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HM Inspector of Constabulary

Mr M Barton
Chief Constable, Durham Constabulary

3 September 2014

Dear Michael

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 This must not be published until this date and time.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.
- The crime prevention message is reinforced by the Chief Constable's delivery of problem-solving master classes delivered to partners and staff, which has captured 955 staff so far and which will capture a further 465 staff between now and the end of July.
- The use of social media, particularly 'Facebook' and 'Twitter' is at an advanced stage within the force and used effectively to get key messages into the community and update the public about activity in their areas with strong prevention messages.
- The force has an electronic database that is updated with information that helps officers and staff prevent crime in neighbourhoods. We found clear evidence that this is used regularly and consistently to record activity to resolve and prevent community issues. The inspection also identified that some evaluation and sharing of good practice takes place. However, evidence of subsequent evaluation was absent.
- Although the force has provided some training to officers and staff, formal crime prevention training has not been delivered to staff who frequently deal 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 future crimes and provide a better quality service to the public.
- Dedicated crime prevention officers are under-utilised and do not appear to be included within strategic initiatives.

Crime recording and attendance

- The force is clear about how it will respond to calls for service from the public. It is one of the few forces that have a policy requiring officers to attend all reports of crimes and incidents.
- Within the force, there is a team approach to attendance which includes routine attendance by specialist units, and the Criminal Investigation Department to priority crime types.

- There is good quality assurance process in place by supervisors in the communication centres. Reality testing showed 100% compliance with deployment protocol.
- 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.
- Crime is recorded by the force, initially through creating an incident on the command and control system and then subsequently entering the details onto the crime recording system. The force has systems in place to identify how many crimes that it attends.
- During the inspection, HMIC reviewed a number of crime investigations, including reports of crimes that were not attended. HMIC found that, in general, there was clear evidence of officers recording updates of the progress of the investigation and supervisory oversight.
- HMIC found that the Integrated Offender Management scheme, in place to manage those offenders likely to cause most harm to the communities, to be well managed. There are regular meetings with key partners and a structured approach is used to identify and assess risk.
- The force was unable to provide HMIC with the number of suspects, but was able to provide the numbers who had failed to answer their police bail. Without this information, the force may be unable to ensure that it 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 in a number of cases.

Freeing up time

- HMIC identified that the force is taking steps to build up a more sophisticated understanding of demand and how its resources are distributed. This includes analysis of different types of incidents and policing activity.
- However, more work can be done in relation to identifying and addressing those tasks that are not believed to be the responsibility of the police.
- The inspection found that there is a clear structure to assist supervisors in assessing the workload and performance of front-line officers and staff.
- The force is not able to identify 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', enclosed within a faint, light-colored rectangular border.

Roger Baker
HM Inspector of Constabulary