

Bedfordshire Police judged as 'good' at legitimately keeping people safe and reducing crime – HMIC

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has assessed how legitimate Bedfordshire Police is at keeping people safe and reducing 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.

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 Bedfordshire Police:

- has a good understanding of the importance of treating the people it serves with fairness and respect;
- has prioritised wellbeing, and provides some good support to its workforce; and
- has failed to implement recommendations from HMIC's 2014 integrity and corruption report.

HM Inspector of Constabulary Zoë Billingham said:

“Bedfordshire Police has performed well in this inspection. We found that the force's alliance with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Constabularies is proving to be successful in a number of areas that we have inspected, allowing the forces involved to share resources, which provides real benefits.

We found that treating people fairly and respectfully is understood by most officers and staff.

"The force uses a variety of methods to communicate and engage with the public, including those people who may have less trust and confidence in the police. It is good at seeking and acting on feedback to improve how it treats all the people it serves. For example, it involves a panel of independent members of the public in reviewing body-worn video camera footage of incidents where the force has undertaken stop and searches. The panel also advises the force how to improve public perceptions of fairness and respectful treatment when planning policing events or responding to public concerns after high-profile public complaints.

"It is not all positive news however. I am concerned to find that Bedfordshire Police had failed to take action on some of the HMIC Police Integrity and Corruption recommendations made in 2014. It took the collapse of a court case to prompt the force and its alliance partners to address the areas of concern we identified.

"Bedfordshire Police is good at ensuring that it treats its workforce with fairness and respect. The force has an open culture and encourages feedback. We found that the workforce is aware of the seriousness of abuse of authority for sexual gain (taking advantage of a position of power to exploit vulnerable victims of crime). However, the importance of identifying circumstances where officers and staff use their position for sexual gain has not been well communicated to officers. This needs to improve.

"Taking all the work that the force is doing to improve its culture of legitimacy and respect I have judged that overall Bedfordshire Police is 'good' at legitimately keeping people safe and reducing crime. I will continue to monitor how the force performs in this area, and addresses the areas it needs to improve."

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.