

Andy Cooke QPM DL
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Date: 3 August 2023
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Dear Mr Cooke

I write in response to **State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2022**.

I acknowledge force grades which are included in this report, and the recommendations. I also make the following observations:

- There is a fine line between recognising that confidence in policing is low whilst providing constructive criticism and messaging/language that further erodes public confidence. In places the language in this report is not helpful in supporting change and improvement. For example, stating that '*police are experiencing one of their biggest crises in living memory*' is a phrase that will draw media focus, which will likely ignore the 'but...' that follows. Lack of public confidence is something that will increase the challenge for policing as it has a negative impact on engagement and information sharing, and whilst an honest and transparent evaluation of the current picture is necessary, language which dramatises the position will further erode public confidence and make the needed changes more difficult to achieve.
- The report says that police have '*strayed into doing the work of other services and not just at times of crisis*'. In the majority of cases police have stepped up because other services, such as mental health, have failed. This criticism is harsh, as police have long been attempting to engage with partners about this, and have been only too aware of the impact on their own resources. I wholeheartedly agree that police should be allowed to focus on policing, but for this to happen other agencies need to fulfil their own responsibilities so the public are not exposed to unnecessary risk. This is difficult to influence in a dysfunctional wider system, and at present I have no confidence of there being an effective plan for resolution of the mental health situation in Essex.
- I agree that the rate of offences brought to justice is not where it should be. This is not, however, solely the responsibility of policing. The police are just one step in the criminal justice system. As the report notes, CPS are often responsible for the charging decisions made, and continued delays in the court system continue to impact on victims and case outcomes.

- Acknowledging the challenges of increasing numbers of officers very rapidly as part of the Police Uplift Programme, I would like to put on record that in Essex this has not led to providing vetting clearance for people unsuited to the service. Essex has maintained high vetting standards (evidenced by the recent 'good' grading by HMICFRS). In the last year alone 119 individuals failed vetting in Essex. However, the challenges that a rapidly expanding force now faces, such as pressure on training and lack of experience, are something we are very aware of locally.
- I welcome the reference to the importance of specialist police staff sometimes being more suitable than officers to fulfil frontline roles.
- I support the proposed changes to the funding formula and would welcome these be introduced at an early opportunity.
- I agree with the need to get the basics right. In particular:
 - The need to prioritise response to calls – when the public call the police it is the first point of contact and creates an impression that impacts what is to follow. This is also the point at which situations are triaged and the need for any emergency response is identified. It is vital that calls are answered efficiently and effectively, and that public expectations are met.
 - The importance of attendance, or ability to utilise video call technology – the variety of incidents which police have to deal with mean that there will always be a need to prioritise the use of resources, however, we know that attendance, or the ability speak to someone face-to-face via virtual technology, is important victims. As well as providing reassurance and improving confidence, it also helps police to get best evidence to support investigations.
 - The act of keeping victims informed – this is important to maintain confidence, and we know that failure to update victims can have significant impact on their willingness to support prosecutions and to report future incidents.
- I fully support the focus on neighbourhood policing as '*the building block of policing in England and Wales*'. Neighbourhood Policing features in my Police and Crime Plan and plays a key role in crime prevention.
- I support the use of Stop and Search as an essential tool for policing. Data in Essex has shown that whilst there is some disproportionality in stops undertaken, this is not evident in the outcomes. Effective use of stop and search helps to keep communities safe and I am pleased that Essex Police has a dedicated Board to oversee it's deployment and ensure it is used appropriately and effectively.
- I do have some concern about greater power being given to HMICFRS and the College of Policing, as well as the suggestion of '*greater central governance*'. It is disappointing that this was not acknowledged when PUP set forces against each other in recruitment practices, allowing some forces to pro-actively encourage transferees from others, including the use of financial incentives. Without accountability no more power can be given; under current legislation PCC/PFCCs are accountable to the public, and that is why it is appropriate for powers to sit with them.
Increased centralisation carries risks of influence and of failure of large forces. This could undermine what we need to prioritise to realise what we want to achieve locally.
- In Essex the relationship between the Chief Constable and myself as PFCC is excellent. The relationship is professional, with both parties having a good understanding of statutory obligations. There is no reason that the Chief Constable and PFCC should not be capable of working together for the benefit of public.

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', written in a cursive style.

Roger Hirst
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

cc Ben-Julian Harrington, Chief Constable, Essex Police