

<b>Report title:</b> HMICFRS Reports into the Effectiveness of Vetting and Counter-Corruption Arrangements	
<b>Report to:</b> Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel – Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee	
<b>Report author:</b> Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner	
<b>Date:</b> 20 September 2023	<b>For:</b> Noting
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<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex	

### 1. Purpose of Report

In November 2022, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspected the effectiveness of Essex Police’s vetting, IT monitoring and counter-corruption arrangements. The inspectorate published its findings on 16 June 2023. The purpose of this report is to brief members of the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee on those findings.

The report also updates members of the sub-committee on the force’s progress in implementing the 43 national recommendations and areas for improvement (AFIs) identified within HMICFRS’s national thematic inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service, which were reported to the sub-committee in November 2022.

### 2. Recommendations

The Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee is invited to note the contents of the report, identifying any areas that require further clarification or comment.

### 3. Context / Summary

#### National Context

A report to the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee on 24 November 2022 provided an initial commentary of the position in Essex in relation to the issues identified by HMICFRS nationally in relation to vetting, misconduct and misogyny, along with the next steps in terms of responding to the findings locally. The progress report attached at Appendix 1 updates the sub-committee on the progress made by Essex Police

against the recommendations and areas for improvement identified and demonstrates that the force is in a strong position against these.

In addition to progressing these actions, members of the sub-committee will be aware that forces across England and Wales have been completing a “Historical Data Wash” in response to the national requirement to search every police officer, member of staff (including those employed by the PFCC) and volunteer against the Police National Database by the end of September 2023. Essex Police had approximately 7,000 people subject to this search, so established a dedicated team to manage this process through a risk-based approach. The force has now completed 85% of the checks required and, thus far, only one member of staff has been found to have intelligence recorded against them that they failed to disclose when they were vetted.

### Local Context

The full report arising from HMICFRS’s inspection of Essex Police’s vetting, IT monitoring and counter-corruption arrangements is attached for Panel members’ information at Appendix 2. Overall, His Majesty’s Inspectors found that the national report was not reflective of Essex Police, and that the force is “Good” at vetting, IT monitoring and counter-corruption work, with a very low appetite for risk. Key points from each section of the report are highlighted below.

#### *Vetting*

Inspectors found that the Force Vetting Unit (FVU) and HR department are effective at predicting future vetting demand and that workloads within the FVU are manageable.

Essex Police informed inspectors that, at the time of the inspection, there were 22 police officers and 11 police staff in post without the correct level of vetting for their role. Some of these were individuals whose vetting had expired. Others were in posts which had recently been made designated posts, which require a higher level of vetting than the postholder was previously subject to. The inspectorate was satisfied that the force had “a good awareness of these cases” and that, in these cases, access to more sensitive data is restricted until the necessary clearance is obtained.

In addition, seven out of 1,018 non-police personnel (contractors, volunteers and people who work in organisations that share police premises) were not vetted, however the force had risk assessed them and none had access to sensitive data. Overall, inspectors were satisfied that Essex Police has a good process to maintain accurate non-police personnel (NPPV) records.

Some police roles have access to more sensitive information and require a higher level of vetting known as Management Vetting (MV). At the time of the inspection, Essex Police had 667 such posts. All the required minimum checks were completed in all the MV cases Inspectors reviewed. Of this cadre, Inspectors found that there were 12 people who did not have current Management Vetting. As indicated above, seven of these were in posts that were newly designated as requiring MV, whilst the other five cases were all attributable to absence and had been risk assessed.

The College of Policing’s Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on vetting permits forces to accept vetting clearance from another force if it is less than a year old,

however Essex Police has chosen to vet all transferees along with those who have left the service and applied to re-join. As part of this process, the FVU requests the individual's complaint and conduct history, as well as any intelligence held by the Counter-Corruption Unit (CCU) from all forces in which they have previously served.

