

## Engaging with PDR across Cleveland Police



*"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. Little attempt had been made to show its benefits as a personal development, performance management and talent tool and it was not seen as an important activity. The result was a sporadic patchwork of PDR use across the Force. However, introducing a new PDR system was more than an issue of compliance. Julie explains: *"We decided that PDR success would be judged over a number of stages. The first being compliance, and the second, quality. 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. Head Light's Talent Performance was selected.

The team liked the system's ease of use and its separation from the Force's own IT system, thereby limiting the impact of any future Force systems development.

Julie continues: *"We wanted use a PDR system that would remain similar over time, that people could recognise and use consistently over the coming years. We wanted something that would grow with us as we developed but that had the fundamental functionality, we needed straightaway for people to get used to."*



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Understanding the importance of getting strong Force-wide engagement, Cleveland Police seconded an operational PCSO, Jane Gibson, Organisational Development Co-ordinator, to work alongside Julie who had the credibility and network to reach others across the Force.

The starting point was for all those who would be part of the system’s development was to explore the system. IT, e-learning trainers, IT trainers, systems and web developers were all given access to Talent Performance to learn what it would take to get the system live.

#### *Reaching out during the consultation phase*

The next step was to take the system out to ‘surgeries’ right across the Force. While the bare bones were in place, the team wanted feedback on how the system should look and feel, and the words that could be used within the tool. This involvement, the team hoped, would lead to engagement with the final system. Jane explains: *“It was really important to reach out to all those who used 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 gathered their input into what was needed.”*

This outreach also brought out ideas not previously considered by the team, such as the need for a place to record conversations around well-being. This suggestion made its way into the final release.

*“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. When these were then included and configured into the software, people knew that they had been listened to and that their ideas had been considered and used. We started to get engagement right from the get-go.”*

Jane admits that this consultation stage was not always easy. People had grown weary of new PDR initiatives and she was met with some cynicism. *“Many had never been educated on the importance of the PDR review and the impact on their development. It was clear that people wanted objectives and wanted there to be an equality and relevance of the PDR questionnaire across every level. There was a sense that our objectives should be set across the Force as we all work together to achieve the same goal.”*

#### *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. For example, one of the Force behaviours is to be able to analyse critically; it can, however, be difficult for some to understand what this means in practice. This resulted in the questionnaire needing to be configured in a way which makes the results easy to understand – and Jane and the Head Light team worked together to achieve this.



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*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.”*



Jane continues: *“The support we received from Head Light was great and we were able to work with them to configure the system to get what we needed. We also had new ideas which fed into Head Light’s own system development programme so that when there was an update to the software released, our functionality was included.*

#### *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. The sessions combined an educational piece with a practical navigation across the system. The training explored how PDR is used, why it is beneficial, how to have performance conversations and how to create objectives. Jane explains: *“This approach made sure we were emphasising that the software is 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.”*

As well as the fuller training, the team also ran bite-sized sessions, specifically for managers. These were run wherever the managers were based and at times that suited them operationally. Jane also created a central web page to host all the relevant support items. A video recorded by the Chief Constable was embedded there, reinforcing the messages around PDR. A support email Inbox was set up and a weekly newsletter sent out to highlight what users needed to be doing and when.

#### *The outcome: A change in the understanding of performance and as 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 it 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 now a more engaged workforce which feels 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.



*“Results showed that, at the end of the first year, 94% were working with the system. This level had never before been*

“People are beginning to see the real value of a great PDR system.”

Jane expands: *“This level of PDR completion compliance had never before been achieved; this is because the system was now designed around the user. People have welcomed the system because they know that we have tried to include all the functionality that they have asked for. If we have not been able to, then there has been a good reason why it was not possible, and I will have gone back to them. When there has been a specific requirement we have needed to action, we’ve worked with Head Light to get this included - such as adjusting the timer on the time out functionality. Working with Head Light is really enjoyable. The Help Desk and wider team are very supportive and quick to respond to my questions.”*

Jane recognises a shift in how people are using the system: *“Initially, people were contacting the team because of user issues, such as a forgotten password. Now they are digging deeper. They are asking how to evidence what they are doing to show progression in their career, or how best to set an objective for someone who is highly competent in their job but needs to focus on their attitude. People are beginning to see the real value of a great PDR system.”*

#### Next steps

Jane and the team have continued to develop the PDR process. They have now 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.

Cleveland Police has also designed – and are 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 final ratings (measure) are fairly and consistently applied (accurate) across the force. It is making sure that the objectives align with its promotion board process to ensure that people are promoted based on their technical competency as well as their values, behaviours and ethics.

#### Lessons learnt from this project

- Engage with and learn from other Forces using the system.
- Recognise that PDR is a critical element to improving the Force.
- Focus resources on the project.
- Take time to meet and talk to people as part of specification and consultation stages.
- Make sure the system is not too complex and is easy to use at the outset – knowing you can add in new functionality at a later stage.
- Do not rush the project – and make sure you give people an opportunity to get involved.
- Go beyond compliance and look at the quality of performance and development conversations by holding manager end-of-year calibration meetings.
- Encourage people to set their own objectives.
- Make sure people own their objective setting and achievement – and PDR completion.
- Set up a user panel of the most engaged people who will contribute to how the system develops in the future.

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