

To: February Joint Audit Committee
From: Sergeant Lucy Hancock
Date: February 2026
Subject: HMICFRS updates and overview of publications

HMICFRS Activity Report

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the work HMICFRS conduct and to provide an overview of inspection reports published by HMICFRS between July October 2025 and February 2026.

2. Overview

HMICFRS inspect all forces on behalf of the public through a number of inspections:

2.1 PEEL assessments

The police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections assess the performance of all 43 police forces in England and Wales. Its main aim is to promote improvements in policing. HMICFRS provide graded judgments on aspects of forces' performance. They identify where forces need to improve and help the public understand how well their force is performing.

2.2 National thematic inspections

Thematic inspections are in-depth examinations of particular policing practices or processes, or of the policing approach to preventing and tackling specific offences. HMICFRS identify themes mainly through their continuous monitoring of forces and through consultations with key stakeholders.

Thematic inspections may be chosen for several reasons, including:

- current, acute problems in policing practice that are harming the public interest.
- inconsistencies in police performance across England and Wales, which force-level work can't adequately explain; or
- further improvement in practice that would benefit the most, or the most vulnerable, victims.

Expanding on the force-specific information from PEEL inspections and force management statements, HMICFRS aim to build a national picture of police efficiency, effectiveness, and legitimacy through a combination of:

- force data and document requests.
- interviews with national, regional, and local policing bodies, Government and other interested parties.
- case file audits; and
- testing the understanding and application of policies and procedures with officers and staff in forces.

While thematic inspections allow HMICFRS to identify areas of notable practice or specific concerns in specific forces, they will usually make recommendations that are relevant to the police service as a whole. These are published in the thematic report and all forces have to assess their performance and work against the recommendation to ensure the common themes HMICFRS have found in the thematic (normally about 6 forces are inspected, choosing a range of areas and sizes of forces to ensure commonality across the country) are addressed (if they feature) in every force in England and Wales.

2.3 Commissions from the Home Secretary and local policing bodies

The Home Secretary may, at any time, require HMICFRS to carry out an inspection of a police force, part of a police force, or particular activities of one or more police forces. Similarly, local policing bodies may, at any time, ask them to carry out inspections or reviews of the police forces they oversee. An example of this has been the rapid review of policing public order after the summer riots.

2.4 Inspection of national bodies and other non-Home Office forces

Additionally, HMICFRS also have a statutory responsibility to carry out inspections of the following national bodies and non-Home Office forces:

- the National Crime Agency.
- the Police Service of Northern Ireland.
- the British Transport Police.
- the Service Police – Royal Military Police, Royal Navy Police and Royal Air Force Police.

- the Ministry of Defence Police.
- the Civil Nuclear Constabulary; and
- HM Revenue & Customs.

At the request of the relevant dependency or overseas territory, they may also inspect forces in British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, such as Gibraltar, Jersey and Guernsey.

HMICFRS have similar voluntary inspection arrangements with the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority.

2.5 Joint inspections

HMICFRS work with other organisations to carry out joint inspections. These allow them to inspect the way in which the police approach and tackle a particular type of crime or problem as part of a wider assessment of the service provided by all relevant bodies and organisations. For example, they work with Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission to examine how local authorities, the police and health services work together to help protect children. These are the Joint Targeted Area Inspections. (JTAI).

HMICFRS also work with the other criminal justice inspectorates: HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons. This allows the assessment of police efficiency and effectiveness in both contributing to, and being affected by, the wider criminal justice system. The joint inspection work HMICFRS do with these inspectorates is detailed in the separate 'Criminal Justice Joint Inspection Business Plan 2023/25'.

2.6 State of Policing report

Each year, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary will produce an annual State of Policing report, which reports on the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in England and Wales. This is to inform parliament of the issues within policing.

2.7 Rolling programmes.

HMICFRS carry out a number of rolling programmes. These are to assess specific issues in areas of higher risk. These are deeper and narrower inspection into specific areas. These include:

- Integrity (Vetting, Counter corruption and Professional Standards)

- Child Protection
- Serious and Organised Crime

3. Publications

3.1 All HMICFRS publications are available through this link: [Publications - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

3.2 Reports of note:

3.2.1 Inspection of the effectiveness of Police and Law enforcement bodies' response to group-based child sexual exploitation: A progress report

In 2023 HMICFRS inspected how the Police, law enforcement agencies and other public bodies were tackling challenges which were identified in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) which took place between 2015 and 2022. HMICFRS identified some progress, however discovered deep rooted problems that remained and published a report with several recommendations. On 24th October HMICFRS published a progress report with further recommendations after a reviewing the progress against the 2023 report. 6 new recommendations were made, 4 of which were relevant to Police forces.

