





Part 1: Overview

I am pleased that the police service has responded well to the recommendations we made last year.

Overview

Over the last year we have, as ever, found many examples of police officers and staff doing excellent work. They do so in the face of often very difficult conditions, and we all owe them a heavy and enduring debt of gratitude.

On the whole, the inspections we have carried out during the past year show that the effectiveness and efficiency of the police service are improving. This is to the credit of all those who work in policing.

Generally, forces have made progress on the recommendations we have made and most can show efficiency improvements. This is important because, while policing budgets have been protected more than in some other public-sector organisations, forces still face difficult financial pressures.

I am pleased that the police service has responded well to the recommendations we made last year. It will, of course, take time for some of the changes to take effect and to translate into better services for the public, but overall this is encouraging.

Policing is often complex and very demanding, and that state of affairs will continue. Those difficulties are intensified and aggravated by failures of some forces to assess future demand and capability properly and efficiently, and to make plans accordingly. Forces also need to improve their work with other organisations to prevent crime over the long term.

The police's cultural strength is also the source of one of its weaknesses

I came into this job with enormous respect and admiration for frontline police officers and staff, and the work they do every day. That respect and admiration is stronger now than it ever has been.

Time and again, our inspectors speak to frontline officers who keep going under very difficult circumstances, every working day. I believe that the greatest cultural strength of

the police – as well as courage, dedication, professionalism and resilience – is the can-do, will-do attitude; the never-say-no attitude; the get-it-done-when-others-won't attitude; the not-turn-away attitude.

We all benefit greatly from this. We may even take it for granted from time to time. But my tenure as Chief Inspector of Constabulary has shown me that the police service's cultural strength is also the source of one of its most persistent weaknesses.

Because frontline police officers and staff can be relied on to 'get the job done' (in the process, often adeptly navigating their way through organisational weaknesses), there is less pressure on leaders to bring about much-needed change. So the changes policing needs – to make sure the service is ready for its current and future challenges – are happening too slowly, and on too modest a scale.

There are no excuses for the shortcomings I routinely see in the police's planning, demand management and resource deployment. In too many forces, officers and staff who are eager and determined to help the public are frustrated by inefficiency, unnecessary bureaucracy, and antiquated and malfunctioning systems. This would not be acceptable in many other organisations in the public sector and the private sector. It should not be acceptable in the police.

Time and again, our inspectors speak to frontline officers who keep going under very difficult circumstances, every working day.



© Kent Police

The welfare of officers and staff in police forces is of first importance.

It is true that there are aspects of police work that set forces apart from most organisations. In some ways, the police service is unique. But there is also a great deal that running a police force has in common with running other types of organisation. Leaders, whether in police forces, hospitals, large corporations, small businesses or the learned professions, should create the conditions that enable staff to achieve their organisation's objectives in the most effective and efficient way.

When measured against the standards of the best organisations, some senior leaders in policing have a great deal to do.

The welfare of officers and staff is crucial

The welfare of officers and staff in police forces is of first importance.

It is vital to the officers and staff themselves; to the leaders of forces, and those who hold them to account; and to the public, who rely on the police to keep them safe.

I mean welfare in its widest sense. I mean it in physical terms: officers face physical risks every day because of demand, their workloads and the nature of the work they are doing. In many cases, they also face the risk of injury or assault – sometimes severe or life-threatening.

I also mean welfare in terms of officers' and staff members' mental health: the severe stresses that come not only from the pressure of the job and the workload, but also from the most appalling things officers must face in their working lives.

I do not only mean the angry and dangerous man, armed with a weapon; or the reckless or even murderous driver of a vehicle; or the person in mental health crisis, endangering their own life or the lives of people nearby. I also mean serious road traffic collisions; sudden deaths and suicides, sometimes of young people; people who have died in fires or by violence of all kinds. The person who died alone, whose body was not found for a long time; the cot death; the most unspeakable crimes against children; the list goes on and on.



It is vital that forces have adequate systems for giving people the support they need.

These things have profound and lifelong effects on the police officers and staff who have to deal with them. It is inevitable that they will take those experiences home, and they will live with them for ever.

We must determine whether forces properly assess and deal with the effects of these things on the mental health and welfare of officers and staff. Do they understand the knock-on effects on their loved ones when they have dealt with a motorway smash, or cut down the body of a teenage girl who has hanged herself in despair and then had to tell her parents? When they lie awake, unable to forget what they have seen, and withdraw into depression and worse, their families suffer too.

