



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

Improving Policing across Scotland

Thursday, May 14, 2015

PRESS RELEASE

HMICS Publish Inspection of Local Policing in Aberdeen City

Strictly EMBARGOED until 1100 hrs, Thursday, May 14

The residents of Aberdeen benefit from effective local policing which has reduced their likelihood of being a victim of crime.

An experienced and empowered local police commander and his team work well with their committed partners for the good of their communities, highlights a report published today (Thursday, May 14).

The HMICS report, Inspection of Aberdeen City Division, is the latest in the rolling programme under which all 14 local policing divisions of Police Scotland will be inspected to assess their state, effectiveness and efficiency. These inspections provide a consistent means of assessing the quality of local policing across Scotland and highlight examples of best practice.

Providing updates to complainers, promoting the local policing plan and giving current data to the local scrutiny committee have all been identified as areas for improvement.

The inspection, which was carried out in January, found partnership working is a key part of the division's approach to policing its communities and it shares many premises, such as libraries, schools and health centres with Aberdeen City Council and NHS Grampian.

HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Derek Penman said: "People in Aberdeen are less likely to be the victim of a crime than in previous years, and where they are a victim of crime, those responsible are more likely to be identified and prosecuted than previously.

“We also found morale among officers to be good. Senior officers are approachable, staff feel valued, good work is recognised and there is good communication within the division.

“Aberdeen City is the smallest division in Scotland in geographic terms and the second smallest in terms of resourcing. The local commander employs a policing model where there is no distinction between ‘response’ and ‘community’ officers with officers performing a dual role. This is well-suited to Aberdeen and meets local needs.

“A major concern for the division has been its ability to recruit and retain staff. It has suffered a proportionately greater loss of officers than any other division in Scotland with several experienced officers leaving to join the oil and gas sector. The perception of well-paid jobs in that industry has presented challenges in terms of local recruitment.”

The report contains a total of four recommendations for Police Scotland. They relate to providing up to date data to scrutiny committees, giving partners’ analysts access to information management systems, reviewing guidance on body worn cameras and ensuring that objectives in local policing plans are measured and timeously taken to scrutiny committees.

The force will be asked to create an action plan to address HMICS’ recommendations and ensure good practice is shared across Scotland to promote continuous improvement.

During its inspections of each local policing division, HMICS will also inspect custody facilities to assess the treatment of and conditions for those detained. Aberdeen City Division is the first where this has been undertaken and a separate report of the custody centre at Kittybrewster in Aberdeen is published alongside this report.

The next in the HMICS series of Local Policing + Inspections, of Edinburgh Division, will be published in September.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Key Findings and Recommendations from the Report are listed below.

The HMICS Inspection of Local Policing+ Aberdeen Division is available to download at the HMICS website www.hmics.org from 11:00hrs, Thursday, May 14, 2015.

To arrange an interview with HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mr Derek Penman QPM, or to request a photograph, please contact:

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REPORT KEY FINDINGS:

Outcomes

- Aberdeen City Division is delivering an effective policing service. People in Aberdeen are less likely to be the victim of a crime than in previous years, and where they are a victim of a crime, the crime is more likely to be detected than previously.
- Feedback from service users is sought regularly in accordance with national policy. Satisfaction rates for Aberdeen fall slightly below the national rate, but more recent data suggests the division's satisfaction rates are rising. A key area for improvement for both the division and Police Scotland is in providing updates to complainers about the progress of the incident they reported to the police.
- The volume of complaints about policing in Aberdeen has reduced and the ratio of complaints per officer in Aberdeen is below the national rate.

Leadership and governance

- The public and local partners influence the division's local priorities and the local policing plan. This plan aligns to national policing priorities, as well as to other local strategies such as Aberdeen's Single Outcome Agreement.
- Some local stakeholders remain unaware of the local policing plan suggesting there is still work to be done in promoting the plan and demonstrating its relevance and benefit to communities.
- There are 13 multi-member ward plans but these do not correspond to community policing areas which are felt to be more reflective of identifiable local communities.
- Reports to the local scrutiny committee do not cover all local objectives and the data supplied in the reports is not always current.
- Councillors in Aberdeen are concerned that national decisions about policing which have an impact locally are made without assessing the local impact and without sufficient consultation. While they feel this has improved recently, it is still not as effective as it could be.
- While Police Scotland has directed officers to record their working time, this has not yet been sufficient to ensure compliance among some senior staff.
- There is effective and visible leadership in the division. Those in supervisory positions, including the senior management team, are viewed as approachable and supportive. Communication within the division is good.
- Staff in Aberdeen feel listened to and say their ideas and feedback are encouraged. Staff feel valued and good work is recognised.
- Performance information is viewed as a management tool. Managers successfully isolate officers at inspector rank and below from unnecessary information about key performance indicators and targets. The majority of officers feel the division's activities are intelligence-led, rather than performance-driven.

