



Key note address to the Police Superintendents' Association of England and Wales conference 2013

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Monday 09 September 2013

Introduction

Thank you for your invitation. This is my first time appearing before you as HMCIC (albeit not my first time being here).

One of the first things I did after being confirmed, was to meet the executive committee of the superintendents' association of England and Wales and ask them for their advice as to how I should approach the responsibilities and the functions of this role. And the advice that I received was generously given and was extremely valuable to me.

Chief Superintendent Thomas has just given a most eloquent review of the challenges faced by the service in the year gone by. From the interview he gave to Police Oracle a few days ago I know he referred to the superintending ranks as having a 'Janus role', in that they have both managerial and command responsibilities.

Continuing this theme – the Roman god Janus, with his two faces, of course looks both forwards and backwards; and that's what I intend to do today, by touching briefly on the last year, and our dual responsibility at HMIC of facing towards both the public and the service.

I will finish by looking forward to the inspection programme for 2013/14, and giving you all some new information about two of the major inspections which we'll be doing.

Looking backwards – the last year in HMIC

As I said, I have now been in post for almost a year; and my time as HMCIC – and therefore HMIC itself – has been very busy.

We've published thematic reports on a range of issues including police integrity, the use of stop and search powers, and progress against our 2012 report of undercover policing.

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We've also published joint reports (with our fellow criminal justice inspectorates) on various aspects of the criminal justice system, including the use of section 136 of the Mental Health Act, the way cases of disability hate crime are handled, and inefficiencies in the criminal justice system.

We've also dealt with force-specific reports, which include reviews of the Historical Enquiries Team in Northern Ireland, of the response to child protection in Northamptonshire, of crime recording in Kent, and domestic abuse in Essex.

Police and crime commissioners have begun to exercise their statutory power to ask HMIC to inspect – our first of these was on crime recording in Kent and was published in June 2013. Others are coming in.

We also published on 18 July our annual value for money report for 2012/13, which identified that forces are rising to the financial challenge of the spending review – crime is down, victim satisfaction up, and the front line is being protected as much as possible. This is greatly to the service's credit. (Although we also raised concerns about the ability of some forces to respond to future funding cuts – of which, more later.)

Looking forward – the public interest

The inspections that we will be doing over the next 6 months will be considerable and extremely important.

But before I go on to them, I wanted to talk briefly about the dual role HMIC plays, of facing towards the public and the police.

As you know, I used to be an economic regulator for another safety-critical monopoly public service. There is a tendency for providers of services to look at things from the point of view of the producer, not the consumer. This is understandable, and why we have regulators and inspectorates. HMIC doesn't do that. In what we do, we look at policing from the point of view of the consumer, the public. HMIC inspects in the public interest – we are the public's eyes and ears on the police service and we will continue to intensify our focus on what matters most to the public.

For far too long, HMIC was thought by some – and in relation to recent years, quite wrongly – to be the police talking to the police. My first year in office has confirmed beyond all doubt that this is incorrect, and in recent years was incorrect. But it was what some people thought. HMIC represents, and talks to and champions the public, first and foremost. That can't be emphasised enough. It is of the greatest import that the public know there is an independent, authoritative, objective and professional organisation serving their interests by inspecting and reporting on the police, its efficiency and effectiveness. Those are the statutory criteria given to us under the County and Borough Act 1856. It is HMIC's core purpose and it hasn't changed at all.

But things have changed at HMIC. It has a more direct link with the public. As I mentioned, we carry out commissions from elected PCCs and we are continuing to increase the amount of public survey work which supports our inspection – we have involved thousands, tens of thousands, of people in our reports, and the stop and search and Valuing the Police 3 reports involved us questioning over 19,000 people.

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2013/14 inspection programme

The inspection programme for 2013/14 highlights how we are working for the public. We look at areas of policing of greatest interest to the public. The people the police are sworn to protect, the people the police are privileged to protect.

On June 10 this year we published our inspection programme for 2013/14. Since then, we have received two further 43-force commissions from the Home Secretary, to look at domestic abuse and undercover policing.

Our programme of work is moving forward at some pace. Some of the developments, which I can tell you about for the first time today, include domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation.

Domestic abuse

If you search online with the terms killed by partner or ex-partner, a depressing – more than depressing, appalling – number of stories come up.