It is vital that forces have adequate systems for assessing these things, and giving people the support they need. This matters not only in human terms for the officers and staff themselves, and their families; on a more systemic level, it matters to the effectiveness and efficiency of the force.

It becomes much more difficult to improve efficiency if officers and staff are impaired, physically or mentally, and often both.



If a police force's most important assets – its people – are under undue strain, whether in terms of workload or the nature of the work they do and the effects of that work on them, the force's ability to serve the public is compromised.

Of course policing can and should be made more efficient. That is something all officers and staff, at all levels, know well. But it becomes much more difficult to improve efficiency if officers and staff are impaired, physically or mentally, and often both.

Forces need to make better long-term plans

Increasing demand and decreasing resources mean that some aspects of policing are still under stress. I am pleased to say that most police forces in England and Wales have risen impressively to the financial challenges they face, and most are investing more effort in planning for the future. But the scope and scale of their plans vary significantly.

In any organisation with limited resources, failing to plan properly will lead to poor outcomes. For the police, failing to plan properly will compromise public safety.

In the face of significant pressure, marginal improvements are not enough. I am concerned that many forces still do not have investment plans or effective governance structures that will significantly change the way they operate. Too many forces still make planning decisions without properly understanding how demand for their services is likely to change.

A small number of forces are still using reserves to shore up the way they currently operate. This is a short-term strategy that, if it works at all, can only last until the money runs out. At that point, if nothing else changes, these forces will have fallen even further behind and will have less time to make the changes they need.

In contrast to this short-term approach, the best managers in the best forces invest time in planning not just one year ahead, but over three or four years ahead, and beyond. These forces use all the information available to them to make informed decisions about how they will need to operate in the years to come. They then make plans so that their workforces and other assets are fit and ready.

This approach should not be the exception; it should be the rule.

Force management statements will help forces plan for future demand

No well-managed enterprise can be fully efficient and effective without a good enough evidence-based prediction of future demand. It needs this to recruit the right people, develop the skills of its workers, exploit the power of new technology, develop new ways of working and improve efficiency.

As part of our inspection process, we now require forces to send us information they use as part of their planning process, in the form of a force management statement. In March this year, we sent template force management statements and guidance to forces.

The best managers in the best forces invest time in planning not just one year ahead, but over three or four years ahead, and beyond.

We know that accurately forecasting demand is not easy, but it is necessary.

This is the first year of a three-year project to develop force management statements, which included a 12-week consultation. I am grateful to all those who participated in the consultation, particularly chief officers and police and crime commissioners, whose input was invaluable. We have listened carefully and, acting on the feedback we received, we have made changes to this year's templates.

We have simplified the templates and made them easier to use. In this first year, forces will tell us how they measure demand and assess capability, and what that process tells them about what they need to do in the next four years. Within the broad parameters of the template, it is up to chief officers to explain how things are and will be in their forces, and how they have arrived at those conclusions.

What we have not done is make this just about today. Force management statements are all about the future, starting from the present. We know that accurately forecasting demand is not easy, but it is necessary and too many forces have neglected it for too long.

Police forces need a better understanding of the demand they face

It is important that forces, and the public, have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the true levels of demand for policing. This is true at the best of times, but it is even more important in the current context of limited budgets and changing demand.

To be effective, police forces need to manage the demand they face. But forces cannot manage demand properly without a clear understanding of how much there is, or what form it takes. In many cases, it is troubling how little forces know about demand – particularly demand that comes from hidden crime, such as so-called honour-based violence and modern slavery.

In contrast, the best forces have carried out sophisticated analysis to identify where they are most likely to find under-reported or otherwise hidden demand. This means they make better decisions about how to use their resources.

It may seem counter-intuitive to spend time and money uncovering even more demand, but it is important for two reasons.

First, this hidden demand is not an abstract concept. It represents real people in trouble; these are victims of crime who need help from the police.

Second, there is little demand that stays hidden for ever; forces will almost always need to respond to it eventually. It is far better to uncover and respond to hidden demand early, rather than wait until demand has escalated, or its severity has intensified. The widespread and shocking abuse of children in Rotherham, which stayed hidden from view for many years, is a powerful example of this.

We need an open, public debate about demand

Once forces understand the real scope of the demand – crime and non-crime, latent and patent – they face, they can make better decisions about how best to tackle it. I encourage forces to manage and prioritise their response to demand, but they must take care not to manage demand in a way that undermines public confidence.

Given that police forces do not have unlimited resources, we cannot expect them to meet all the demand that we might want them to. This means chief officers must make choices about how to respond to each type of demand. It is important that the public understand those choices – and the reasons behind them – so they can have fair expectations and confidence in the police.