- The division communicates well with its partners and with the public in Aberdeen. It has an effective process to record and monitor community engagement.
- No decision has yet been made on whether to progress the proposed merger of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire and Moray Divisions. In the absence of a business case outlining the benefits and dis-benefits of a merger, we have been unable to make our own, evidence-based assessment but will continue to monitor the proposal.

Planning and process

- The Interim Vulnerable Persons Database (iVDP) is seen as a useful tool to manage referrals of children and adults at risk to other agencies. However, there is a lack of definitive guidance on thresholds and the degree of concern that must exist before incidents are entered onto the database.
- There is a lack of clarity about the circumstances in which it is appropriate to conduct joint investigative interviews of child victims and witnesses. However, this should be addressed by Police Scotland's plans to develop a standard operating procedure on joint investigative interviews.
- The Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse is being piloted in Aberdeen. Early feedback from officers involved in the scheme suggests they view it as a useful tool in their efforts to prevent domestic abuse.
- The division is seeking to learn and continuously improve its service delivery. An effective divisional improvement plan is in place. While still at the early stages, the plan shows the division is aware of areas for development and is taking steps to address them.

People

- The most significant challenges facing Aberdeen City Division relate to the recruitment and retention of staff. The division has lost experienced officers to the oil and gas industry and struggles to recruit locally.
- The division has the highest proportion of new recruits (probationers) in Scotland and its workforce is therefore less experienced than that of other divisions. The division successfully managed an influx of probationers in 2014 by creating a Tutor Unit to support their development.
- Many probationers assigned to the division are from outwith the North East area. They face challenges in finding appropriate and affordable accommodation as the cost of living is higher than elsewhere in Scotland. The division is, however, working with partners to identify affordable housing opportunities.
- Officers and staff feel training and development opportunities have been more limited in recent years. They feel there is an over-reliance on online training which many feel is not as effective as traditional methods.
- Aberdeen City Division is managing absence effectively and has the lowest absence rate in Scotland for both officers and staff.

- Morale among officers is higher in Aberdeen than in other divisions we have inspected to date. Officers attributed their good morale to a sense of team spirit and working in a supportive environment where their efforts are valued.
- Morale is not as high among police staff who continue to be concerned about job security and who feel their contribution to policing is not as valued by Police Scotland as that of officers.

Resources

- The community policing model in Aberdeen City is working effectively and is meeting local needs.
- The use of police officers to provide security at courts does not appear to be cost-effective.
- There is an impressive record of co-location with operational bases in council premises, libraries, schools and health centres. This helps community policing teams to have a visible presence in their local areas.
- Body worn video cameras are seen as a useful tool by officers in Aberdeen. However, the cameras have not yet become embedded in their daily practice.

Partnerships

- Partnership working is embedded within Aberdeen City Division and is effective. The division's leaders hold key positions in the local partnership environment.
- Partners have been frustrated by poor communication and a lack of consultation in relation to national decisions made by Police Scotland that have a local impact.
- Young people involved in the Police Scotland Youth Volunteer Programme told us the programme helped them to develop skills and had improved their confidence and their relationship with the police. The programme also received positive feedback from the young people's parents as well as the wider community.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should ensure that progress against all objectives in local policing plans is measured and reported to local scrutiny committees at an appropriate stage each year.

Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should ensure that the Analysis and Performance Unit helps divisional commanders to provide data to local scrutiny bodies that is current enough to support effective local scrutiny of policing.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should examine the effectiveness of the existing guidance given to officers on the use of body worn video cameras.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should provide appropriate access to its information management systems for those analysts working in partnership with the police.

REPORT EFFECTIVE PRACTICE:

Aberdeen City's divisional improvement plan has helped to identify the division's strengths and areas for development. The plan supports continuous improvement in the policing of Aberdeen. We consider it to be an example of effective practice and we welcome the division's commitment to self-assessment (see paragraph 80).

The division's early intervention management process is an example of effective practice in learning from complaints (see paragraph 83).

The Tutor Unit, set up to manage and support a large number of probationers who joined the division over a short period of time, is an example of effective practice (see Case study – Tutor Unit on page 39).

The Community Safety Hub, a local initiative involving Police Scotland, Aberdeen City Council, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and other agencies, is an example of effective partnership working (see Case study – Community Safety Hub on page 52).

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