

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
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Dear Home Secretary,

I write in response to the HMICFRS thematic inspection report 'An Inspection of the effectiveness of the Regional Crime Units'.

I acknowledge the seven recommendations made in this HMICFRS inspection report, and the one cause for concern. I understand that recommendations 3 and 4 are applicable to all Forces, including Essex Police.

I am very aware of the detrimental impact of Organised Crime on residents and businesses in our county, and conscious that the activities of Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) often extend beyond their primary activity and can cause significant incidental harm as well as that which is intended or expected. Work, both locally and regionally, to combat this, is a vital part of policing.

I have received assurance from my Chief Constable that Essex Police, and the Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU) for the Eastern Region (ERSOU), are both meeting the requirements outlined in relation to recommendations 3 and 4 (detailed in appendix A).

The Chief Constable has provided a detailed response to me regarding each of the seven recommendations.

Whilst recognising the importance of ROCUs in dealing with the highest tier of crime, in collaboration with the NCA, I strongly support the capability afforded by the joint Kent and Essex Serious Crime Directorate and the impact that this shared resource makes in that area of the country.

We will use the observations and recommendations contained in this report to inform our work in Essex, including our collaboration in the 7 Forces Eastern Region, working with other forces to maximise our impact.

I will continue to monitor the work of Essex Police in this regard, including through the monthly Performance and Resources Scrutiny Board.

Yours sincerely

Roger Hirst
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

c.c. Ben-Julian Harrington, Chief Constable, Essex Police.

Appendix A – Recommendations

Recommendations 1-6

1. By March 2021, the Home Office should consider what changes to legislation can be made to allow the NCA to formally task ROCUs.
2. By February 2023, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for SOC, with the Home Office, should devise a technical solution to make exchanging sensitive intelligence between organisations more efficient, and then encourage its adoption and adherence by all relevant forces and the NCA.
3. By February 2022, chief officers responsible for SOC in each region, with the chief officers of the affected forces, should make sure that systems are in place for senior investigating officers (SIOs) and lead responsible officers (LROs) to work effectively together. •
4. By February 2022, the chief constable with the lead for SOC in each region, with the chief officers of the affected forces, should ensure that a chief officer is appointed with responsibility for each ROCU, as far as practicable working autonomously of force responsibilities.
5. By August 2021, the NPCC lead for ROCUs, with the NPCC lead for counter corruption, should publish an anti-corruption strategy for ROCUs and then encourage its adoption and adherence by all relevant forces.
6. By February 2022, the NPCC lead for SOC should design a national function that can make sure ROCUs operate in a co-ordinated and consistent way across England and Wales; the Home Office and other relevant interested parties should adopt the arrangements so devised and provide the necessary resources to ensure their successful operation.

Cause of concern

We found that the complexity and short-term nature of ROCU funding has a significant detrimental effect on how well they operate. We also found that local interests, rather than regional and national threat, risk and harm, affected prioritisation.

Feedback from across the ROCUs, from senior managers to frontline staff, consistently identified funding as their top concern. This was echoed when interviewing national leads.

Business leads find it difficult to plan, staff face uncertainty about the tenure of their posts, ROCUs struggle to attract and retain talent based on fixed-term arrangements and they can't invest effectively in specialist capabilities. This is neither effective nor efficient and is a cause of concern.

Recommendation 7

7. By February 2022, the Home Office should lead work with the NPCC and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) to identify a sustainable funding model for ROCUs that: • provides long term clarity and certainty to the financial position of the ROCUs, to allow for future business planning and more financial stability; and • enables ROCUs to lead the response to SOC in their region.