Given that police forces do not have unlimited resources, we cannot expect them to meet all the demand that we might want them to.



Almost a quarter of forces are not meeting enough of their demand or are managing it inappropriately.

Some forces are not meeting enough of their current demand

Last year, we were concerned that a small number of forces were struggling to meet demand and were artificially suppressing it. Some forces were going as far as downgrading the severity of calls from the public to justify a slower response; I am pleased to say that this year we found less evidence of this.

But there is now a new problem. Although forces are no longer suppressing demand to the same extent, they are not managing it all properly, either. Almost a quarter of forces are not meeting enough of their demand or are managing it inappropriately. In some cases, forces are putting vulnerable people at serious risk of harm.

In some forces, we found that staff were holding thousands of emergency calls in queues, largely because officers were not available to respond to them. In some cases, officers were not actively reassessing the urgency of the calls during the delay.

Many, although not all, forces use telephone investigations to respond to some types of demand efficiently. There is not necessarily anything wrong with this; telephone investigations have the potential to give victims of crime a prompt and efficient service. But forces must not use telephone investigations as simply a cheap way of dealing with a case. They need to be properly allocated, well supervised and only used in appropriate cases. Of the telephone investigations we inspected over the last year, roughly one third were of poor quality and nearly half were not supervised properly.



© South Wales Police

Demand can be unpredictable

Changes in demand emerge in different ways – some are unexpected and sudden, others are expected and gradual.

We have recently seen the fine examples of forces responding extraordinarily well to terrorist attacks, co-ordinating the actions of armed and unarmed officers in a way that saved lives and inspired confidence and admiration. The Metropolitan Police Service, City of London Police, British Transport Police and Greater Manchester Police, working with their colleagues across the other emergency services, have much to be proud of. We know from research we carried out with Ipsos MORI that public confidence in the police to protect them during a terrorist incident has increased markedly since 2016.¹

Crimes such as terrorist attacks, and major incidents such as the fire at Grenfell Tower, create unpredictable and extreme demands which will always stretch resources, however good a force's plans are. The tragedy at Grenfell Tower involved a crime scene in the most difficult and dangerous of environments, recovering and identifying 71 bodies, dealing with families and friends desperate for information about their loved ones, and a complex investigation under the gaze of the media. The police could have foreseen none of this 24 hours earlier.

Similar demands arose from the terrorist attacks – Manchester's especially, given that 14,000 people attended the concert that night and ten of the 22 people killed were young people, the youngest only eight years old. Inevitably, the scale, speed, complexity and risks associated with incidents of this kind mean there will be lessons to be learned from the emergency response. But we should never lose sight of the fact that the police, and others, chose to stay in the Manchester Arena foyer to help casualties, despite knowing there was every possibility of a second explosion.

The police, and others, chose to stay in the Manchester Arena foyer to help casualties, despite knowing there was every possibility of a second explosion.

Crime recording is the springboard to investigation; it has to be done properly.

Some demand can increase gradually

Fraud – once a relatively low-volume, niche crime – is now a high-volume, common crime. Much of it is carried out online and against vulnerable victims. Many frauds are recorded; many are not investigated.

Then there is cyber-crime. Offences that were unimaginable a few years ago are now commonplace; they are carried out on an industrial scale and, in some instances, threaten major disruption to society.

Working with the National Crime Agency and other bodies, the police are adapting to the demands that fraud and cyber-crime create. However, these crimes are often technically complex and international. This creates more, if not unexpected, demands for the police. We intend to look more closely at the police response to these crimes.

It is vital that police record crime accurately

We know from our Crime Data Integrity inspections² that the police are getting better at recording crime. But too many forces are still not doing it accurately enough.

In October 2014, we finished the most extensive and comprehensive inspection ever carried out into crime recording. At that time, we found that almost one in five crimes was not being recorded – an indefensible 19 percent of crimes were not even getting on the books. The position in the case of rape and other sexual offences was even worse: one in four was not recorded.

One of our recommendations was that, for the purely administrative act of recording a crime, what the complainant said should be assumed to be correct. The crime would be recorded, and that would trigger the obligation to investigate. Immediately after the crime has been recorded, investigators must proceed with an entirely open mind.

Those who are victims of crime, and those who say they are victims, are entitled to have their complaints taken seriously, and to have them properly investigated. In all cases, once the investigation has begun, the police must proceed promptly and find and evaluate the evidence.



