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Dear Home Secretary,

I write in response to the HMICFRS thematic inspection report 'Disproportionate use of police powers - A spotlight on Stop and Search and the use of force'.

I acknowledge the eight recommendations made in this HMICFRS inspection report (listed in appendix A), and understand that six of those recommendations (1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7) are applicable to all Forces, including Essex Police.

I am aware of the huge importance of this thematic report and welcome the national overview on this topic. It is an area of specific interest to me, on which I receive regular reports through my Performance and Resources Scrutiny Board.

Stop and Search is a useful and effective policing tool and one that has been used with good results in Essex, whilst maintaining the strong support of our communities. However, without that strong support its use can also carry significant risks.

I acknowledge that Essex Police are disproportionate in the use of Stop and Search and use of force, but I am encouraged by the recognition and actions undertaken to better understand this and the underlying reasons for it. It is important when looking at this area to differentiate where stop and searches lead to a positive result such as weapons or drugs being taken off the streets.

Considering proportionality in isolation is not enough; we must also look at the proportionality of stop and searches which do not result in a positive result, while also engaging effectively with communities around these issues. Over the last year confidence in Essex Police has increased significantly. This is also true in relation to the confidence

our communities have that Essex Police will use Stop and Search powers fairly and respectfully.

It is pleasing to see proactive work by the Force in holding conversation with the communities affected, with the aim of both understanding the impacts of these powers and explaining the reasons for their use. Working together to keep our communities safe is vital and underpins the crucial relationship between the Force and the communities it protects.

The Chief Constable has provided a detailed response to me regarding each of the six recommendations assigned to Essex Police which has provided additional reassurance to me of his approach.

I know that the Force undertake regular internal monitoring through a quarterly Use of Force Board and quarterly Equality Diversity Inclusion and Cohesion meeting, which includes external representation. Use of Force and Stop and Search are also topics considered by the various local Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) across the county and a subject that is discussed regularly at my own scrutiny and governance boards.

I have received assurance from my Chief Constable that Essex Police is in a good position in respect of these recommendations and having undertaken my own scrutiny share this view. Local ongoing work includes debriefing after officer assaults, external scrutiny in relation to Stop & Search encounters, scrutiny around the outcomes of Use of Force complaints, and improvements to ethnicity recording which will enable both transparency with the public and issues of disproportionality to be identified and action taken to address. The Force also intends to adopt the new personal safety training package, being developed by the College of Policing, in 2022.

In addition to the work led by the Force, in my role as Chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board I have recently commissioned a piece of research to be undertaken by Anglia Ruskin University. This research is exploring disproportionality in the wider criminal justice system, recognising the importance of the whole system being efficient, effective and just.

We will use the observations and recommendations contained in this report to inform our work in Essex.

I will continue to monitor the work of Essex Police in this regard, and to hold the Chief Constable to account, 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 1-8

Recommendation 1 - By July 2022, forces should ensure that officers and staff have effective communication skills, in line with the National Policing Guidelines on Conflict Management. This should be in addition to existing training on conflict management and de-escalation.

Recommendation 2 - By July 2021, forces should ensure that communication skills are reinforced as part of the programme of continuing professional development for officers and staff, and that supervisors are supported to routinely and frequently debrief officers on these skills using body-worn video footage.

Recommendation 3 - By September 2021, forces should:

- ensure that officers record on body-worn video (when this is available) the entirety of all stop and search encounters, including traffic stops and use of force incidents;
- have a structured process for regularly reviewing and monitoring internally a sufficient sample of body-worn video footage to identify and disseminate learning and hold officers to account when behaviour falls below acceptable standards; and
- provide external scrutiny panel members with access to samples of body-worn video footage showing stop and search encounters and use of force incidents, taking account of the safeguards in the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice.

Recommendation 4 - The Home Office and the NPCC should take steps to ensure that the quality of the data collected on the number of incidents where force has been used to effect a stop and search is sufficient for publication. The Home Office should publish this data as soon as possible.

This is a Home Office/NPCC recommendation.

Recommendation 5 - By July 2021, forces should ensure they have effective internal monitoring processes on the use of force, to help them to identify and understand disproportionate use, explain the reasons and implement any necessary improvement action.

Recommendation 6 - By July 2021, forces should ensure they have effective external scrutiny processes in place in relation to the use of force. Forces should take account of feedback and update the scrutiny panel and the community on the action taken.

Recommendation 7 - With immediate effect, forces should ensure that all stop and search records include detail of the self-defined ethnicity of the subject. When this information is refused by the subject, the officer-defined ethnicity code should be recorded.

Recommendation 8 - By December 2021, the Home Office should agree, nationally, a minimum standard for monitoring stop and search powers. HMICFRS commits to working on this with the Home Office and other interested parties, such as the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council.

This is a Home Office recommendation.