

PEEL spotlight report

A workforce under pressure

Emerging themes from the second group of 2018/19 PEEL inspections



Contents

Foreword	1
About this report	2
PEEL	2
Emerging themes	2
Risk-based approach to inspection	3
Summary of grades	6
Our findings	7
Reducing the pressure on the workforce: improving the service to the public	7
The initial response: responding to calls and assessing vulnerability	8
Investigating crime: reducing delays	8
Building the workforce: recruiting and developing people	9
Managing the workforce: improving supervision	9
Preventing pressure on the workforce: improving the future service to the public	10
Preventing harm: focusing the workforce on their local communities	10
Building trust: linking together the workforce and local communities	10
Building the right culture	11
Protecting the workforce	11
Protecting services: a force fit for the future	12

Foreword

This report gives an overview of the emerging themes from the second group of 2018/19 PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy) inspections.

Overall, most forces are performing well. They are keeping people safe and reducing crime, using their resources efficiently, and treating their workforces and the communities they serve fairly and with respect. But there are more forces requiring improvement in more areas. And we have issued our first inadequate grades in our 2018/19 PEEL inspections.

As well as the fourteen force reports from our second group of inspections, we have published our inspection report for Cleveland Police. This force was inspected as part of our third group. We have graded Cleveland as inadequate in each of the three pillars. These results are so worrying that we have chosen to publish the report sooner than we originally planned. The force is now being supported to improve its performance.

Our first group of inspections showed a system under pressure. In our second group of inspections, we are increasingly seeing how this pressure is affecting the workforce. A workforce under pressure cannot give the public the best level of service.

Our inspections took place before recent announcements of the recruitment of additional officers, but this makes our findings more relevant. It is welcome news that the government plans to increase the number of police officers. But it will not, on its own, solve the pressures facing policing. Our report shows areas that need addressing to make sure the public feels the benefits.



Matt Parr

HM Inspector of Constabulary

September 2019

About this report

PEEL

PEEL is our annual assessment of police forces in England and Wales.

We assess forces in three ways to find out:

- how effective they are at preventing and investigating crime, protecting vulnerable people and tackling serious organised crime;
- how efficiently they manage demand and plan for the future; and
- how legitimately they treat the public, how ethically they behave, and how they treat their workforce.

We judge forces as 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' in these categories (or pillars).

In 2018/19, we adopted an integrated PEEL assessment (IPA) approach. This combines the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy pillars into a single inspection. We assess forces against every pillar every year.

Our 2018/19 PEEL inspections of forces are arranged into three groups.

Emerging themes

Each individual force report is based on robust evidence. With each group of reports, we publish the themes we are identifying through our inspection work. Our first group included only 14 of the 43 forces in England and Wales. As a result, our conclusions had to be tentative.

We are publishing a further 15 force reports: the 14 forces we inspected in the second group of inspections and Cleveland Police, which we inspected in the third group. We can now highlight some themes with more confidence. We focus here on those forces inspected as part of our second group. But our conclusions are reinforced by our first group of force reports, and the early publication of our Cleveland report.

Risk-based approach to inspection

As part of the IPA approach, we have looked for ways to reduce the intensity of inspection on forces. Based on our analysis of previous inspections and other information, we have used a risk-based approach (RBA), which means that well-performing forces are inspected on fewer areas.

We carry out pre-inspection work to inform our risk-based approach. This includes examining investigation file quality, assessing arrangements to tackle serious and organised crime, and reviewing stop and search records. This means we hold information about all forces in many areas.

In this group of inspections, we used an RBA to focus on the following elements of the 15 forces (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Risk-based assessment of forces in the second group of forces in the 2018/19 integrated PEEL assessment

	Crime prevention	Crime investigation	Protecting vulnerable people	Serious organised crime	Specialist capabilities	Demand management	Future demand	Treating public with fairness and respect	Behaving ethically and lawfully	Treating workforce with fairness and respect
Cheshire		X	X		X		X		X	
Cleveland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dorset		X	X		X		X	X	X	X
Hertfordshire		X	X		X		X		X	
Metropolitan Police	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
North Yorkshire			X		X	X	X	X	X	
Northamptonshire	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Northumbria	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
South Wales	X		X		X		X	X	X	X

