

Most police forces judged to be fair and ethical – but are let down by lack of progress on stop and search

The majority of police forces in England and Wales were found to be treating people fairly and ethically in a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), published today. However, HMIC found that this was a mixed picture overall when the use of stop and search and the way black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) officers and staff were treated in disciplinary matters were taken into account.

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[PEEL: Police legitimacy 2015](#)

The Legitimacy inspection examined all 43 forces in England and Wales on whether they operate fairly, ethically and within the law, how they engage with their communities and their use of stop and search and tasers. Thirty seven police forces were graded as 'good', and one police force, Kent Police, achieved an 'outstanding' grade. Additionally there were five police forces that were graded as 'requires improvement', none was 'inadequate'.

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary Stephen Otter, who led the inspection, said:

"The majority of police forces demonstrate fair and ethical behaviour; the public expect no less. However, all the good work that we've seen forces are doing to engage with their local communities risks being undermined if they continue to fail to get stop and search right.

"This is the third time we've looked at stop and search in the last three years and although there is some improvement, it's not happening fast enough. This is inexcusable given that it is one of the principal indicators of police legitimacy.

"In this inspection, we found that police use of stop and search was declining: police officers need to be given the confidence to use this policing tactic correctly. Additionally, too many forces are still not recording the reasonable grounds for stopping a person – in one force, almost two thirds of the records we reviewed did not record this detail.

"I am frustrated by the apparent lack of commitment by chief constables to ensuring stop and search is used properly and legitimately, and I am looking for police leaders to take action to address this within the next three months."

HMIC was disappointed to find that far too many forces were not complying with the Home Office and College of Police's Best Use of Stop and Search scheme, despite all chief constables having signed up to the scheme. Thirteen of the 43 police forces are not complying with three or more of the five requirements of the scheme. HMIC will revisit these forces within six months to determine what progress they have made.

However, we found that in our first inspection of the use of tasers, forces had robust oversight systems in place, officers were well-trained, and use of tasers was fair and appropriate.

The other area of concern was a suggestion of possible bias in the way that BAME officers and staff were treated in disciplinary matters. The data showed differences in the way that BAME officers and staff appeared to be treated throughout the processes. Staff representative groups told us that the perception of bias and discrimination exists. Disappointingly, the data from forces was not consistent and complete enough to draw firm conclusions. HMIC recommends that chief constables conduct a review to assess whether bias exists and, if so, take action to address this. Additionally, the College of Policing and National Police Chiefs' Council should establish national standards to detect bias so that forces can take the appropriate action.

The Legitimacy inspection considered many issues: from the degree to which forces reflect the diverse make up of the communities they serve, whether the police workforce feel they're being treated fairly, the efforts made by the police to engage and communicate with the communities they serve, and the way that stop and search and tasers are used.

Police legitimacy will continue to be inspected as part of HMIC's annual all-force inspection programme.

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Notes

1. The five forces which were graded as 'requires improvement' are:
 - o Cleveland;
 - o Dyfed-Powys;
 - o Northumbria;
 - o West Mercia; and
 - o Warwickshire
2. Individual assessment reports are available for each of the 43 police forces in England and Wales.
3. As part of its annual inspections into police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL), HMIC's Legitimacy programme assessed how a force dealt with people – both its workforce and the public – fairly and ethically. Our inspection focused on the overall question: 'How legitimate is the force at keeping people safe and reducing crime?' To answer this question HMIC evaluated three areas:
 - o To what extent does practice and behaviour reinforce the wellbeing of staff and an ethical culture?
 - o How well does the force understand, engage with and treat fairly the people it serves to maintain and improve its legitimacy?
 - o To what extent are decisions taken on the use of stop and search and tasers fair and appropriate?
4. This report will be followed by the report into the remaining strand of the annual PEEL assessments – Effectiveness – of all 43 police forces of England and Wales, which will be published next week. Efficiency was published in October 2015. The

judgments in this report will be counted towards the next HMIC PEEL assessment, published on 25 February 2016.

5. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest, and rigorously examines the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces to tackle crime and terrorism, improve criminal justice and raise confidence. HMIC inspects all 43 police forces in England and Wales together with other major policing and law enforcement bodies.
6. For further information, HMIC's press office can be contacted during office hours from 8:30am – 5:00pm Monday – Friday on 0203 513 0600.
7. HMIC's out-of-hours press office line for urgent media enquiries is 07836 217 729

Source: HMIC, 11 February: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/news/news-feed/most-police-forces-judged-to-be-fair-and-ethical/>