3.2.2 A report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Wiltshire Police

Background

On 29th October 2025 HMICFRS published their report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Wiltshire Police. This is in relation to their integrity inspection program where all Police forces they inspect within the programme will receive separate graded judgements for vetting, professional standards and counter-corruption.

HMICFRS judgements:

Area	Grade
Vetting police officers and staff	Requires improvement
Upholding the standards of professional behaviour	Requires improvement
Tackling potential corruption	Requires improvement

3.2.3 **A report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Devon and Cornwall Police**

Background

On 29th October 2025 HMICFRS published their report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Devon and Cornwall Police. This is in relation to their integrity inspection program where all Police forces they inspect within the programme will receive separate graded judgements for vetting, professional standards and counter-corruption.

HMICFRS judgements:

Area	Grade
Vetting police officers and staff	Requires improvement
Upholding the standards of professional behaviour	Requires improvement
Tackling potential corruption	Requires improvement

3.2.4 **A report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Avon and Somerset Police**

Background

On 29th October 2025 HMICFRS published their report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Avon and Somerset Police. This is in relation to their integrity inspection program where all Police forces they inspect within the programme will receive separate graded judgements for vetting, professional standards and counter-corruption.

HMICFRS judgements:

Area	Grade
Vetting police officers and staff	Requires improvement
Upholding the standards of professional behaviour	Requires improvement
Tackling potential corruption	Requires improvement

3.2.5 Evaluation of PEEL Assessments

On 30th October 2025 HMICFRS published a report detailing their evaluation, which took place between March 2021 and June 2023, on whether the changes to PEEL:

- Had been implemented as designed
- Identify examples of impact in policing
- Understand which elements of PEEL inspections are most relevant to achieving impact

The report details significant improvements that have been made to the PEEL inspection process. For the 2021/22 inspection cycle HMICFRS made significant changes to the approach for PEEL inspections, including:

- A move to a more continuous assessment
- A new five-tier set of graded judgment criteria
- A shorter, more focused inspection report

The evaluation showed PEEL inspections have contributed to improvements in policing.

3.2.6 Terms of Reference: Inspection of the Firearms Licensing System Across Police Forces in England and Wales

On 12th November 2025, HMICFRS published their terms of reference in relation to their thematic inspection into the firearms licensing system across police forces in

England and Wales. In their inspection, they will consider the efficiency and effectiveness of:

- National guidance and legislation
- Local policies and processes
- National, regional and local governance arrangements
- Training for firearms licensing personnel
- Funding and resourcing

3.2.7 South Wales Police: National Child Protection Inspection

On 14th November 2025, HMICFRS published a report setting out their findings of their 2025 inspection of child protection services in South Wales Police.

Background

In February 2024, HMICFRS introduced a new child protection rolling inspection programme. For each police force in England and Wales, they make five judgments on how effectively the force safeguards children at risk.

In each inspection, HMICFRS focus on the experiences of children who come into contact with the police when there are concerns about their safety or well-being.

HMICFRS judgements

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Leadership of child protection arrangements	Risk assessment and referrals		
	Working with safeguarding partners	Investigating child abuse, neglect and exploitation		
	Responding to children at risk of harm			

3.2.8 Terms of Reference: Inspection of Counter-Terrorism Safeguarding

On 19th November 2025 HMICFRS published their terms of reference in relation to their thematic inspection into how police forces, Counter Terrorism Policing and partner organisations safeguard young and vulnerable people. In their inspection they will examine the safeguarding measures adopted for young people under the age of 25 and other vulnerable people who:

- May be at most risk of radicalisation or exploitation by extremist groups
- Are under investigation for terrorism offences

In their inspection they will address the following questions:

- How effectively do Police forces and CTP understand the nature and scale of existing and emerging risks
- How effectively do Police forces and CTP share relevant intelligence between themselves and partner organisations to make sure risk assessments and safeguarding referrals are based on all available information
- How effectively do police forces and CTP safeguard young and vulnerable people, including how they use measures described in the 'Prevent' strand of the United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2023 (CONTEST)
- How effectively do police forces and CTP manage the risks associated with young and vulnerable people, including how they use offender management, safeguarding and other measures described in the 'Pursue' strand of the CONTEST strategy

3.2.9 West Midlands Police: National Child Protection Inspection

On 21st November 2025, HMICFRS published a report setting out their findings of their 2025 inspection of child protection services in West Midlands Police.