© West Midlands Police

The evidence may support a complaint and it may not; a few who claim to be victims may be untruthful or there may be no evidence apart from the word of the accuser. What matters is that the police must proceed professionally and objectively, without bias, fear or favour. During an investigation, there is, and should be, no presumption of guilt on the part of the accused. Police officers have not been told to believe the complainant throughout the investigation. They have only been required to record crime on an assumption of truth – an assumption which ends immediately after the crime record has been made and before the investigation has begun.

If a complaint of crime is not recorded, in almost every case it will not be investigated, the complainer will not receive services she or he is entitled to, the perpetrator (if there is one) will be free and may go on to re-offend, and justice will be denied.

Crime recording is the springboard to investigation; it has to be done properly. If the police later determine that no crime was committed, they must, under the crime-recording rules, take it off the books.

Those making valid complaints must have confidence in the police taking them seriously. And so their reports of crime must be recorded so that objective investigations are carried out.

Public confidence in the police depends on their being conspicuously fair to everyone – accuser and accused alike.

Eight hundred years since Magna Carta, it should not be necessary now to remind anyone of Article 40: “To no-one will we sell, deny or delay justice.” Justice is fairness. Public confidence in the police depends on their being conspicuously fair to everyone – accuser and accused alike.

Not recording crime accurately has other consequences too – for the police and for those who hold them to account. Without accurate crime records, it is harder to judge how well each force is performing against the first Peel principle: preventing crime.

Not only that, without accurate records, police forces cannot use predictive tools to help inform their planning. Using these tools to analyse crime data can reveal patterns of criminal behaviour, including where it is occurring and how severe it is. If the crime data the tools rely on are inaccurate, forces miss out on a vital opportunity to become more efficient.

The police need a better understanding of their role in the criminal justice system

Police basic training may be enough for officers in their earliest years in the service. But the demands associated with preventing, detecting and prosecuting crime mean that all officers must keep up and build on their skills during their service.

That includes their knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals and essential details of criminal law, including the rules of evidence and procedure.

Police officers need a better understanding of the role they play in the criminal justice system. They need to have a sound appreciation of how what they do, or do not do, will be examined – and may be challenged – in court. They need to be able to understand, anticipate and predict the course of a prosecution so they do not make avoidable mistakes in the investigation.

When police have this ability, the integrity of criminal cases, and the chances of a successful and just conviction, or a plea of guilty to an appropriate charge, improve markedly.

Equally, accusations which are false or for which there is insufficient evidence are more likely to be flushed out, and the wrongly accused can be relieved and public money and time saved.

However, at the moment, constables do not usually receive sufficient and specific training in this area. As almost all police officers begin and end their careers as constables, this is unsustainable.

This year, we have seen the high-profile collapse of a series of criminal trials because police (and others) failed to comply with the disclosure rules, which require the defence to be given material which undermines the prosecution or may help the defence. Any miscarriage of justice is a tragedy – for a victim who is denied justice or an accused who is wrongly convicted. These cases strike at the very heart of our legal system and leave our confidence in it severely shaken. They damage people's lives.

No-one should have to wait months or years for the police and prosecutors to realise a case is unsound, and to drop it. Justice must be timely; delayed, it is denied.

Take the example of a man wrongly accused of a sexual offence, where there is no evidence against him but the word of his accuser. There is material on a digital device, now in the hands of the police, which he believes shows the accusation is false and that he is innocent. Because of delays in the police getting the material from the device, it might take a long time for the true picture to emerge.

During this delay, the accused's life is effectively on hold; indeed, it might well be getting a great deal worse. He – and others close to him – will suffer while the police wait to obtain and then analyse the data on the device. Anxiety and fear that something will go wrong will mount up; his job or business will suffer; his social and professional relationships will be under strain and may break; he may endure severe financial hardship; his mental health may deteriorate; if he is a student, his ability to concentrate on his studies and do his best in his exams will be severely impaired. Months later, the police realise the accusation was false and drop the investigation. In the meantime, the accused has become

Any miscarriage of justice is a tragedy – for a victim who is denied justice or an accused who is wrongly convicted.

It is not uncommon for the police to seize computers containing terabytes of material, which they then have to interrogate.

a victim not only of a false accusation but of severe delays on the part of the police to see that it is false; but no-one can give him back what he has lost. That too is an injustice, and it is an avoidable one.

It is vital that the police have both the training and the resources they need to avoid these problems. The timeliness of the interrogation and analysis of digital devices, and the quality of training and supervision of officers in establishing the strength or weakness of a case, must improve considerably.

