Please ask for : Alison Spence
Telephone Number: 0121 626 6060
wmpcc@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk

Our reference: 2019-00091

west midlands
police and crime
commissioner

Sir Thomas Winsor
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of
Constabulary and Fire & Rescue
Services (HMICFRS),
6th Floor, Globe House,
89 Eccleston Square,
London,
SW1V 1PN

01 February 2019

Dear Sir Thomas,

Thank you for your letter dated 15 January 2019 allowing Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and Chief Constables (CCs) the opportunity to share their views on the challenges facing police services and how they are responding. My response is set out below.

Demand

The demands and challenges facing the police service in 2019 are clear and substantial. Between 2015 and 2018[1] Total Recorded Crime (excluding fraud) has increased by 36 per cent in England and Wales, meaning the service had to respond to an additional 1.3 million crimes last year than in 2015.

While some argue that this increase is an artefact of changes in recording practices, the evidence of real changes in criminal activity and the impact this has on our communities and on the police service is apparent. In the West Midlands force area we have seen a 5 per cent increase in the number of 999 calls in the last year alone, meaning an additional 33,500 calls for West Midlands Police's (WMP) Force Contact centre to resource and respond to. Over the same period the number of the most serious incidents, which require an immediate response from WMP's Force Response teams, has increased by 11 per cent. This means an additional 20,000 incidents in 2018 compared to 2017, which are deemed an immediate priority as there is danger to life or a crime in progress.

We are witnessing an increase in crime at its most extreme. Fifty people were murdered in the West Midlands in 2018, 13 more than in 2017 and more than twice as many as in 2014. These crimes have a devastating impact on families, friends and communities. They also take their toll on the police officers and staff who respond to and investigate these crimes.

[1] Year to September data from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2018

We are seeing an alarming return to levels of acquisitive crime not seen for more than a decade. In 2018 there were 116,000 recorded crimes of burglary and theft and handling in the West Midlands, a level not seen since 2007. This follows a period of falling crime from 2003 to 2015. Total violent crime has not only returned to levels not seen since 2006 but has surpassed those. Between 2006 and 2012 the number of recorded violent crimes in the West Midlands fell from 69,000 to 42,500. By 2018 the figure stood at 99,900. Some of this increase will be due to changes in recording practices rather than 'real' increase.

Nonetheless the increased demand on the police is real. These crimes must be recorded and responded to and victims supported by the police and other services.

We are seeing increases in the volume of crime, in severity of crime and also in complexity. Fraud offences referred to National Fraud Intelligence Bureau by Action Fraud have increased by 27 per cent since 2016, an additional 62,700 crimes. The levels of serious and organised crime, scale of violence and subsequent demand on policing are substantial.

Responding to crime is only one aspect of demand that policing faces. The College of Policing's demand analysis highlighted the significance of non-crime demand in terms of:

- anti-social behaviour
- missing persons
- road traffic collision where there have been casualties
- and, increasingly, incidents involving people with mental health issues.

In 2018 West Midlands Police recorded 961,000 incidents of which 173,000 had a final classification of recorded crime.

In addition there is an unmeasurable demand on policing in terms of deterring crime and providing reassurance to the public. The HMICFRS report on public perceptions clearly highlights this issue as shown in the report's findings below[2].

Respondents who...	On foot	In vehicle
Think seeing police in local area is important	78%	77%
Have seen police in local area at least once every 3 months	44%	59%
Have not seen police in the last year	36%	20%
Are satisfied with the frequency of visibility	24%	30%

In 2017 29% reported seeing police on foot in their local area at least once every 3 months. In 2018 this rose to 44%.

[2] https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/public-perceptions-of-policing-in-england-and-wales-2018/

Response to demand

In responding to demand West Midlands Police, supported by my office, has taken a number of positive, innovative approaches including the large scale investment in the WMP2020 change programme. Examples of approaches to improve response to demand include:

- delivering mobile devices to response and neighbourhood officers to allow them to access timely, relevant and accurate information in the field
- introduction of the Data Driven Insights programme to bring together information and assist the organisation in making better decisions, providing greater understanding of underlying causes of crime
- the Violence Prevention Alliance which brings together partners to improve understanding of violence, support research on its causes, consequences and costs and promote prevention activities
- building on the legacy of the Turning Point trial to increase the effective use, and availability, of out of court disposals
- developing new ways of working across the public and community sector to tackle the harms and costs related to substance misuse, including investing in investigative capability to take money away from organised crime gangs.

However, the programme began with the intention of making WMP objectively "better". Instead, available resources fell and demand mushroomed. The best we now hope for locally is "mitigation" – our reforms and innovations leaving policing less bad than it would otherwise have been due to austerity

Police forces must always seek to make improvements to the way they operate and the service they deliver. The introduction of PCCs has been an important step in improving accountability in delivering efficient and effective police services. HMICFRS has an important role to play in providing independent assessment which inform PCCs ability to hold Chief Constables to account. However, the prolonged period of austerity is clearly hampering police forces' ability to invest to make such improvement and to respond to immediate demands they face from rising crime.

