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Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

Mr S. Sawyer   3 September 2014
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Dear Shaun

Core business: An inspection of crime prevention, police attendance and use of police time

Between January and April 2014, HMIC carried out inspection fieldwork across all 43 forces in England and Wales. This inspection, called 'Making best use of police time' (now known as 'Core business: An inspection of crime prevention, police attendance and use of police time') assessed three areas of police work. These were:

- how well forces are preventing crime and anti-social behaviour;

- how forces respond to reports of crime, including investigating crime and bringing offenders to justice; and

- how well forces are freeing up the time of their staff so they can focus on core policing functions.

Attached is an embargoed copy of the national thematic report for this inspection which will now be published by HMIC on Thursday 4 September 2014 at 00:01. This must not be published until this date and time.

The findings that specifically relate to your force are included in this letter. The initial findings were previously sent to you for factual accuracy checks and, where appropriate, have been amended following your response.

The majority of the inspection findings contained in the national thematic report do not identify individual forces. However, electronic versions of the national report will link to the HMIC website where data on each force can be viewed.

We will revisit some of the evidence gathered during the 'Core business' inspection as part of the crime inspection for HMIC's Police Efficiency, Effectiveness and Legitimacy (PEEL) interim assessment.

All forces will be given the opportunity to provide an update. This updated evidence will be considered as part of the PEEL interim crime inspection, which is due to be published at the end of November.

Preventing crime

- Although the inspection found references to crime reduction and prevention in some of the force's plans and documents, there is no overarching crime prevention strategy. This would provide greater clarity to officers, staff and the public on the importance to the force of preventing crime and anti-social behaviour and how this will be achieved.

- HMIC found some good examples of where the force has undertaken long-term crime prevention initiatives; for example, in Plymouth there are effective multi-agency partnerships where agencies are working together to reduce crime.

- The force uses an electronic database to record problem-solving activity. This database is updated with information to help officers and staff prevent crime in local neighbourhoods. Although a problem-solving approach is evident, there is limited evidence of evaluation or the identification of good practice to make that approach more effective. However, there are examples of the force's evaluation of medium-to large-scale, problem-based operations for learning and improvement.

- Although the force has provided some training to officers and staff, specific formal crime prevention training has not been delivered to staff who deal frequently with victims of crime and anti-social behaviour. HMIC believes that by providing training, the force would be able to make the most of opportunities to prevent crime and provide a better quality service to the public.

Crime recording and attendance

- The force has defined 16 categories when an officer must attend an incident. Outside of these categories, the decision whether to send an officer is based on a series of considerations including identifying the threat risk and harm to the victim, caller or community. Control room staff assess what type of resource is required and whether an officer should attend. Although there has been no wide-scale consultation with the community about the policy, there has been consultation with organisations that represent those who may have difficulty in contacting the force control centre, for example, organisations representing the hard of hearing and the Alzheimer's Society.

- As a result of discussions and observations in the force's call-handling centre, the inspection team identified that the force has clear policies and procedures to identify vulnerable and repeat victims of crime and anti-social behaviour. If vulnerability is identified, the finding will influence any decisions made regarding response times and the resources required to attend. A risk manager based in the force control centre reviews call logs to ensure that the most effective resource available is used to reduce the risk of harm to the victim.

- Crime is recorded by the force in one of two ways:

  o creating an incident on the command and control system and then subsequently entering details onto the crime recording system; or

  o directly recording crime onto the crime-recording system, without creating an incident first.

Although the force is able to identify how many crimes are recorded directly onto the crime recording system, it is not able to identify how many of those crimes it attends subsequently.

- During the inspection, HMIC reviewed a number of crime investigations including reports of crimes that were not attended. In certain cases, for crimes such as burglary dwellings, there was clear evidence of investigation and supervision. However, for other offences, such as theft from motor vehicle, many of which were not attended, there was little evidence of meaningful investigation or supervision

- HMIC found that the Integrated Offender Management scheme, in place to manage those offenders likely to cause most harm to their communities, was well-managed. There are regular meetings with key partners and a structured approach to the identification and assessment of risk.

- The force was unable to provide HMIC with the number of named suspects yet to be arrested or interviewed. Without this information, the force is unable to ensure that is has effective arrangements to manage outstanding named suspects and offenders.

- A small sample of named suspect files, including those circulated as wanted on the police national computer, provided clear evidence that activity had been documented and properly supervised across a number of cases.

Freeing up time

- HMIC identified that the force has a good understanding of demand and is taking steps to improve how its resources are distributed. Its approach includes an analysis of different types of incidents and policing activity.

- The force has carried out some work with other agencies to identify and address those tasks that are not the sole responsibility of the police. For example, consultation has started with the local ambulance trust and mental health teams. This has resulted in a new mental health 'triage' system that was due to start in March 2014. This system would result in a medically-trained person giving advice in the control room with the aim of reducing unnecessary time that officers spend with people with mental health issues.

- The inspection found that there is a clear structure to assist supervisors in assessing the workload and performance of frontline officers and staff.

- The force is not able to identify the savings in staff time that have been made as a result of changes introduced or new technology it has implemented.

- The use of mobile devices (such as tablets and mobile phones) to enable officers to access force systems while on patrol is limited. However, the force has indentified funds to support a business case for the introduction of personal-issue devices to most frontline staff.

Yours sincerely

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Wales and Western Region