As these collapsed cases and a recent joint inspection³ show, there are demands that the police, working with other parts of the criminal justice system, must address. Officers need up-to-date skills and knowledge to do so.

The main Act of Parliament that governs disclosure is the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996. The world has changed a great deal since it was enacted. In the years that followed, the rise in the volume of digital material created in criminal investigations has been enormous. It is not uncommon for the police to seize computers containing terabytes of material, which they then have to interrogate. It is essential that the police establish and bring into operation the most efficient and effective systems for rapidly interrogating and analysing digital devices, so these vast quantities of data can be properly and quickly assessed. Having people read thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of pages of data from a single mobile phone will never be sustainable, and no force should assume it ever will be. I return to the issue of artificial intelligence and machine learning later in this Part.

As Sir Brian Leveson said in his 2018 Criminal Cases Review Commission Annual Lecture:⁴ “The disclosure process, if it is to be carried out effectively, requires expertise, time and money. All require effective funding.”

It is also imperative that the College of Policing intensifies its work in relation to the link between the police’s systems for training, development and competency and the regime for pay and reward.

The rise of serious violence means the police must use their powers fairly and proportionately

The last year has seen a significant increase in serious violence, and not only in London, where knife crime in particular is making regular news headlines.⁵

Some young people are dying on our streets because they believe, wrongly, that carrying a weapon will protect them. Around the time of the 2011 riots, the Labour MP for Tottenham, David Lammy, spoke about “a Grand Theft Auto culture that glamorises violence; a consumer culture fixated on the brands we wear, not who we are and what we achieve; a gang culture with warped notions of loyalty, respect and honour.” That same culture, combined with hopelessness, poor education and a lack of father figures, could be leading young people, and young men in particular, to engage in criminality, including serious violence.

The Government, police and public all recognise that the police need to use their stop-and-search powers. They are a legitimate tactic to reduce violent crime and take knives and other weapons from those who carry them on our streets.

The Government, police and public all recognise that the police need to use their stop-and-search powers.

© Greater Manchester Police



It is not only police forces that are responsible for preventing crime.

However, over the years, stop and search has not been without controversy; every community has a strong and long-held interest in how the police use it. Five years ago, we found “disturbingly low levels of supervision”⁶ and other major problems, which led to the Government creating the Best Use of Stop and Search scheme. Things have improved since then, but in last year’s State of Policing report, I noted that not all forces were complying with the scheme. This year, we have seen sustained improvement in how forces record reasonable grounds for stop and search, but it varies across the country how effectively forces record, monitor and scrutinise how they use these powers.

The rise in serious violence means the police need to use the powers Parliament has given them for these purposes. Public support is fragile but there are good indications that it is improving; for example, the use of body-worn video cameras leads to more accountability and fewer complaints.

There are also good examples of forces taking determined, high-profile action to tackle specific types of crime, such as the Metropolitan Police’s response to moped crime and acid attacks. This shows that the force can work flexibly when it needs to, giving an appropriate response to new trends.

We need a concerted effort to prevent crime

It takes time to develop and deploy new tactics. Forces need to think ahead and make sound assumptions about how they must change. Early warning of new trends is important, not just to give forces time to plan, but also to help forces stop trends forming in the first place.

It is not only police forces that are responsible for preventing crime. We need a concerted effort from all public authorities – and increasingly from private-sector organisations – to tackle the causes of crime and disorder, long before an emergency response becomes necessary. This philosophy, which is evident across many aspects of police work, is a prominent and valuable feature of the Government’s strategies for tackling terrorism, serious organised crime, extremism and, now, serious violence.⁷ I strongly endorse this approach.

Early intervention must be given much higher priority. For example, there is so much that needs to be done to help troubled families; reduce parental conflict; support children's emotional and cognitive learning; develop young people and divert them from offending; make the child protection system more effective; and treat mental illness and addictions.

If society does not give adequate and timely support to those who desperately need it, the chaotic lives they endure will lead them to become victims of crime or offenders. All too often, they become both. The work of institutions such as the Early Intervention Foundation⁸ is therefore vitally important.

Preventing crime is not only about tackling its causes. We also need to do what we can to make ourselves safer. Initiatives such as SafetyWorks!⁹ in Northumbria are taking a rounded view of this problem. SafetyWorks! promotes safety through a range of interactive scenarios for young people and community groups. These include actions that keep people safe, such as installing smoke alarms and dealing with bogus callers. They also include activities designed to deter children from littering, committing anti-social behaviour, trespassing on the railway, starting fires and becoming victims of grooming.