In the current climate of overwhelming demand and diminished resource, the inspection reports must recognise that it will not always be possible to improve one area of performance without removing resources from another. Too often HMICFRS consider force's performance against ideals of best practice rather than looking at what is actually achievable. For example in the last couple of years HMICFRS, in identifying causes of concerns or areas for improvement, has stated that WMP:

- is failing to attend incidents promptly, putting some vulnerable victims at risk of harm
- should provide regular and active supervision in missing person investigations to improve quality and ensure that victims are properly safeguarded
- should improve its approach to reducing the risk posed by dangerous and sexual offenders by ensuring that sexual offender management unit supervisors have sufficient capacity to quality-assure all risk assessments in a timely manner

- should ensure that officers and staff routinely record all use of force and introduce processes to enable effective and robust scrutiny of data
- should ensure it introduces a robust process for effective vetting 'renewals' arrangements so that all members of the workforce have up-to date vetting checks
- should review its operating arrangements to ensure that these arrangements secure the recording of all reported crimes at the first point at which sufficient information exists to make a crime-recording decision, and in any event within 24 hours of receipt of the report.
- should improve how it collects diversity information from victims of crime and how it uses this to inform its compliance with its equality duty.

These issues are unquestionably worthy of concern and of concerted effort to bring about improvement. However, HMICFRS puts forward un-costed recommendations and areas for improvement that often encourage forces to increase resourcing of specific areas. Such recommendations are at best unactionable, at worst, drive perverse behaviours in chasing grade improvements rather than focusing on how, for a fixed budget, to deliver the best possible service across the policing functions as a whole. We have not, to my knowledge, had a recommendation to date that suggests WMP should reduce activity or resourcing in a particular area.

Between 2015/16 and 2018/19 the WMP has seen its funding from central government fall by 2 per cent in current prices and by 10 per cent when taking into account inflation . While the government has allowed PCCs additional flexibility in increasing precept this shifts the burden of police funding from that Treasury to local council tax payers, disproportionately benefits wealthier forces who are able to generate more council tax. In 2018/19 Surrey more than half of Surrey's police funding came from the local council tax precept. In the West Midlands only 17 per of the police funding is generated this way. While both areas have seen central government funding cut by 2 per cent in current prices, the difference in ability to raise council tax means that the West Midlands is disproportionately impacted by these cuts. This is further exacerbated by funding settlements that apply growth to the council tax precept equally. In 2019/20 the government's proposed precept increases will raise £5.96 per head in the West Midlands, compared to £10.29 in Surrey, because of more higher banded properties in that force area. It is perverse and is breaking the link between need and police funding.

The West Midlands benefits greatly from its youthful and diverse population, from its significant major roads network and from its popular city centres. However, these benefits also bring challenges. Young people are both substantially more likely to be a victim of crime[3] and more likely to commit offences[4] than older people. The Brexit referendum brought with it alarming spikes in hate crime against people of different religions and ethnic backgrounds. The region's significant motorway network enables travelling criminality and the central location provides an ideal market for criminality to both operate and export from. City centres also attract substantial levels of shoplifting and violent crime associated with the night-time economy. In the West

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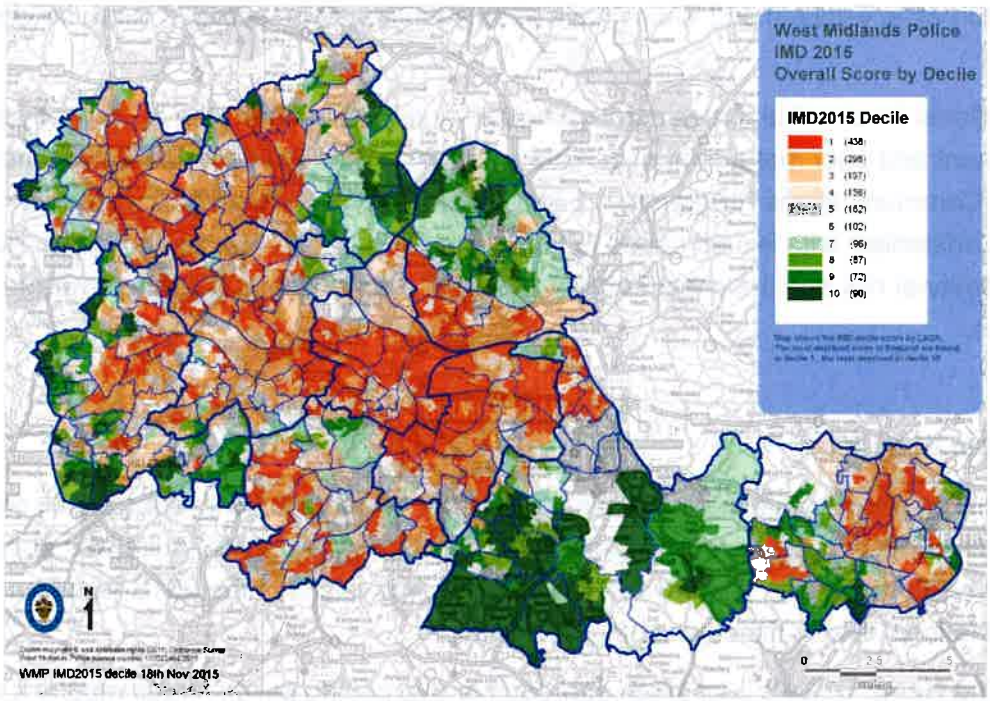
3 https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218143222/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/r246.pdf