	Crime prevention	Crime investigation	Protecting vulnerable people	Serious organised crime	Specialist capabilities	Demand management	Future demand	Treating public with fairness and respect	Behaving ethically and lawfully	Treating workforce with fairness and respect
South Yorkshire		X	X		X	X	X		X	X
Suffolk		X	X		X		X		X	
Surrey	X		X		X	X	X		X	X
Thames Valley		X	X		X		X		X	
Warwickshire	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
West Mercia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Summary of grades

On **effectiveness**, we graded ten forces as good, four as requiring improvement and one as inadequate.

On **efficiency**, we graded nine forces as good, four as requiring improvement, and two as inadequate.

On **legitimacy**, we graded eleven forces as good, three as requiring improvement and one as inadequate.

Because we inspect forces using a risk-based approach, it is a realistic possibility that a small minority of these results may be more positive than they would otherwise have been.

Our findings

Our first group of inspections this year showed a system under pressure. We are seeing increasingly that this pressure is affecting the workforce. A workforce under pressure cannot give the public its best level of service.

The public are already experiencing some of the problems this creates. There are delays in attending their calls and it can take too long to carry out investigations. Officers and staff sometimes carry out tasks without the right training or enough supervision. Tackling these problems will reduce the pressure on the workforce and will improve the service the workforce provides to the public.

But forces also carry out work to prevent there being a need for their services in future. They:

- prevent crime;
- build relationships with their communities;
- evaluate how well they are dealing with the threats communities face;
- build trust with communities who have less confidence in the police; and
- make sure they will be able to provide a policing service in future by planning effectively.

This work is less visible to the public, but not doing these things creates further harm and further demand for services. Improving in these areas will prevent pressures building on the workforce and contribute to a better service in the future.

Reducing the pressure on the workforce: improving the service to the public

Policing is becoming more complex and involves more risks. As the demand for policing services changes, forces need to develop and deploy their workforce and capabilities to meet the areas of greatest need. Meeting this demand with existing numbers of officers and staff remains the biggest challenge facing forces.

In this group of inspections, we saw some new patterns as to where forces are struggling to respond to increasing demand. Seven of the fifteen forces have seen their performance in our efficiency gradings decline. Two forces are experiencing significant difficulties, leading us to grade them as inadequate. When forces are unable to manage their demand, it makes it much more difficult for them to solve crime and protect vulnerable people.

The initial response: responding to calls and assessing vulnerability

We have concerns about the ability of control room staff to manage the pressures of demand they are facing. Nine forces in this group are experiencing difficulties in providing an effective response. This is poor service for any member of the public. But it affects vulnerable people the most. To prioritise calls for service well, forces must conduct effective assessments of the needs of the caller. Usually this is through a THRIVE assessment. This considers the threat, risk and harm of the situation, along with the investigative opportunities, the vulnerability of the caller, and the engagement opportunities.

We found that five forces in this group needed to improve their initial assessment. Four forces need to improve their approach to the reassessment of these needs following a delay in response. Doing so will help prioritise their services towards those who need them most.

We were pleased to see that frontline officers and staff had a good understanding of vulnerability. This continues the positive findings from our first group of inspections. All forces have given their front-line workforce some form of training to help them recognise vulnerability and hidden harm. Crimes such as modern-day slavery and child sexual exploitation require officers and staff to recognise when such crimes are happening. They need to intervene with care and competence. We saw positive examples of this happening.

Investigating crime: reducing delays

Most forces have invested in investigating the most serious of crimes, such as child abuse, rape and serious violence. But with resources constrained, forces are less able to meet the demands of other high-volume crimes such as burglary, assault and theft.

In this group of inspections, we have seen this difficulty increase due to backlogs in [digital forensics](#). Most crimes now need some form of digital or technical investigation. We found long delays in retrieving evidence from digital devices. In some cases, there was a 12-month backlog. Victims will lose their confidence in the criminal justice system due to the delays in prosecutions taking place. Some victims will be without their mobile phones or computers while waiting for examinations to take place. And officers and staff need to manage more investigations which are taking longer to resolve. Seven of the twelve forces we inspected in this group need to improve their capacity to recover digital evidence within a reasonable timeframe.