If public bodies do not work together to tackle problems properly, at an early stage, before they escalate into criminality and disorder, they are simply storing up more severe problems for the police and the rest of society.

Public services must work together to support children

The need for public-sector organisations to work together is particularly acute when it comes to children's and adolescents' mental health. We all know that prevention is always better than cure – this applies to children's mental health even more than it does in other areas. To paraphrase Frederick Douglass, the 19th-century social reformer, it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults. Early intervention and prompt, adequate and effective treatment are essential.

We all know that prevention is always better than cure – this applies to children's mental health even more than it does in other areas.

Reports and studies have repeatedly shown that poor mental health care will often lead to offending.

The factors that affect children's mental health are complex and no single person or organisation can control them all. But if we do not act to support children early on, the problems that can develop are more complicated to address, not just for the NHS and the education system, but also for the police and the wider criminal justice system. These points have been emphasised very recently by others.¹⁰

Reports and studies have repeatedly shown that poor mental health care will often lead to offending. The Government's Green Paper makes an explicit link between children with conduct disorders and later delinquency and criminality: children with conduct disorders are 20 times more likely to end up in prison than the general population.

A 2014 report by the British Medical Association¹¹ made similar links and pointed out that young people in young offender institutions, secure children's homes and secure training centres rarely thrive. Once problems have been allowed to reach this stage, helping children becomes more costly and less effective.

There are many people in the criminal justice system who should not be there. They are there because social or economic disadvantage, injustice or brutality led them there – perhaps via a route which involved poverty, truancy, illiteracy, physical, sexual or emotional abuse, teenage pregnancy, failed relationships, mental illness, or drug or alcohol addiction. Often, it is several of the above; it can be all.



© West Midlands Police

Our single-agency child protection inspections are finding a significant change in the way police understand and treat vulnerability.

They may also be there because of their complex needs or vulnerabilities; in these cases, police custody suites become places concerned with health and social care, not criminal justice.

A more effective police response to children experiencing mental health problems is of course welcome. But too often, this response is to treat a symptom which might have been less severe – or entirely absent – had there been better and earlier recognition of its underlying causes and action to tackle them.

There is much research on the correlation between adverse childhood experiences, the increased risk to children's mental and physical health, and their increased vulnerability to child abuse and exploitation. These links should be identified and understood at the earliest possible stage, so that each child receives the right support. This means timely and targeted support, with all the agencies and organisations charged with protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children working together closely.

The police are laying some foundations for this. Our single-agency child protection inspections are finding a significant change in the way police understand and treat vulnerability. Officers and staff (with the encouragement of senior leaders) are increasingly starting to look past the anti-social behaviour or other misdemeanour of a child and ask, 'What is causing this behaviour?' – and, crucially, 'What can I do about it?'

However, this is by no means consistently the case; and our inspections also still find some other problems again and again. We do not underestimate the complexity of this work, nor the difficulty of working with often very troubled children, but progress must be faster and surer. In 2011, Professor Munro's review of children's services¹² described a situation where practitioners had become overly preoccupied with doing things right (i.e. complying with a process) as opposed to doing the right thing.

It is universally accepted that a police custody suite is not the right place for a child.

We still see this in police forces. Decisions about risk and exchanging information with other agencies can be about managing demand, not mitigating risk. Senior leaders review numbers of child protection cases, but do not always assess the quality of the decisions officers and staff are making. Too often, investigations involving children are allocated to teams and individuals without the skills or experience to manage them. And children are not always kept informed about their investigations or consulted about decisions made on their behalf.

Culture also has an important part to play. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the case of children who are detained in custody. It is universally accepted that a police custody suite is not the right place for a child. This is not to say that children should not be arrested, or alleged crimes should not be investigated. However, often children who are suspected of an offence (and whose behaviour may be very hard to handle) are not recognised as vulnerable. Their behaviour is described and seen as a deliberate and calculated choice. While that may be true, they are likely to have had several adverse experiences which have driven them to those choices. However, very few referrals for safeguarding support originate from police custody.

There are no easy fixes. There needs to be a relentless focus on improving outcomes for children, as quickly and cohesively as possible.

We have a collective obligation to work together to protect children from problems leading to or arising from poor mental health. I echo the call from the Care Quality Commission for those who commission health, social care and criminal justice services to work together more closely and pool their resources where necessary.

There will always be situations where someone in crisis needs a rapid response from the emergency services. But too often our public services are failing to work together to prevent the crisis in the first place.