The volume of notifications received by the FVU suggests that the workforce has a good understanding of the requirement to report any relevant changes of personal circumstances, which allows the FVU to conduct the necessary enquiries to identify risks and any impacts on the individual's vetting status. Essex Police also regularly uses risk mitigation measures to support its vetting decisions, such as restrictions on where people can be posted, monitoring social media activity and use of the force's IT systems, and reviewing applicants' management of their finances.

The force maintains records of the results of all vetting applications from people who declare a protected characteristic, and analysis of all vetting applicants between January and June 2022 revealed no disproportionality in vetting refusals for people in this cadre. In addition, the force assists applicants from ethnic minority groups by assigning a member of staff to support them through the vetting process.

As part of the inspection, a vetting specialist from another force reviewed 40 clearance decisions from the preceding three years relating to police officers and staff who had previously committed criminal offences or who the force had other concerns about (including transferees). The specialist agreed with all the force's decisions.

### *IT Monitoring*

Essex Police proactively checks activity on mobile phones to help identify potential misconduct including improper contact with vulnerable victims or organised crime groups. The force also actively monitors people who intelligence suggests pose a higher risk of sexual misconduct or corruption. Encrypted apps are not permitted on force devices, and no new IT systems can be introduced to the force without the prior approval of the Counter-Corruption Unit (CCU), which ensures they contain suitable functionality designed to prevent and detect misuse.

Officers and staff spoken to by inspectors demonstrated awareness of the force's expectations of them with regard to IT (including social media) usage. However, the inspectorate urged the force to review staffing levels in its CCU to ensure these are sufficient to meet the demand for monitoring.

### *Counter-Corruption Arrangements*

Inspectors found that Essex Police correctly categorises intelligence in line with the counter-corruption APP. They also found that the force has a counter-corruption control strategy based on the 4P (pursue, prepare, protect and prevent) approach which clearly sets out the priorities identified in its counter-corruption strategic threat assessment (STA). Each of the corruption threats identified in the STA and control strategy are considered in detail in the force's implementation plan. Each task has a designated person responsible as well as clear timescales for completion. In addition, inspectors found that Essex Police's counter-corruption policies were comprehensive and reflective of guidance contained within the counter-corruption (prevention) APP.

Inspectors reviewed 60 corruption intelligence files and found two cases in which the force chose not to act, which they considered may have resulted in missed opportunities to develop the intelligence further and mitigate corruption risks. In the other 58 cases, inspectors concluded that the CCU responded effectively, using a variety of techniques to carry out investigations that were well supervised. Inspectors also found two cases of proactive intelligence collection using the force's IT monitoring system.

At the time of the inspection, the CCU was a small team consisting of experienced detectives and a crime analyst who are experienced in covert law enforcement. When required, the force can also access resources for covert investigations through the regional organised crime unit (ROCU) or National Crime Agency (NCA). Inspectors recognised that the force was increasing the resources it has to carry out prevention and engagement work to support vulnerable people, and that it had secured funding for an additional intelligence researcher dedicated to routine and IT monitoring, but also highlighted that, until these new resources were in post, the existing specialist CCU resources would not be able to focus sufficiently on corruption investigations, which was a risk to the force. It consequently raised an area for improvement (AFI) that "The force should improve how it collects, assesses, develops, and investigates counter-corruption intelligence by ensuring that its counter-corruption unit has sufficient resources and suitably trained staff to meet demand and allow for proactive intelligence collection." The additional resources that were planned at the time of the inspection have now been recruited.

Inspectors found that the force manages processes relating to notifiable associations or business interests, gifts and hospitality effectively. It also recognises abuse of position for a sexual purpose (AoPSP) as serious corruption, and consistently refers such cases to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). Where the risk is assessed as low and the intelligence cannot be developed, good use is made of early interventions through risk management meetings. Mandatory training is provided to the wider workforce as well as specifically to line managers, supported by poster campaigns, intranet articles and the publication of the outcomes of gross misconduct hearings. Consequently, there is good knowledge of AoPSP across the workforce.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Update Report on Recommendations and AFIs for Chief Constables in the HMICFRS report '[An inspection of vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the police](#)'

Appendix 2 – A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Essex Police (HMICFRS, June 2023)