

Engaging with PDR across Cleveland Police



"We are helping to change how PDRs are seen."

We are doing this not from a compliance perspective, but to ensure a fair and ethical approach to PDRs."

*Julie Cowen,
Cleveland Police*

Cleveland Police worked with Head Light to design, develop and deploy a new PDR process. One year on from initial implementation and the PDR has evolved. Engagement is strong with the completion rate higher than has previously been achieved. The focus is now on ensuring the fairness and quality of the feedback, and that evidence is in place.

The challenge: Changing the culture of PDR

Professional Development Review (PDR) across the Cleveland Police Force had, as with many Forces, a mixed history. With an increased need to report accurate, reliable, Force-wide data, designing and deploying an engaging new process became a key imperative.

Julie Cowen, Head of Learning and Development, Cleveland Police explains: *"PDR as a process was not widely embedded within the Force. There had been several attempts to introduce PDR into the organisation, but all of the initiatives had failed to achieve a wide-scale adoption. A paper-based system had been used; however, without the supporting integrated technology, it had failed to gain traction. A bespoke digital system that had been introduced, was found to be clunky to use and this mitigated against people using it."*

However, it was more than a lack of a supporting system that had prevented the take up of and engagement with a PDR across the Force. PDR had not been seen as an important activity. The result had been a sporadic patchwork use of PDR across the Force. But introducing a new PDR system was more than an issue of compliance for reporting numbers. Julie explains: *"Ultimately, we were looking to change our culture and engage our workforce in meaningful conversations about both their own and their Force's development and performance."*

The solution: A PDR system that is easy to use and reflects what is needed

The Force invited PDR and performance review system suppliers to competitively tender for the new system and Head Light's Talent Performance was selected. The team liked the system's ease of use and separation from the Force's own IT system as its ability to stand alone meant that there was no dependence on how the Force's system developed over time. The starting point was for all those who would be part of the deployment to explore the system. IT, e-learning trainers, IT trainers, systems and web developers were given access to learn what it would take to get Talent Performance live.

Reaching out during the consultation phase

The next step was to take the system out to 'surgeries' right across the Force. The bare bones were in place; however, the team wanted feedback on how the system should look and feel, and the words that could be used. This involvement would lead to engagement with the final system. Jane Gibson, Organisational Development Co-ordinator, explains: *"It was really important to reach out to all those who use the system. I met with people at all levels of rank, across a range of teams and explained what we were wanting to do, how straightforward the system was and gained their input. It meant that people were involved in the specification, got to see the system early on and could suggest requirements that needed to be considered."*



“Reaching out to people was a good strategy. It meant that people were involved in the specification, got to see the system early on and could suggest requirements that needed to be considered”

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It shows we are committed to a fair process for all of our workforce.”

*Jane Gibson,
Cleveland Police*



Configuring the system to meet the needs of Cleveland Police

Post consultation, the configuration of the system began in earnest. The team wanted more than a rating against specific behaviours as it wanted to bring these alive by adding context and descriptions of what they could – and should not - look like. This meant that the questionnaire needed to be configured in a way that made the results easy to understand. Jane and the Head Light team achieved this.

Jane continues: *“The support we received from Head Light was great and we were able to work with them to configure the system as we needed. Our new ideas fed into Head Light’s system development programme so that when there was an update to the software released, our functionality was included. Working with Head Light is enjoyable, and the Help Desk and wider team are really supportive.”*

Tailoring the roll-out of the system

It was important to Cleveland Police to work alongside its external trainers to not just get the systems training in place, but also the messages that it wanted to convey across the Force. Jane explains: *“This approach made sure we were emphasising that the software is the tool around performance. In the sessions, we dealt with past problems and showed how we had listened and improved what had gone before. We are helping to change how PDRs are seen.”* The team also ran bite-sized sessions, specifically for managers, wherever the managers were based and at times that suited them operationally. Additional support came in the form of a central web page that included a video message recorded by the Chief Constable, a support email inbox and a weekly newsletter.

The outcome: An ongoing project to change PDR culture

One year on from the initial launch and PDR has evolved. Jane explains: *“The first year was focused on getting people to navigate the system and educate them about how useful PDRs can be as well as the positive impact they have on promotions and developing themselves on a personal level. Now we are focused on improving the quality of evidence that is being used and how people can reflect on their PDR to take a developmental step forward.”*

From a compliance perspective, the results have been strong. Jane expands: *“The Chief Constable wanted initial basic compliance statistics. Results showed that, at the end of the first year, 94% were working with the system. This level had never been achieved before. Feedback from the users has been really positive and that is because the system has been designed around them.”*

Jane recognises a shift in how people are using the system, saying that *“people are beginning to see the real value of a great PDR system.”* Cleveland Police are also making sure that the objectives align with the promotion board process to make sure that people are promoted based on their technical competency as well as their values, behaviours, and ethics.

Next steps

The PDR project continues, and the team are now building in a quality assurance process. Jane has brought together a panel of PDR champions within the Force and, at three points in the year, each team member randomly selects 30 PDRs to review and checks them for three essential components: objectives are in place; regular conversations happen; evidence is uploaded. As Jane explains: *“We are doing this not from a compliance perspective, but to ensure a fair and ethical approach to PDRs.”*

Jane concludes: *“This moderating panel is quite unique to us in the Cleveland Force – although others may follow. It shows we are committed to a fair process for all of our workforce.”*

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