Policing very often deals with society at its lowest ebb – either because people are at their most frightened and vulnerable, or behaving at their worst. But blue lights should not have to flash for someone to get the help they need in time.

Blue lights should not have to flash for someone to get the help they need in time.

Technology can both harm and help vulnerable people

The raw power of the worldwide web can be an agency of fear as well as freedom. Technology enhances much of our daily lives. It also intensifies severe threats to the most vulnerable people in society, including children.

For instance, the pressure to be active on social media makes it impossible for some children to escape bullying. When bullies can pursue children into their homes and even into their bedrooms, the pressure can be unbearable and lead to lifelong damage and, sometimes, tragically, to children ending their lives.

The Care Quality Commission has highlighted concerns about online bullying. It also raised concerns about children and young people accessing inappropriate websites, such as those that may promote eating disorders, self-harm and other harmful behaviours, even suicide.

But the Care Quality Commission also makes the important point that technology can be part of a solution. For example, many children prefer to use websites, online forums or apps for support with their mental health rather than seeking help from professionals. And some services are starting to harness this trend by developing age-appropriate online information about mental health for children and young people.

Technology raises complex issues for the police

The ease with which we can generate, access and move data about ourselves brings a new set of rights and responsibilities, many of which are still developing. It is not always possible to foresee the problems that might arise from the use (or misuse) of a particular technology. But we need to try.



As a society, we need a better understanding of the role of individuals and the state in regulating behaviour online, and how much privacy we think is reasonable. The speed with which new technologies are developed and adopted means we may also need to accept that views on this will differ greatly between generations.

There is a handful of very large companies with a highly dominant influence over how the internet is used. In too many respects, their record is poor and their reputation tarnished. The steps they take to make sure their services cannot be abused by terrorists, paedophiles and organised criminals are inadequate; the commitment they show and their willingness to be held to account are questionable. It should come as no surprise if this leads to the establishment and ever-tightening of internet regulation, to compel responsible and proportionate actions which these companies could voluntarily take today.

There are already examples of private firms developing technology with the express intent of making it impossible for law enforcement agencies to intercept communications, or gain access to devices containing relevant information. Protecting personal data and communications from eavesdroppers is a legitimate concern. But there are very few legitimate reasons in democratic countries to prevent properly-operated law enforcement agencies, with appropriate judicial oversight, from getting access to communications and other data. The wide availability of impenetrable end-to-end encryption services has made life easier for terrorists, paedophiles and organised criminals, and harder for law enforcement.

How we generate and use personal data also raises questions of trust, brought into sharp focus by the revelations about Cambridge Analytica. In England and Wales, as in other parts of the world, the police use personal data to prevent and detect crime, especially serious organised crime and terrorism.

If, with a lawful search warrant, the police seize a drug dealer's address book, or a terrorist's notes on bomb-making, the public are supportive. But they seem less supportive of the police having access to mobile phone records or other forms of personal data, despite their value as evidence in crime and terrorism cases. The police have to understand why the public are reluctant to trust them with their data; the public have to understand why the police need it. The police deserve that trust.

The police need to harness the power of technology – particularly artificial intelligence and machine learning

In recent years, several forces have made commendable advances in developing and using technology. But, in too many respects, others are still playing catch-up.

Used properly, technology can make policing far more efficient and effective. But technology is not improving the efficiency of police forces at the same rate as in other organisations. In part, this is because the police are still not acquiring the right technology. What concerns me more and more is the fact that police are not exchanging information effectively enough between, or even within, forces and the different types of technology they use do not interact well enough with each other.

I have said far too many times that police ICT is, in too many respects, outdated, inadequate and weak. ICT departments are still too disconnected from other parts of their forces. Senior officers often think of ICT as a procurement function, rather than an integral part of strategic planning. In 2014, we said that “the current situation in relation to the development and use of ICT in the police service is unsatisfactory and its causes must be tackled”. This has not improved anywhere near enough.

The wide availability of impenetrable end-to-end encryption services has made life easier for terrorists, paedophiles and organised criminals, and harder for law enforcement.

The police could and should use AI far more to analyse the huge amounts of data held on digital devices.

The lack of progress is frustrating, because there is real potential for technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, to make the police more effective and efficient. If the police are going to be able to prevent and detect crime in the future – particularly technology-enabled crime – they need to invest now in the technology and training to do so.

The police could and should use AI far more to analyse the huge amounts of data held on digital devices. This will undoubtedly help prevent the kinds of disclosure mistakes that lead to trials collapsing, particularly in cases of rape and other sexual assaults. And it will accelerate justice for accuser and accused.

