

Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

section55responses@homeoffice.gov.uk

Kelvedon Park, London Road, Rivenhall,
Witham, Essex, CM8 3HB

Telephone: 01245 291600
Fax: 01245 291601
E-mail: pfcc@essex.police.uk
<http://www.essex.pfcc.police.uk>

Your ref: n/a
Our ref: SH
Date: **25 January 2023**
Enquiries to: Suzanne Harris
E-mail: pfcc@essex.police.uk

Dear Home Secretary

I write in response to the HMICFRS inspection report: **An inspection into how well the police and other agencies use digital forensics in their investigations.**

I acknowledge the 9 recommendations made in this report and understand that 3 of the recommendations are applicable to all Forces, including Essex Police.

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

Essex Police is already compliant with recommendation 2. A Forensics and Facial Recognition Board is overseen by an Assistant Chief Constable and meets regularly to ensure good understanding of local demand.

Essex Police is already compliant with recommendation 8, as Essex Police Digital Forensic capability is fully integrated into the structure of Forensic Services. A proposed Forensic Re-design further would serve to enhance this integration through total harmonisation of digital forensic capability.

Essex Police is currently working towards compliance with recommendation 4. It has been identified that only one element of operations is preventing full compliance and work to determine the best solution is well underway. It is anticipated that full compliance will be achieved by September 2023, as required by the recommendation.

As the use of digital media continues to grow, and it's use in relation to crime increases also, digital forensics are a vital tool in policing. Whilst digital media can aid and assist crime taking place, it can also assist the process of identifying perpetrators and bringing about justice. How digital forensics are managed will remain of key importance for the foreseeable future.

It was pleasing to see Essex identified in the report as a good example of innovative practice, in relation to work of the child protection team with the Crown Prosecution Service. It was also good to see that Essex is ahead of some other areas in preparing to move to cloud-based storage. Whilst I recognise the concerns that some have about the use of cloud-based services, I am happy that Essex is taking a proactive approach to secure future storage capacity. Nevertheless, I welcome the proposal that NPCC/Home Office guidance will be made available to all, to inform future decision-making.

I will continue to maintain close scrutiny of the work of Essex Police in this regard, and to hold the Chief Constable to account.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Hirst', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Roger Hirst
Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

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

Appendix A – Recommendations

Recommendation 2

- By December 2023, each force in England and Wales should develop a governance and oversight framework to better understand the local demand for digital forensic services.

Recommendation 4

- By September 2023, the National Police Chiefs' Council and all forces within England and Wales need to include the management of digital forensic kiosks in their governance and oversight frameworks.

Recommendation 8

- By November 2024, chief constables should integrate digital forensic services under their existing forensic science structure.