

Culture and capacity

How chief constables can foster supervision that supports individual performance, learning and wellbeing.

First published 25 April 2022

Chief constables should ensure that the role of supervisors in supporting staff is understood, valued and delivered consistently. This includes:

- actively seeking ways to enable supervisors to give regular dedicated time to their staff
- ensuring that strategic decisions take account of, and do not negatively affect, supervisors' capacity to support their staff
- promoting a culture that values the importance of supervision and recognises the role that supervisors play in demonstrating and delivering a visible commitment to diversity and to treating staff fairly

Evidence summary

There was a good level of research evidence on organisational culture that could enable or support effective supervision. This included creating a shared vision, engendering organisational commitment, demonstrating care for subordinates, driving change rather than managing the status quo, and complex problem solving.

Research and practitioner evidence suggests that the role of supervisors in supporting staff wellbeing, learning and performance is not necessarily understood universally or delivered consistently in policing.

The evidence also suggests that material circumstances, such as limited resources and time for learning, are a barrier to developing supervisors' skills and behaviours. Practitioner evidence suggested an inability to protect time for supervisors to spend with their staff was a barrier to effective supervision.

There is evidence that aspects of existing police culture, particularly resistance to change and a belief in the value of hierarchical traditional leadership, present challenges for changing supervisor

practices and approaches. Discrepancies between what senior, lower and middle managers see as important in good management is a further barrier.

Staff perceptions of fairness and support from the wider organisation and from senior management are associated with positive outcomes regarding staff wellbeing, learning and performance. One study found that employee engagement is more strongly associated with perceptions of support from their organisation than support from their direct supervisor.

Empirical evidence

Good

Practitioner evidence

Available

Chief constable responsibilities

The [chief constable](#) has overall responsibility for:

- leading their force
- creating a vision
- setting and role modelling a culture that promotes wellbeing and facilitates impactful professional development and performance management

The Guideline Committee acknowledged the challenge of managing high levels of operational demand. Developing and supporting staff to respond effectively to this demand will help them to provide high levels of service to the public. Finding ways to enable supervisors to spend time with their staff to achieve this should be considered as an essential investment. Chief constables could consider how the processes used to provide protected time for training might also be used to provide protected time for supervision. Practical suggestions drawn from the practitioner evidence included:

- dedicated time for staff wellbeing, development and performance factored into shifts
- shift patterns that maximise the time when supervisors and their staff are on duty together
- time for one-to-ones protected by control rooms, unless interruption is absolutely necessary

No evidence was found that suggested the ideal number of individuals that a supervisor should manage. These ratios are dependent on many factors, which are likely to differ between forces, roles and individuals. These factors include the size and culture of an organisation, the exact nature of the job, and the skills and experience of individuals.

Many forces have formal processes in place to record the impacts of strategic decisions on finance, human rights, and equality and diversity. Chief constables could consider the introduction of similar formal auditable processes to record impacts on the capacity of supervisors to support their staff.

To promote diversity and inclusion within policing, research and practitioner evidence has identified a need for support from senior-level role models and a visible organisational commitment to diversity at all levels.

Chief constables should promote an inclusive organisational culture where all staff expect to be recognised as individuals and treated fairly, regardless of their role or demographic characteristics.

Supporting resources

- [Police professional profile – Chief constable](#)
- [Competency and values framework](#)
- [National policing culture and inclusion strategy 2025 to 2030](#)

Tags

Supervision Evidence-based policing