There are already some good examples of forces starting to harness this technology. The Metropolitan Police are developing plans to use AI to identify images of child abuse, with the effect of greatly speeding up the processing of the material and its reliable use in prosecutions. By having machines do this extraordinarily distressing work, the force also helps reduce the risk of officers suffering psychological trauma. Police in Durham are working on a predictive AI system to help officers decide whether a suspect should be kept in custody. And there are other instances of worthwhile advances.



© South Wales Police

At a national level, the National Law Enforcement Data Programme, run by the Home Office, is bringing together the main national computer systems, including the Police National Computer and the Police National Database.

But, compared with the enormous capability and potential of AI, this is rudimentary, and the police could and must do much more. The opportunity here is not only to get machines to do faster what the police already do. It is also to use technology to achieve police objectives in ways we have not even thought of yet, and might never.

Instruments and technology exist today which can process information far faster, more efficiently and more reliably and effectively than any human could. But, even more significantly, the capability exists now to devise ways of learning – of machines thinking for themselves – which no person has ever achieved, and perhaps no person ever could.

Preventing, investigating and determining the causes of crime all involve numerous complex factual permutations, unpredictable human behaviour and random as well as intended events. This is the perfect field for the application of smart computers of the kind I have described. Of course, this technology costs money. But if the police invest now, working with the experts who have created and are developing these capabilities, this powerful technology has the potential to make them more efficient, and achieve huge advances in public safety and security, and timely justice.

It is time the police raised their eyes from digitising what they already do (important as that is), to see and develop the means to achieve what they cannot and may never otherwise be able to do.

We are giving the police a network code to help them use technology more effectively

When it comes to ICT, the need to work together at a national level is clear. We are developing a network code to help the police establish common operating standards. This type of mechanism is not a new idea and we are drawing on models already in use in other essential public services.

Police in Durham are working on a predictive AI system to help officers decide whether a suspect should be kept in custody.

For any collaboration to be successful, there must be enough in it for both sides.

This is important, because the police collect data on all sorts of things: for example, people, such as victims, suspects and offenders; places, such as crime scenes, road junctions and addresses; and objects, such as stolen goods, weapons and vehicles. But the police do not currently collect this data in a sufficiently standardised way. This means that the police cannot always easily exchange information with each other, which could lead to them missing opportunities to detect and prevent crime.

The report we published this year on the National Police Air Service (NPAS) is an example of what can happen in a bad model of collaboration. Under that agreement, the level of service given to each force and the financial contributions needed in return were negotiated separately and directly between NPAS and the collaborating forces. This led to a view that collaboration arrangements necessarily create ‘winners and losers’.

For any collaboration to be successful, there must be enough in it for both sides. Otherwise, it ceases to be a collaboration and becomes a good deal for some forces at the expense of others. The network code has at its heart the principle of enduring mutual benefit and the objective of perfect, affordable technological co-operation.

The police service needs to develop more of a culture of national co-operation

The network code is important, but of course it is not the whole solution.

Police forces are not competitors of one another, and the public need forces to pool their expertise to be as efficient and effective as they can be.

It is good that partnerships and collaborative approaches are now common in policing; these arrangements take many different forms. There are some impressive local and regional collaborative arrangements between forces, local authorities, health authorities, fire and rescue services, charities and other organisations.

For example, Onecall¹³ in Northumbria brings 20 different services together in one building. Anyone who is worried about the welfare of a child or adult can call one number and have their call dealt with by someone from the right agency. Before Onecall, there were 42 different ways of contacting the agencies involved. The new system not only gives the public a better service, it also helps agencies become more efficient by working more closely together. This is a commendable achievement which should be adopted throughout the country.

I am encouraged that, this year, more forces were clear about the benefits they derived from collaborative work. This is important, because the aim of collaboration is not to work together for its own sake, but to improve efficiency and give the public a better service.

Conclusion

Above all, the brave and committed men and women who serve at the frontline of policing need their leaders, in policing and politics, to deal with all the things I have highlighted. That means getting ahead of demand; collaborating with each other and other bodies to prevent crime and deal with its causes; exploiting advances in technology; and giving early intervention the emphasis and resources it deserves.

By doing this, they will give frontline officers and staff the best prospect of keeping people safe and achieving timely justice. The public deserve nothing less.

The brave and committed men and women who serve at the frontline of policing need their leaders, in policing and politics, to deal with all the things I have highlighted.



© Greater Manchester Police