Home Office statistics show that on average, 2 women per week and 7 men per quarter are killed in the UK as a result of domestic violence, and 40–60% of all domestic abuse reports are made by repeat victims.

The Home Office reports an estimated 1.2 million women experienced domestic abuse last year. Of that 1.2 million, over 400,000 were sexually assaulted, including an estimated 85,000 rapes, and thousands more were subject to stalking.

75% of all children on child protection plans come from families that have experienced domestic abuse.

The effect of these dreadful statistics on the police – apart from the fact that they represent a blow against the police's central tenet, which is to protect people – is also stark. 8–10% of the overall demand for police resources is domestic abuse related, and domestic violence accounts for one out of every seven reported crimes of violence.

Because of the clear public interest in ensuring the police are dealing with and wherever possible preventing domestic abuse, the Home Secretary announced on Friday that she has commissioned HMIC to conduct a thematic review in this area.

Whilst tackling domestic abuse effectively requires a range of agencies and partners to work together, the emphasis of HMIC's inspection will be on the police action, with a particular focus on victim care.

Our terms of reference require us to assess and report on:

- the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic violence and abuse;
- whether victims at risk of violence in the future are appropriately managed;
- whether the police are learning from past experience and adapting their response; and
- whether any changes need to be made to the overall approach of the police.

All 43 forces will be inspected, and we are consulting now on our approach, with a view to starting fieldwork in October 2013 and completing all inspections before

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Christmas. A national thematic and 43 individual reports will be published by April 2014.

Child sexual exploitation

The second inspection I would like to talk about in our limited time here is that of the police response to child sexual exploitation.

Our review earlier this year into allegations and intelligence material concerning Jimmy Savile received between 1964 and 2012, which was published in March this year, was the first part of our work in this area.

High-profile and horrific recent cases such as those in Oxford, Telford and Yorkshire demonstrate – should there be any need to do so – the continuing need to focus on this critical area, protecting the most vulnerable people in our communities, our children.

A few weeks ago I met DCI Alan Edwards, who was SIO in the Telford case. The facts of that case are truly horrifying, and DCI Edwards has today given me a paper on the matters which he believes deserve the most close attention in cases of this type; I'm most grateful for that. We will of course be reviewing information from many other sources.

Tragically, the internet has provided new ways for this kind of abuse to take place. Those of us who have children will know that their online lives are increasingly as important as their offline lives. Ofcom research from 2012 showed that 12-15 year olds are spending as much time on the internet (17 hours a week) as they do watching TV, with one in ten 3-4 year olds using a tablet computer at home, according to their parents.

Just last Thursday [05 September 2013], I read the article on the BBC website with Det Supt Ewen Wilson of Essex Police, in which he revealed that seven child sex cases, each with multiple victims, have been investigated by Essex Police in the last 12 months.

I will take this opportunity to quote his words from this article, as an example of the changing nature of this kind of offence.

Det Supt Ewen Wilson said "stranger danger", as it was once known, is now extremely rare. Instead, he said child abuse is often carried out by known people, or online.

Cases dealt with recently included the grooming of vulnerable children so they could be sexually abused, and even prostituted. The abuse, he said, often begins with abusers identifying a victim of about 12 or 13 years old – the age that parental influence begins to loosen – and then befriending them in person or online. The victim is then given gifts – often a mobile telephone, because that gives the abuser access to the child. Later, they could be taken to parties, introduced to drugs and alcohol, and the sexual exploitation will begin.

Because of this kind of tragic trend, I can today announce that the next stage of HMIC's inspection of the police response to child sexual exploitation will look at internet grooming and internet-based child offending.

We have already carried out a pilot study and we will visit another eight forces in October and November, with a view to publishing a thematic report in March 2014.

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There has been considerable support for this inspection from the police service – for which we offer our gratitude – and responses to consultation from forces and other stakeholders have been overwhelmingly constructive and supportive.

More with less

The sort of cases I have just described in relation to the grooming of children online represents the worst of the internet. Of course, the internet offers much that is good, which includes offering the police huge opportunities in terms of intelligence and information – but the police are struggling to harness this power to best effect.

That is in no small part down to the problems with the IT hardware which is available to the police – something I have rehearsed in public many times before, and which I know you (of all audiences I have addressed) know very well indeed.