Background

In February 2024, HMICFRS introduced a new child protection rolling inspection programme. For each police force in England and Wales, they make five judgments on how effectively the force safeguards children at risk.

In each inspection, HMICFRS focus on the experiences of children who come into contact with the police when there are concerns about their safety or well-being.

HMICFRS judgements

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Working with safeguarding partners	Leadership of child protection arrangements	Responding to children at risk of harm	
			Risk assessment and referrals	
			Investigating child abuse, neglect and exploitation	

3.2.10 Joint Child Protection Inspection of Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment in Brighton and Hove

Background

On 4th December 2025 a joint child protection inspection report that took place in Brighton and Hove was published. Between 13th and 17th October 2025, Ofsted, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the Care Quality Commission and His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation carried out a joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse in the family environment in Brighton and Hove.

The inspections examine the arrangements and services for children in need of help and protection in local authority areas in England. Professionals across the partnership received praise for their high levels of commitment, thoughtfulness and reflection to engage sensitively with families and build trust. Prior to the inspection, the multi-agency safeguarding partnership had already recognised the need to make improvements to the response of services to child sexual abuse in the family environment in Brighton and Hove. It responded quickly to the findings of 2 the CSPRP report which was published last year and had promptly agreed the need for

a plan to understand the prevalence and the needs of these children. A number of areas for improvement were identified and highlighted in the report.

3.2.11 Staffordshire Police: National Child Protection Inspection

On 5th December 2025, HMICFRS published a report setting out their findings of their 2025 inspection of child protection services in Staffordshire Police.

Background

In February 2024, HMICFRS introduced a new child protection rolling inspection programme. For each police force in England and Wales, they make five judgments on how effectively the force safeguards children at risk.

In each inspection, HMICFRS focus on the experiences of children who come into contact with the police when there are concerns about their safety or well-being.

HMICFRS judgements

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Working with safeguarding partners	Leadership of child protection arrangements	Responding to children at risk of harm	
		Risk assessment and referrals	Investigating child abuse, neglect and exploitation	

3.2.12 Terms of Reference: Inspection of How Effectively Police Forces and Fire and Rescue Services Manage Cybersecurity Risks

On 8th December 2025 HMICFRS published their terms of reference in relation to their thematic inspection into how effectively police forces and fire and rescue services manage cybersecurity risks.

Background

Cybersecurity risks are a growing concern for Police forces and Fire and Rescue services. In 2024, there were several cybersecurity attacks that affected essential public services, including:

- Cancelled operations in London hospitals
- Personal data of 150,000 Scottish NHS patients published online
- Temporary closure of a secondary school in Essex
- IT systems and phone lines temporarily unavailable at Leicester City Council
- Shutdown of housing websites for Bolton, Manchester and Salford local councils in Greater Manchester

HMICFRS have said Police forces and Fire and Rescue services must protect their IT systems and the data stored within them to keep the public safe.

Terms of reference

In their inspection, they will consider how effectively Police forces and Fire and Rescue services:

- Understand, assess and manage cybersecurity risks
- Protect their IT systems and networks from cybersecurity risks
- Implement cybersecurity detection measures that are proportionate to the known threat, harm and risk
- Prepare for, and recover from, cybersecurity events or incidents

3.2.13 Terms of Reference: Inspection of Police Forces' Contributions to Safety Advisory Groups

On 12th December 2025 HMICFRS published their terms of reference in relation to their thematic inspection into police forces' contributions to safety advisory groups.

Background

In October 2025, the Home Secretary commissioned HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary to inspect how efficiently and effectively police forces in England and Wales contribute to:

- Safety advisory groups (SAG's)
- Other bodies responsible for public safety and licensing in relation to high-profile public events

In their inspection, they will consider the contribution forces make to safety advisory groups when these events are planned.

They will examine:

- Legislation, policies and processes in relation to the role of Police in SAG's
- National and force-specific guidance on planning major events, how forces use it to assess risk, and how forces use the SAG's process
- The extent to which forces take account of local community impact assessments, as well as wider local, national and international factors, when planning their approach to these events
- Whether forces are striking the right balance between risk, financial costs and national and international factors when they assess risk and compile their advice
- When forces advise SAG's, how effectively those forces then communicate that advice to the public
- When event organisers or local authorities make decisions, how effectively forces then communicate those decisions to the public

Within this commission, the Home Secretary asked HM Chief Inspector to prioritise inspecting the match assessment and categorisation that West Midlands Police provided to the Birmingham City Council safety advisory group. This concerns the Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture, which took place on 6 November 2025.

