

Mr Richard Lewis
Chief Constable
Cleveland Police

Cc: Mr Steve Turner
Police and Crime Commissioner
Cleveland Police

29 June 2021

Dear Richard,

CLEVELAND POLICE CAUSE OF CONCERN REVISIT - WORKFORCE, COMMUNICATION AND FAIR TREATMENT

Background

We inspected Cleveland Police, as part of our PEEL programme of inspection, between 20 and 31 May 2019. During the inspection, we identified six causes of concern. One of them was about workforce, communication and fair treatment. This was that:

“Cleveland Police doesn’t consistently treat its workforce with fairness and respect. It doesn’t effectively communicate with or engage its workforce, its processes aren’t perceived to be fair and it doesn’t understand its workforce well enough to support them.

To address this cause of concern, the force should:

- communicate with the workforce, so they have a clear understanding of what is happening in the force;
- involve the workforce in decision making; listening to their feedback, acting on it, and communicating action taken;
- improve the timeliness of its grievance handling processes (previous AFI remained open since 2017);
- understand the risks and threats to the wellbeing of its workforce and use this to inform the actions it takes (previous AFI remained open since 2016);
- understand the performance of its workforce, support their development, and deal with poor performance fairly and consistently (previous AFI remained open since 2016);

- fairly and consistently identify those with the potential to become senior leaders and support them to gain the skills for future leadership roles (previous AFI remained open since 2016); and
- ensure that promotion processes are transparent, fair and perceived as such by the workforce.”

2. We reviewed progress against this cause of concern between 12 April and 25 May 2021. The revisit was done remotely (because of COVID-19 restrictions) and, more recently, on-site to allow for reality testing.

3. During the revisit, we interviewed staff from across the force, observed force meetings, and reviewed a range of documents and data. A summary of our findings is below.

Progress against the cause of concern recommendations

Communicate with the workforce, so they have a clear understanding of what is happening in the force – signed off

4. The workforce has a better understanding of what is happening in the force. From our reality testing, we found that communication with the workforce is good. Most of those we spoke to understood the clear vision and direction of (Towards) 2025, and any change happening in their area of work. There is regular communication through daily ‘messages to all’; emails, including weekly email briefings; the chief constable’s weekly blog; videos by chief officers; and an internal newspaper.

5. The force now has better technology to communicate with the workforce. All officers and staff we spoke to felt they were communicated with, and most valued that communication. Sometimes they don’t have the time to read the emails, but no-one complained of not having information about what is happening in the force. Supervision ensures that daily briefings with staff include anything of importance from the emails, particularly anything that directly affects their work. In some departments, there is also a weekly newsletter specific to that area of the business, to keep officers and staff informed about things happening that are relevant to their work.

Involve the workforce in decision making, listening to their feedback, acting on it, and communicating action taken – in progress

6. The force has a better understanding of how well it engages with its workforce. For example, it uses surveys and health check interviews to monitor how well it communicates. The results are then mapped to an engagement model. There are processes in place to build on these improvements through a workforce engagement group. The aim is to create an informed, engaged and ethical workforce – from the moment someone joins the force to the day they leave. There are many ways for the workforce to give feedback, including surveys, ‘ask the chief’, audits, health check interviews, listening days, ideas drop, and leadership roadshows.

7. The force has provided feedback on the findings from the different surveys through a leadership session, although attendance was low.

8. Our reality testing found that the workforce is not yet able to describe whether they are being listened to, or what happens because of their feedback. What some officers and staff value the most is when you, the chief constable, visit stations personally. This means they can ask questions and get feedback there and then, or via an email from you. The gap is in the formal feedback to the workforce. This would make sure that when staff are asked to provide their views, they can see what has happened as a result.

9. We will continue to monitor progress on this, and it will be further reviewed as part of our PEEL continuous assessment programme.

Improve the timeliness of its grievance handling processes – signed off

10. Grievance handling times have improved. The force monitors them through its people and wellbeing performance assessment. During the 12 months to February 2021, the average time taken to handle a grievance was five months. This is an improvement since May 2019, when we found that grievances were regularly taking more than 12 months.