Meanwhile, as society debates the parameters between “real” and online life, the police are left to deal with its worst excesses. Some of these excesses are open, such as the vicious trolling of public figures, or racist or homophobic remarks; others, as we have seen with child sexual exploitation, are hidden, deep in what is termed the dark web.

The police are expected to deal with both of these kinds of offending – while at the same time their responsibility to deal with “traditional” offending, the burglaries, violence, ASB and so on, still weighs heavily upon them.

The Inspectorate is keenly aware that the need to adapt to new challenges, while continuing to shoulder continuing responsibilities, comes at a time when the service is becoming smaller.

The spending announcement in June 2013 shows the police will have to find further savings. The reality is that most of the money spent by police is spent on people – 80% and more – and so, less money means continued pressure on police numbers. This requires greater efficiency and effectiveness from a service diminishing in numbers.

There are also indications that these changes are having a particular effect on the superintending ranks.

In our report Valuing the Police 3, we reported how staff associations raised issues in relation to operational and personal resilience, particularly at superintendent and chief superintendent ranks, which from March 2010 to March 2013 have reduced by 20% (210 officers) and 22% (106 officers) respectively.

Superintendents in some places, perhaps in all places, are on call more often, less able to take rest days, and increasingly carrying multiple onerous responsibilities. We understand that and attach considerable weight to those factors.

How we will inspect

This is another example of HMIC’s dual role (if I haven’t exhausted the Janus metaphor): we shine a light not only on how the police are responding to the types of offending the public think are important, but also on the enormous challenges they face.

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To emphasise: HMIC is not in existence only to criticise the police (albeit the negatives are more often reported on). We also play a part in highlighting good practice and ensuring that we provide transparent information about the good work done in one area, so that the public and their elected representatives can see whether or not it matches what they see in the area in which they live. That is also in the public interest.

The good and the bad – in all our inspections, we will not flinch from saying what needs to be said.

It is not for the inspectorate to hide either what the police do or the enormous challenges they face behind any smokescreen – not one constructed of political sensitivities, or official obfuscations.

Crime and the harm it does needs to be talked about in the language which people understand, and can relate to the sometimes grievous wrongs which have been done to them. Anything else does their suffering a disservice.

We will continue to proceed on the basis of hard evidence – a rigid adherence to the facts.

We will give a fair and honest judgement based on the best evidence available. We do not seek to influence through judgements which are based on speculation or on the advice of those without expertise. But this is not a one-way process. It requires that we be given quality data and information on which to base our assessments and our judgements. And as the senior operational commanders of the police service, this is a responsibility which falls on you.

We will also continue to listen to you, the service. The position of HMIC is one of independence, objectivity and fairness. I have said this before, and I repeat it here - some inspection findings will be unpopular with the police service at all levels, they will be unpopular with the Home Office, with PCCs and maybe other stakeholders. But we will never shy away from making judgments and telling the public of them. May I emphasise this: political considerations form no part of our statutory criteria – I've looked, there's nothing in them. There's no special emphasis or undue weight in any of them. We operate for the public interest. That's it and it's never going to change.

Conclusion

To conclude: I started by speaking of Janus's role of looking in two ways – both back and forwards. Janus is also however the god of thresholds, and so of change – from old to new, from past to present. There is no doubt that he is an apt figure to talk about in relation to policing, because a lot has happened:

- as was said earlier, any suggestion that the police is the last unrefined service might have been true years ago, but certainly isn't true today. The changes are significant ones (the College of Policing, NCA, PCCs, etc);
- criminals, and the way they commit crimes, is in some cases changing, including by using the internet and social media; while concurrently
- you, the service, now have new ways of fighting crime and gathering intelligence, to combine with the centuries old skills of the police in investigating and detecting crimes.

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It is your ability to adapt, to evolve, to look both forward and back which makes you so successful.

The British model of policing – this has been said often, but I am in no doubt it bears repeating, both in the past and the present – is the best in the world.

Your exemplary ability as a service to make difficult cuts while victim satisfaction continues to rise, and recorded crime to fall, bears ever more forensic witness to this.

I look back over a year in which the service has proved itself to be rising successfully to the financial challenge, while working to tackle new problems; and looking forward, to talking to you much more in the years ahead about the fascinating, difficult, and crucial work of the police in England and Wales, work which deserves the highest international recognition as well as public recognition in this country.

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