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HM Inspector of Constabulary

Mr S Byrne
Chief Constable, Cheshire Constabulary

3 September 2014

Dear Simon

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 This must not be published until this date and time.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, of the importance to the force of preventing crime and anti-social behaviour and how it will be achieved.
- HMIC found some good examples of where the force has undertaken long-term crime prevention initiatives. In addition, HMIC found that the daily management meetings in the force were being used well to focus staff towards crime prevention activity. Although, intelligence briefings across the force varied in terms of depth and quality.
- Although the force has an electronic database, that is updated with information that helps officers and staff prevent crime in neighbourhood, it is not being used as effectively as it could be. While we did find evidence of problem-solving, areas such as thorough evaluation and sharing of good practice were absent.
- No formal crime prevention training has been delivered to staff who frequently deal with victims of crime and anti-social behaviour, other than to new recruits. HMIC believes that by providing training, the force would be able to make the most of opportunities to prevent future crimes and provide a better quality service to the public.

Crime recording and attendance

- The force's policy does not require officers to attend all reports of crimes and incidents. Instead it considers the threat, risk and harm to the victim, caller or community. In addition to this, there are specific occasions when a crime is reported, where the force will always aim to attend. HMIC understands that the force has not consulted with the public in relation to this policy.
- During discussions and observations in the force's call-handling centre, the inspection team identified that the force has clear policies and procedures to enable it to consistently identify vulnerable and repeat victims of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- The Constabulary is working to a recently revised call grading policy (Public Assistance Service Standards guidance) is reliant on the personal judgements made by operators. There are inconsistencies in that some crime types are attended in one area but not in another. The revised grade 2 incident arrangement is leading to confusion both in the control room and amongst front line staff.
- There was clear evidence of communication supervisors controlling incidents effectively.

- There were some examples of beat managers working as a response resource and therefore leaving the officers little time for problem-solving and joint working with the Police Community Support Officers.
- Crime is recorded by the force in one of two ways:
 - creating an incident on the command and control system and then subsequently entering details onto the crime recording system; or
 - directly recording crime onto the crime-recording system, without creating an incident first.

The force is unable to identify how many crimes are recorded directly onto the crime recording system, or 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 a motor vehicle, many of which were not attended, some cases were found to have little evidence of meaningful investigation or supervision.
- HMIC found that the constabulary had no current strategic governance forum in place to discuss integrated offender management arrangements. There had been no recent meetings with partners and none were planned. In recognising the important role played by other agencies, HMIC consider that the constabulary should ensure that there is an effective meeting process in place at a strategic level to ensure offenders are managed effectively to protect the public.
- The force was able to provide HMIC with the number of named suspects that are yet to be arrested or interviewed, as well as those who had failed to answer police bail. The inspection team found that the force has clear, robust arrangements to manage its outstanding named suspects and offenders.
- A small sample of named suspect files, including those circulated as wanted on the police national computer, provided little evidence that activity had been documented or properly supervised in a number of cases.

Freeing up time

- HMIC identified that the force has a relatively good understanding of demand, and is taking steps to build up a more detailed insight of demand and how its resources are distributed. This includes analysis of different types of incidents and policing activity. There were good examples of the analysis of demand and activity in Stockton Heath and the 'altogether better' initiative to tackle domestic abuse in West Cheshire.
- 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.

- A force pilot in Ellesmere Port is planned which seeks to make more effective use of resources by removing silos, creating a team ethos to streamline service delivery and improve performance.
- The inspection found that the force does not have a thorough understanding of how staff are spending their time. Although some basic management information is available, staff are unclear about what is expected of them.
- The force has some understanding of the amount of savings in staff time that has been made as a result of changes introduced or as a result of 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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Baker', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Roger Baker
HM Inspector of Constabulary