We have reported before on the national shortage of trained investigators. That shortage remains, although there is a national plan to increase their numbers. But we are continuing to find that local plans to increase investigation capacity could be better.

It takes up to 18 months to become accredited as an investigator. Some forces are tackling the problem by recruiting directly into investigator posts, through the direct entry detective scheme. But filling this gap in investigative capacity remains a challenge for policing. This gap means that investigations will take longer or that officers and staff will investigate crimes that they don't have the skills and experience for. As a result, some victims may not see the outcome their case deserves.

Building the workforce: recruiting and developing people

Forces need to make sure that they build the skills of their workforce, so they can provide a better service to the public. To build trust, they also need to make sure their workforce is representative of the community they police. Most forces are having some success in recruiting more officers and staff from a range of ethnic backgrounds. But they need to consider how to attract those from other groups with [protected characteristics](#).

Retaining and developing the workforce so it reflects the diversity of the community will need a broader range of methods. Many forces are working to improve their promotion processes to make sure they are fair and effective. But more work needs to be done to make the workforce as diverse as their communities. [This is most stark at the most senior levels](#).

Most forces understand the operational policing skills they hold within their workforce. But we did find examples of out-of-date workforce plans, and skills audits which were too simplistic. Some forces gather information on some operationally relevant skills, such as the ability to speak other languages. But most forces don't gather information on the wider skills their workforce have. This includes police staff in non-operational roles such as HR, finance and communications. Eight of the fifteen forces we inspected in this group needed to improve in this area. Forces will be more effective and efficient if they can deploy the skills they have, and plan to replace them in future. This will help get the right people to the right places to provide the best service to the public.

Managing the workforce: improving supervision

Officers and staff need to be well supervised. This helps their development, gives them direction and supports their wellbeing. But some forces are struggling to give their workforce the supervision they need to provide their best service to the public.

Forces are increasingly good at supporting officers and staff after traumatic incidents. But supervisors need to have regular discussions with their staff, on a one-to-one basis, to review workloads and explore their wellbeing needs. Without this time, supervisors may struggle to spot early signs that someone is having difficulties. We found that, in many forces, supervisors aren't consistently having these regular discussions, with three of the nine forces in this group having this as an area for improvement. Wellbeing training for supervisors is becoming more widespread. But supervisors need time to provide support and make sure officers and staff are coping with the pressures they are facing.

We are continuing to see some forces with poor supervision of investigations. Six of the twelve forces we inspected in this group must improve in this area. This is of most concern with non-specialist investigations, allocated to frontline officers with multiple demands on their time. We found that supervision wasn't proactive and directive enough in cases where investigators were struggling to complete investigations. This means forces are missing opportunities to solve some crimes. But we were pleased to see that many forces are developing plans to train supervisors in this area. We also continued to see an improvement in victim care.

Preventing pressure on the workforce: improving the future service to the public

The demand for policing services is increasing, but there are opportunities to reduce this demand in the future. Putting effort into preventing crime and building community relationships can lead to falling demand for policing services. Some forces continue to do this well, despite pressures to divert resources from prevention work. Reducing the future demand on policing will prevent further pressure building on the workforce. It will also mean the public have more trust in their police. Ultimately it will mean the public are safer.

Those forces achieving our highest grades are focusing on these areas. They are proactive in preventing crime and are training their workforces in problem solving. They are innovative in using intelligence, seeking information from the public and other agencies to identify where they most need to intervene. And they make sure they root out those officers and staff who are corrupt. They are reducing the demand they are likely to experience in future, meaning fewer victims, less harm and an easing of the pressure on the workforce.

Preventing harm: focusing the workforce on their local communities

We found generally positive and promising results in forces' focus on preventing crime. Most forces had protected their neighbourhood officers' time in their communities, preventing crime and building relationships. But three of the eight forces inspected in this area had reduced the size of their neighbourhood teams. In one force, we saw several examples of evaluated crime prevention and partnership activity, leading to clear results. But four forces need to improve how they evaluate their crime prevention work, or how they share their findings with colleagues.