They will also examine:

- The match assessment and categorisation that West Midlands Police carried out before the fixture

- The extent to which the information and intelligence the force gave the safety advisory group accurately reflected the full information and intelligence picture, including information and intelligence it had received from the Netherlands Police

3.2.14 An Inspection of the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Response to Serious and Organised Crime

Background

On 18th December 2025, HMICFRS published a report which describes their findings following an inspection of the Yorkshire and Humber regional response to serious and organised crime. The forces in the report are Humberside Police, North Yorkshire Police, South Yorkshire Police and West Yorkshire Police.

Background

As part of HMICFRS's overall police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy inspections, they inspected how well police forces tackle serious and organised crime (SOC). In 2022, they changed how we inspect this aspect of policing, to incorporate inspections of the ten regions, as well as the nine regional organised crime units (ROCU) throughout England and Wales, and the 43 police forces. This improves the understanding of how well forces and ROCUs work together to tackle SOC.

The report includes sections on the following:

- Regional findings – a summary of inspection evidence
- The ROCU and individual forces – the ROCU and each individual force are given a graded judgment

Regional findings:

- 2 areas for improvement identified

Force specific findings:

Organised Crime Unit Location	Grading	Area for Improvement
Yorkshire and Humber	Good	0
Humberside	Good	1
North Yorkshire	Adequate	2
South Yorkshire	Good	0
West Yorkshire	Outstanding	0

3.2.15 Lincolnshire Police: Accelerated Cause of Concern

On 19th December 2025 HMICFRS issued two accelerated causes of concern to Lincolnshire Police. If their inspection identifies a serious or critical shortcoming in a force's practice, policy or performance, they will report it as a cause of concern. A cause of concern will always be accompanied by one or more recommendations. When they identify causes of concern during our inspections, they normally provide details in the published force report.

In some cases, such as where HMICFRS discover significant service failures or risks to public safety, they can report our concerns and recommendations earlier. This is called an accelerated cause of concern.

Reasons for accelerated cause of concern:

- Effectively investigate when children are at risk of, or have been harmed by, criminal or sexual exploitation
- Have enough trained and accredited officers to investigate abuse and exploitation effectively

Recommendations

HMICFRS have issued 9 recommendations in relation to the causes of concern.

3.2.16 Terms of Reference: Inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service's Recruitment and Vetting Arrangements

On 8th January 2026 HMICFRS published their Terms of reference in relation to an inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service's recruitment and vetting arrangements.

Background

In September 2025, the Home Secretary commissioned HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary to inspect the Metropolitan Police Service's recruitment and vetting arrangements for police personnel. This followed an internal review by the MPS. In its review, the MPS found that it didn't carry out all necessary vetting checks when assessing the suitability of people applying to become police personnel. As a result, the MPS recruited unsuitable people.

HMICFRS will examine the recruitment and vetting arrangements the MPS has used since the College of Policing introduced the vetting authorised professional practice and the Vetting Code of Practice in May 2017. This includes the period of recruitment under the Police Uplift Programme, which ran from November 2019 to March 2023.

Questions to be addressed in inspection:

- To what extent did the MPS's recruitment and vetting arrangements deviate from regulations, authorised professional practice or force policies, in what specific ways, over what time frame and for what reasons
- To what extent did the MPS's recruitment and vetting arrangements increase the risk of harm to the public and/or itself
- To what extent and how effectively has the MPS identified and addressed any shortcomings in its recruitment and vetting arrangements, mitigated any risks and made improvements
- To what extent has the MPS updated its recruitment and vetting arrangements to make sure they are sufficiently robust

3.2.17 Inspection of Bedfordshire Police, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Hertfordshire Constabulary's Firearms and Explosives Licensing: Accelerated Cause of Concern

On 9th January 2026 HMICFRS issued an accelerated cause of concern to Bedfordshire Police, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Hertfordshire Constabulary after a thematic inspection determined the tri-force collaboration doesn't adequately manage its firearms and explosives licensing arrangements to keep the public safe.