Understand the risks and threats to the wellbeing of its workforce and use this to inform the actions it takes (previous AFI remained open since 2016) – signed off

11. The force now better understands the risks and threats to the wellbeing of its workforce (beyond the areas of sickness absence). A people and wellbeing board oversees this, analysing risks and threats to wellbeing. 'Deep dives' into hotspot areas help the force better understand the causes. The Health and Safety Executive's model is giving the force a broader understanding of the issues around wellbeing. The force uses the model to carry out organisational stress risk assessments, which include demand, capacity, single points of failure, culture, and change.

12. A people intelligence board has been reinstated, to enable organisational oversight of individuals when concerns are identified and there is a risk to them and/or the organisation. This is to allow for early intervention and support. All these improvements are helping the force better understand wellbeing risks and threats, informing its priority plans, mitigations and actions.

Understand the performance of its workforce, support their development, and deal with poor performance fairly and consistently (previous AFI remained open since 2016) – signed off

13. The performance of the workforce is better understood, because of the performance development review (PDR) process. And the force is now better at dealing with poor performance fairly and consistently. After the first full year of PDR, ending on 31 March 2021, analysis has identified the gaps and trends in performance and development. These can now be addressed. With the basics in place, the force is aiming to take performance management to the next level of the 'what' and the 'how'. It also plans to use 'calibration' to benchmark against defined scales of rating individual performance.

14. The force is better at identifying, monitoring and supporting those who are under-performing and need development. All those identified are being supported and have a formal action plan, with formal procedures used where required.

Fairly and consistently identify those with the potential to become senior leaders and support them to gain the skills for future leadership roles. (previous AFI remained open since 2016) – in progress

15. I am pleased to see the progress the force has made with this recommendation. It now understands the leadership skills it needs. This has been achieved through a series of surveys and interviews, carried out with external support. The feedback has identified the behaviours leaders should display at all levels, and showed where the force needs to do more. It is using what it has learnt to inform its leadership development framework. This framework will bring together different types of training and tools for all leaders, not just senior leaders. The force also now has a formal approach for succession planning for senior leaders and critical posts. It is applying this throughout the organisation in a systematic way.

16. This will next be reviewed as part of our PEEL continuous assessment programme.

Ensure that promotion processes are transparent, fair, and perceived as such by the workforce – signed off

17. We recognise the improvements made to the promotion process. Now overseen by the newly appointed human resources (HR) director, it brings in-house a service that used to be outsourced. The service is now working better with other corporate departments. People better understand the promotion opportunities available. And the process is clearly communicated by posters and a video by the assistant chief constable. Promotion panels include an independent member, have an equal gender balance, and include senior leaders new to the organisation when possible. This is because previous feedback indicated there was bias in the process. Panel members must be ethically sound. This means that they must not have any outstanding issues against them, so that they can be as objective and fair as possible. All shortlisting panels are given training, including on force values, competencies, and unconscious bias training.

18. Promotion panels run in parallel, and a moderation process makes sure that scoring reflects the type of evidence provided. Candidates now get verbal face-to-face feedback and their personal score. The promotion process is continuously reviewed, identifying issues as they arise.

Conclusion

19. I am pleased with the progress that has been made, and that this is reflected in the workforce's experiences. While we have continually monitored progress, this is the first time we have formally reviewed the force's results. As a result of our review, five of the seven recommendations have been signed off. We will continue to monitor progress against the recommendations that remain open.

20. Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to recognise the commitment it has taken from Cleveland Police's workforce to make this happen, not least during the COVID-19 pandemic. I recognise that there has been significant effort in getting some of the HR basics in place and working. This includes moving 244 staff returning from a private provider back under force supervision. Also, I note the workforce's willingness to engage, which has helped the force make these improvements.

21. This is one of six PEEL causes of concern being monitored. As such, Cleveland Police remains in the engage phase of our monitoring process, at least until our next review period.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Cooke'.

Andy Cooke, QPM

HM Inspector of Constabulary

HM Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services