Forces are also performing well in their understanding of the threat posed by serious organised crime. Their relationships with [regional organised crime units](#) are strong. But there is less consistency in their understanding of the threat posed by gangs and [county lines](#) activity. Closer working between organised crime specialists and neighbourhood officers will increase forces' understanding of the risks posed to their communities. But four of the five forces we inspected need to understand better the impact they are having on organised crime in local communities.

Building trust: linking together the workforce and local communities

Police officers and staff need to build trust and confidence in policing in the communities they serve. Without this, their interactions with the public become more difficult, more confrontational and more stressful for all concerned. Forces need to continually assess and develop how they engage with the communities they are policing and respond to their concerns. We found examples of forces using digital technologies to engage with the public, alongside traditional methods. There has been some evaluation work to establish how effective these are. But forces could improve the quality of the evaluations. Understanding the most effective methods of engaging with communities will improve the capacity of officers and staff to engage and build trust. This is especially important when policing communities who tend to have less trust and confidence in the police.

Forces should provide training, and give feedback to officers and staff, to improve the quality of their interactions with the public. Forces provide conflict management and de-escalation training for officers and some staff. But there is little training on day-to-day communication skills.

We are still finding that some forces need to scrutinise their use of stop and search powers more, so they understand how effective they are being. This helps forces direct officers to make better use of their time. Supervisors can give feedback so that officers can use these powers better and forces can understand better why they stop people of some ethnicities more than others. As part of a [recommendation we made in 2017](#), all forces need to make sure their workforce understands [unconscious bias](#), and how this may influence their decisions. Six of the nine forces inspected in this second group still need to improve in this area.

Building the right culture

Most police officers and staff are honest and well-intentioned. All forces except one have fully embedded the [Code of Ethics](#). But the tiny minority of officers and staff who are corrupt cause immense harm to the public. They also harm their colleagues. We are still concerned about forces' ability to prevent, uncover and address corruption.

Forces are continuing to have problems in making sure their workforce is properly vetted. Ten of the fifteen forces we inspected in this group weren't fully compliant with the vetting guidelines. Seven forces weren't checking that their vetting decisions weren't disproportionately affecting those with protected characteristics. Forces will need to improve their vetting processes to manage the recruitment of more officers.

We continue to be concerned about forces' progress in tackling the [abuse of position for a sexual purpose](#). This form of corruption was the focus of a [recommendation we made in 2016](#). Only two forces in this group have fully implemented all the actions needed to address the recommendation. We have reported more fully on our findings in our [PEEL spotlight report: Shining a light on betrayal](#).

Protecting the workforce

Forces are taking steps to improve the wellbeing of their workforce. The Blue Light Framework provides a structure for all emergency services to self-assess their health and wellbeing. We are pleased to see the police service widely using this.

Forces are providing more wellbeing services. But we continue to find that the workforce doesn't always feel the benefits. In some forces, the workforce wasn't aware of the support available. In others, the workforce knew about the support available, but felt they were too busy to be able to access it. This means that the help and support to prevent health problems developing or becoming worse isn't effective. This is building up future pressures.

Too many forces don't have fair and effective processes for managing people's performance. Six of the nine forces we inspected in this group need to improve in this area. Without these processes, these forces can't be confident that they can fully develop their workforce, or fairly identify talented individuals. There is also variation in how well forces tackle underperformance. This limits their future abilities.

Protecting services: a force fit for the future

Most forces have a good understanding of the demand they are likely to face in future. But few have sustainable plans in place to deal with it. An increase in the number of police officers will help forces meet this demand. But it will not be enough alone to make sure the force can continue to provide services in the future.

Forces will still need to make savings. We found three examples of forces in this group with limited plans in place to make these future savings. For others, it is not clear that their plans are fully achievable. High costs of long-running operations, and the breakdown of established collaborations, are already negatively affecting some of these plans.

Forces now need to plan to meet additional employer pension costs. In December 2018, a central government grant covered these costs. Forces assume the government will repeat this in future years, but this is not certain. Forces may need to meet the demand they are facing with fewer resources. This will increase the pressure on the workforce and will have a negative effect on the public they are there to serve.

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