[Link to Report](#)

Findings leading to the accelerated cause of concern:

The tri-force collaboration doesn't effectively and efficiently manage its firearms and explosives licensing arrangements to keep the public safe. Details:

- The collaboration has significant backlogs in processing its firearms and shotgun licence applications and renewals. They identified some cases that had been outstanding for up to two years.
- The collaboration doesn't have enough officers and staff to address the volume of outstanding applications.
- HMICFRS found that it was issuing a large number of temporary permits as a result (over 1,000). As the collaboration must review temporary permits every six months, this delays and duplicates work
- The collaboration doesn't have an effective case management system to manage applications and there is limited supervision of case files.
- It doesn't provide enough firearms licensing training to the firearms and explosive licensing unit and other related departments to make sure officers and staff have the required skills to do their jobs effectively
- HMICFRS found that the collaboration wasn't complying with certification requirements for licensing certificates. It was signing off certificates without proper delegated authority
- There was no standard operating procedure for seizing and revoking firearms licences across the collaboration, which was creating inconsistency
- The collaboration's renewal policy for shotgun licences may leave the public at risk. The shotgun renewal policy is a 'desk-based process', and the collaboration carries out checks remotely.
- It doesn't carry out home visits or household checks to identify any factors that could suggest the applicant isn't suitable to have a licence. It doesn't

directly speak to the licence holder, other people living with them or the referees listed on their renewal application

- Poor communication, both internally and externally, was creating inefficiencies. At the time of their inspection, there was no phone number to allow the public to receive a prompt response from their firearms and explosive licensing unit
- They identified 2,190 unanswered emails awaiting the collaboration's attention. The risk that might be contained within these emails was unknown. It had no plan to deal with this backlog and stay on top of email demand
- They also found that officers and staff in the unit were often unclear about their roles and responsibilities. The collaboration didn't make them aware of the work they were authorised to carry out. This inconsistency led to confusion and duplicated efforts
- Although the collaboration had introduced new senior leaders and governance structures, at the time of their inspection, these changes hadn't yet addressed the issues we identified

Recommendations:

With immediate effect, the collaboration should:

- Make sure that all licensing certificates are signed off with proper delegated authority
- Update its firearms licensing policy and standard operating procedures, including delegated authorities, in line with August 2025 statutory guidance to create consistency across all three forces
- Understand the risks that the backlog poses and appropriately prioritise licence applications and renewals
- Review and assure itself that its desk-based shotgun licence renewal process effectively reduces risk to the public
- Put in place a governance structure with oversight from senior leaders to make sure the firearms and explosives licensing department functions effectively

- Improve how it communicates with its officers and staff and the public.

Within three months, the collaboration should:

- Provide enough, sustainable resources to safely manage the workload in the firearms and explosive licensing unit
- Make sure that all officers and staff have the right skills, training and experience to do their jobs effectively

This notification of an accelerated cause of concern constitutes a report under section 54 of the Police Act 1996. As it also contains recommendations, the local policing body is required to respond under section 55 of the Police Act 1996.

3.2.18 Multi-Agency Response to Children Who Are Victims of Domestic Abuse

On 19th January 2026 HMICFRS published their report which sets out their findings from six joint targeted area inspections (JTAs) carried out between October 2024 and June 2025. JTAs are carried out by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.

Together, they looked at how local partnerships and services respond to children who are at risk of, or who have been victims of, domestic abuse. Their inspection focused on the unborn children and children aged 0 to 7 years who are victims of domestic abuse. They also inspected how strategic arrangements in the local area worked to protect all children.

This report shares the most significant findings from these inspections which took place in Cleveland, Hertfordshire, Metropolitan, Norfolk, North Yorkshire and Thames Valley. It aims to help improve practice, knowledge and understanding for local areas, partners and agencies working in domestic abuse.

3.2.19 Terms of Reference: How Police Forces and The National Crime Agency Use Retrospective Facial Recognition to Identify Suspects

On 27th January 2026 HMICFRS published their terms of reference in relation to their thematic inspection into how police forces and the National Crime Agency use retrospective facial recognition to identify suspects.

Background

On 12 November 2025, the Home Secretary commissioned HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary to review how select police forces and the National Crime Agency use retrospective facial recognition to identify suspects in criminal investigations. They will examine how Police forces and the National Crime Agency use retrospective facial recognition effectively, efficiently and legitimately.

In their inspection, they will address the following questions:

- To what extent are local, regional and national guidance, policies and governance arrangements for retrospective facial recognition fit for purpose
- How well do police forces and the National Crime Agency train their investigators to use retrospective facial recognition in investigations
- How well do investigators understand and follow the required investigative processes after identifying a potential facial recognition match

3.2.20 Super-Complaint About the Length of Police Investigations into Sexual Offences

On 15 December 2025 His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services received a super-complaint from the Centre for Women's Justice. It is about what the Centre for Women's Justice describes as 'excessively lengthy police investigations into sexual offences'. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct have assessed this super-complaint and decided it is eligible for investigation.

[Link to Super-Complaint](#)