

Police performance: Getting a grip. Response from Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

Published on 7th July 2023, this report brings together findings from the PEEL 2021/22 inspection programme. It highlighted two fundamental issues:

- 1) governance and performance management lacking grip and;
- 2) lack of investment in first-line supervisors.

The first issue relates to downfalls, including strategic decisions being based on poor data, or insufficiently analysed data and short sighted financial and strategic planning. This includes an under-skilled and under-resourced workforce. The second relates to too many first-line supervisors being let down, having to take on high workloads, whilst lacking sufficient training and not having access to the right resources.

This response focuses on the first of these issues, for which the following three recommendations are of most relevance:

1) By January 2024, forces should review whether they have effective processes in place to reduce the risk of skilled personnel leaving the organisation.

The inspectorate states that this review should cover police officers, police staff, special constables and volunteers and include:

- a) how exit interviews are conducted and to use this information to identify patterns and trends as to why people leave; and
- b) how people who are thinking of leaving are identified, and the action that is taken, where appropriate, to encourage them to stay.

The police force's employees are its biggest asset. The inspectorate pointed out that, it is important to retain skilled personnel for a number of reasons. More experienced officers and staff, allow for a higher level and quality of service to the public. The report referred to the statistic by the National Audit Office that by 2023/24, 38% of all police officers will have fewer than 5 years' service. This not only affects service standards, but also the well-being of newly recruited officers, who are often placed in roles that are unsuitable for them.

The report also noted that several officers with fewer experience are also leaving, referring to the Police Uplift Programme National Leavers Framework, which highlighted that 71% of all voluntary resignations were of officers with fewer than 5 years of experience. The report stated that the police are struggling to

retain officers in the first 5 years of their careers and are not doing enough to avert it, including not understanding enough through exit interviews, to learn what reasons have led to an officer leaving.

To combat this issue, West Midlands Police (WMP) have recently recruited a new head of Human Resources, who is currently in the process of reviewing HR policies and processes across the organisation. The process around exit interviews will be reviewed as part of this work, to understand the additional work needed in retaining individuals.

2) By January 2024, forces should review their proactive well-being support for officers and staff in high-stress roles and situations. They should make sure it includes targeted support that goes beyond mandatory annual psychological screening.

High attrition rates are also due to a lack of sufficient well-being support, particularly for individuals in high risk roles. One of the main reasons for this, was sighted as misleading answers to well-being surveys by those in high risk roles, due to worry that they would be removed from their roles rather than receiving support to address underlying issues, including those concerning resources and workload.

Officer well-being was also highlighted in the inspectorate's Annual Assessment of Policing (2022). There is a significant wellbeing offer across the force. WMP is partnered with 'Vivup', an employee assistance programme which provides counselling services, offering professional support 24-7 to all employees. Alongside counselling, Vivup provide additional resources, including podcasts on a range of topics such as resilience and mindfulness, self-compassion webinars and self-help books. Trauma Risk Management (TRiM), is also implemented across the force.

Based on 'active mentoring', TRiM is a trauma-focused peer support system, designed to help people who have experienced a traumatic, or potentially traumatic event, making it particularly relevant to those in high-stress roles. WMP has informed the office, that the wellbeing strategy will be reviewed, to ensure that it is still fit for purpose and whether any further changes need to be made.

3) By January 2024, chief constables should review their force's performance frameworks and governance processes to reassure themselves that the force is:

- a) collecting and analysing the right data to help it to understand and improve its performance;**
and
- b) integrating a culture of evaluation into performance and improvement activity at all levels.**

It was suggested that by reviewing performance in this way, performance management on service provision can be improved, so that more crimes are solved and that more victims of crime receive the justice that they are entitled to. WMP should be doing all that it can, to make people feel safe in their own communities. The inspectorate made particular reference to the rate of offences brought to justice, in which the performance of police within England and Wales is not good enough.

Whilst, it is encouraging to see that the work of the Data Analytics Lab within West Midlands Police, in predicting demand and planning response, was recognised as an example of promising practice by the inspectorate, we cannot be complacent. A wider governance review is currently underway in WMP and the results of this will inform next steps. Evaluations are becoming more common place, with the introduction

of the Partnering and Research team, as part of the force's Strategy, Direction and Assurance (SDA) department.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Foster', written in a cursive style.

Simon Foster

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner