

Sent by email:

Dr Sean Cummings
Assistant Coroner
Bedfordshire & Luton Coroner Service
The Court House
Woburn Street
Amphill
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16 August 2024

Dear Dr Cummings,

Re: Regulation 28: Report to prevent future deaths

I am writing to provide you with an update on my letter dated 31 January 2023. In this letter to you, I said I would instruct my team to monitor Bedfordshire Police's armoury processes. This was as part of the HMICFRS police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspection programme 2023–25.

Since my last correspondence, my team has been reviewing Bedfordshire Police's armoury processes. It has focused on the [Regulation 28 'Prevention of future deaths report' published on 16 January 2023](#). The report detailed five concerns:

1. Single access to the armoury and incorrect access levels.
2. Lack of awareness of who shouldn't have access to the armoury.
3. Failures by senior management to effectively and safely manage the South Base armoury.
4. IT failures resulting in armoury access challenges.
5. Safety and security at the South Base armoury.

I am pleased to report that the force has made progress in all five areas listed above to make sure access to the armoury is regulated and controlled. The force has introduced systems and technology to control access to the armoury. These are working effectively. Senior management are now able to effectively manage the armoury to make sure their officers are safe.

As part of our PEEL inspection of Bedfordshire Police's armoury procedures, we carried out interviews and ran focus groups with both senior leaders and practitioners. We also inspected the Luton Firearms base.

We have reviewed a range of strategic and tactical documents which illustrate policy, procedure and audits of key decisions, actions and risks. And we attended key governance forums, boards and meetings across the collaborated firearms provision. Bedfordshire Police is part of the Joint Protective Services Command (JPS) which is a collaborated service with Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire Constabularies. This provides armed policing across the three counties.

Key progress against the five areas

Single access to the armoury and incorrect access levels

The force has reduced single access to the armoury to make sure that only officers who need single access can have it. Only five people have single access to the armoury. All five are operational firearms commanders and armourers. The force has taken the added precaution of removing single access to the armoury from national firearms instructors. The force states these restrictions in its standard operating procedures, which have been distributed to all officers. Managers review these restrictions at the monthly managers' meeting which is audited and recorded. We found that this process was tightly managed and regularly scrutinised.

Awareness of who shouldn't have access to the armoury

Officers can choose not to carry firearms. They can also request that their armoury access is revoked for a defined period, should any welfare/well-being or professional standards concerns arise. Managers can also restrict armoury access if a person meets the same criteria. The firearms command has focused on enhancing its culture around 'it's ok not to be ok'. And we found that the force has made significant progress with its well-being/welfare provision. We found evidence of officers feeling supported and cared for by their leaders.

Once access for a person is restricted, the sergeant sends an email to all officers informing them of who has had their access revoked. The force duty inspectors are also made aware, and a restricted duties note is placed on the individual's shift management system. We found improvements to the culture around carriage of firearms and to the way the command communicates with officers. These were effective in keeping officers safe.

Failures by senior management to effectively and safely manage the South Base armoury

The force holds a daily management meeting chaired by the duty manager with the operations superintendent in attendance. We found these meetings are effective at monitoring the times when officers are diverted from their duties. They are also effective at monitoring operational challenges, armoury access status, health and safety and sickness. There is good senior officer oversight through the monthly managers' meetings. At these meetings, managers identify themes and trends and monitor armoury access. Key risks and issues are used to inform the firearms strategic board. The JPS assistant chief constable chairs this board, which provides good senior officer oversight and support.

IT failures resulting in armoury access challenges

The firearms command has invested in new and improved technology to reduce the number of Chronicle failures. Chronicle is the system that the force and the firearms command use to manage firearms accreditations and armoury access. The firearms command has moved to new premises at Luton airport. This means that there are better wiring and charging points to service Chronicle. As a result, the number of Chronicle system faults has reduced to zero in the last six months.

JPS tracks and monitors system faults through the monthly managers' meeting. JPS has a manual key process which provides access to the armoury when Chronicle faults occur. The force's daily manager checks the manual key process following a clearly defined procedure. This makes sure the workforce is safe and secure. We found the new processes were effective in keeping officers safe.

Safety and security at the South Base armoury

The new firearms base in Luton is a modern, secure premises. It is fit for purpose, with several enhanced security measures. The new site has fencing to restrict access and enhanced 360-degree CCTV coverage in the armoury. It also has an enhanced armoury design, to control the access and distribution of weapons to officers. We found moving to the new site has significantly increased the safety and security of the officers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am satisfied that the firearms base at Luton airport is managed correctly. It has the correct procedures, policies and processes in place to keep officers safe while on the site. I am pleased to report positively on the force's efforts to improve. They take all reasonable steps to continually improve the safety and well-being of their officers.

Yours sincerely,



His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services