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An inspection of the effectiveness of the Regional Organised Crime Units

As the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner I welcome the HMICFRS inspection report on Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) but would suggest that the recommendation do not go far enough. ROCUs are at the heart of police efforts to address organised crime, and they need to be properly funded, properly tasked and properly governed. The report is evidence of the urgent need for a sustainable funding model and appropriate guidance required from Government to address these ongoing issues.

ROCUS currently rely on fragmented, annual funding streams that often affect their recruitment, planning and operational ability. As the report indicates, PCCs been raising this problem for years, and but the issues remain as they ever were. It was expected that the national review of serious and organised crime by Sir Craig Mackey would again highlight these issues and but this has never been published. Without a sustainable funding model, ROCUs have no alternative than to set an annual budget without getting confirmation of how much money they will receive until well into the financial year. A single, national multi-year serious and organised crime grant for each ROCU would go some way to remedy these problems. I would also recommend that government considers moving to a lead Force model, whereby the budget for ROCUs is held by a single Force, instead of being spread across a range of Forces that can have very different threat profiles. This model works well for counter-terrorism and it should be considered for serious and organised crime.

With regards to the call for the National Crime Agency to have more tasking powers, I recognise this need, but the NCA has to be answerable for these decisions. National tasking decisions can have significant local implications, and at present there is no meaningful mechanisms that allow for a proper two-way discussion about the local implications of national decisions, or the national threats and priorities that require a local response. Police and Crime Commissioners are critical to ensuring the public are represented in those discussions, making sure the NCA is aware of the implications of its activity and is answerable for what it does. ROCUs need to remain "owned" by a local police force so they understand and are responsive to local circumstances, just as counter-terrorism units are.

There are several other issues that need to be reformed that were not covered by the HMICFRS report. I would therefore recommend that a considered and cohesive response to the following issues would better enable a more effective response to serious and organised crime:

- The need for effective local democratic oversight of police use of covert surveillance powers.
- A review of the Proceeds of Crime arrangements. The current legislation around processing cash and assets seized from criminals disincentivises police forces from targeting criminally obtained wealth because Home Office retain too big a share.
- National strategies for serious and organised crime need to be classed as statutory guidance for Police and Crime Plans, and PCCs need to be able to demonstrate how they and the Force they govern are responding to national threats, such as that posed by serious and organised crime.
- PCCs need stronger powers to convene the range of partners that can prevent and respond to serious and organised crime.

- Government needs to act more quickly to address new serious and organised crime threats that emerge, such as the rules around “exempt accommodation”.
- The national policing response to organised fraud needs to be urgently reviewed.

More generally, there needs to be more development around preventative work to stop people becoming involved in or vulnerable to serious and organised crime. The harm from organised crime is huge, and our job, whether for Forces, PCCs, or the Home Office, is to give policing and its partners the intelligence, capacity and capability to prevent and detect serious and organised crime, safeguard the vulnerable and bring offenders to justice.