

## 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 had previously been achieved. The focus is now on ensuring the fairness and quality of the feedback, and that evidence is in place. Cleveland Police has now designed a thorough calibration process to help do this.*

### **The challenge: Changing the culture of PDR**

Professional Development Review (PDR) across the Cleveland Police Force had, as with many Forces, a mixed history. Its 2019 HMIC inspection had flagged, as a cause for concern, the area of workforce engagement and communication. It was noted that the Force did not effectively communicate with or engage its workforce. This acted as a catalyst to design and deploy an engaging new PDR process across Cleveland Police.

Julie Cowen, Head of Learning and Development, Cleveland Police explains: *"PDR as a process was not widely embedded within our Force. There had been several attempts to introduce PDR, 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. Furthermore, a bespoke digital system that had been adopted and 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 with the result being a sporadic patchwork of PDR use across the Force. However, introducing a new PDR system was more than an issue of compliance. 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. 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 would use the system so 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."*



*“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”*

*“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.”*

*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 to life by adding context and descriptions of what the behaviours could look like and what they should not look like. In short, the results needed to be easy to understand.

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 own 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 only get the systems training in place, but also confirm the messages that it wanted to convey across the Force. Jane explains: *“We made sure we emphasised that the software is simply the tool around performance. We dealt with past problems and showed how we had listened and improved what had gone before. With our new approach, 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 with a video message recorded by the Chief Constable, a support email Inbox and a weekly newsletter.

#### The outcome: A change in the understanding of performance and a shift in PDR culture

The impact of PDR on the engagement and culture of the organisation is clear. The latest Governance paper for the Force highlights the effect of the Force now having *“a PDR system that is a trusted, transparent recording tool that captures performance and development evidence to enable individuals to own their personal and professional development.”*

It highlights that officers and staff understand their roles, responsibilities and relationships within the Force’s performance management framework and this improved performance translates into providing better service to the communities. The report emphasises behaviours are established, clearly communicated, understood, and acted upon and there is a more engaged workforce who feel valued.

The work does not stop. Initially, the focus was on encouraging engagement with the process and, with unprecedented completion rates of 94%, the attention shifted to improving the quality of evidence being used in the feedback. Jane expands: *“This level of PDR completion compliance had never been achieved and this is because the system was designed around the user. People began to see the real value of a great PDR system.”*

#### Next steps

During 2021, the team introduced a new Performance Excellence framework, which encompasses:

- Setting force, business unit and individual objectives.
- Ongoing management of progress against objectives, supported by a Performance Excellence Guide.
- Connecting those ratings to other processes, such as Talent Management and Performance Management.

It also designed and is in the process of delivering a pilot of an end-of-the-year Performance Rating Calibration process. Facilitated Calibration meetings ensure that managers have open and honest conversations so that final ratings (measure) are fairly and consistently applied (accurate) across the force.

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