grouping forces to which each police force can be compared that has similar social and demographic characteristics
NCDG	National Complaints and Discipline Group
NCIS	National Criminal Intelligence Service
NIM	National Intelligence Model
PA	police authority
PCSO	police community support officer
PDR	performance development review
PNC	Police National Computer
PPAF	Police Performance Assessment Framework
PS	professional standards
PSD	professional standards department
RDS	Research, Development and Statistics
RES	race equality scheme
RIPA	Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, 2000
QA	quality assurance
SGC	specific grading criteria
SLA	service level agreement

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'
SPOC	single point of contact
TCG	tasking and co-ordination group
UPP	unsatisfactory performance procedure