4 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/167982/horr64.pdf

Midlands half of our wards are among the most deprived areas in England based on income, employment, education, health and other factors[5].



The government and HMICFRS must recognise the combination of the disproportionate impact of funding cuts and the fact that some areas of the country are harder to police. That is the view of police officers and the public, yet is not reflected in the overall trend of HMICFRS ratings.

In 2018 the Policing Minister argued that forces must make gains in efficiency or productivity:

> Efficiency and productivity are essential to a sustainable plan to enable the police to manage challenging demands. Since the police funding settlement, I have been working with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and the National Police Chiefs Council to agree concrete proposals to save around £120m through better procurement and use of shared services. We are also working with the police to deliver the benefits of better, digitally enabled working. The motion debated on 28 March called for 10,000 additional officers. The motion did not make reference to efficiency or productivity. If all forces could deliver the same one hour per officer per day of productivity benefits from mobile working as the best in a recent sample with eight forces, this has the potential to free up the equivalent of 11,000 extra officers nationally to provide the proactive policing that committed police officers want to deliver. The Government believes that it is essential that we work with the police to realise these productivity benefits, rather than focusing on extra funding or having a sterile debate on officer numbers alone.[6]

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[5] http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/idmap.html

[6] https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-04-19/HCWS626/

While efficiency and productivity gains are to be sought and welcomed, the reports from HMICFRS indicate that 33 forces (more than 3 in 4 forces) are rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' in terms of efficiency in 2017, only one fewer than 2015. Similarly, 32 forces were rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' in terms of effectiveness in 2017, 4 more than in 2015. Despite the fact that all 43 police forces in England and Wales have seen an increase in recorded crime between 2015 and 2018.

At a national level police forces across England and Wales have been let down by the lack of investment and poor management of national projects. For example, the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) has been consistently discussed by PCCs and Chief Constables, with issues raised to the Home Office due to the costly delays, huge organisational risk and the sheer inability to deliver a product that has the coverage policing requires.

The state of policing

The growing and diversifying demands on police forces coupled with substantial, prolonged under-investment in the service by central government raises critical questions about how policing will survive in the future. The severity of this issue was raised in the 2018 report on police funding by the National Audit Office[7] which argued that:

> The Home Office's light touch approach to overseeing police forces means it does not know if the police system is financially sustainable. It lacks a long-term plan for policing and significant gaps remain in its understanding of demand for police services and their costs. The way the Department chooses to distribute funding has been ineffective and detached from the changing nature of policing for too long, and it cannot be sure overall funding is being directed to the right places. With plans to reform the funding formula on hold, and no systematic approach to ensuring forces are financially sustainable, we cannot conclude that the Home Office's oversight of the police system is value for money.

Also, it is vital to also recognise that it is not just the police services that has been impacted by central government spending cuts. Public services exist in an eco-system wherein deterioration in one service can have significant knock-on impact on other services. The police service, as has been highlighted by others, often picks up the pieces when individuals are failed by other public services. Examples of this include, but are no means limited to:

- the impact of the huge increase in school exclusions and off-rolling on youth crime, including the targeting of vulnerable, excluded young people by organised crime gangs running county lines
- the impact of under-investment in substance misuse services on police in terms of offences committed to purchase illegal substances and in alcohol-related violence in the night-time economy and in domestic settings
- resourcing by police of mental health triage services
- police forces and PCCs now taking on more responsibility and more of the cost in relation to issues such as gangs and violence, which used to fall within the remit of Local Authorities.

[7] https://www.nao.org.uk/report/financial-sustainability-of-police-forces-in-england-and-wales-2018/

You ask in your letter "what should the police service be doing now to ensure it can provide the best possible service to the public in the year ahead?". Responses to this question must fully acknowledge the reality faced by the service and HMICFRS has an important role in helping forces to do the best they can within this environment. The questions we are grappling with in the West Midlands are:

In light of rising demand and without substantial investment in policing forthcoming, what is a realistic level of service that can be delivered by the police service?

What should policing stop doing?

Yours sincerely

David Jamieson
Police and Crime Commissioner

Lloyd House, Colmore Circus Queensway, Birmingham, B4 6NQ
0121 626 6060 www.westmidlands-pcc.gov.uk @WestMidsPCC