

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

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: 31 August 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 of how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms.**

I acknowledge the twelve recommendations made in this report and understand that eight recommendations (listed in appendix A for reference) are applicable to all Forces, including Essex Police.

The Chief Constable has provided a detailed response to me regarding the eight recommendations applicable to all Forces and assured me that all have been added to the force's register of HMICFRS recommendations. I am pleased to see that Essex Police is compliant with six recommendations and is working towards compliance with the other two, recommendations 2 and 7.

With regard to recommendation 2 (*By 31 July 2024, chief constables should make sure there is access to both specialist strategic firearms commanders and specialist tactical firearms commanders, through a 24-hour rota covering their region.*), it is of note that of the four specialist tactical firearms commanders in the Eastern Region, two are based in Essex. Essex also has two specialist strategic firearms commanders. Whilst regional cover is not in place in line with the recommendation, and this clearly needs to be resolved, Essex has a system in place based on goodwill, which means that all SFC and CTFC's are able to contact an STFC/SSFC to take over high threat operations or the deployment of the CTSFO network. For the 7 Force area, a strategic armed policing board action is underway to better define a pathway to prepare candidates for the extremely challenging course which would enable better cover across the region.

With regard to recommendation 7 (*By 31 October 2023, the regional armed policing lead should share armed policing exercises with the National Armed Policing Portfolio. This would allow opportunities for learning to be identified and shared.*), this is a recommendation for the regional armed policing lead, but Essex Police are well placed to feed in to this, with large training exercises held at Stansted airport and at other locations in the county.

As a force, Essex Police made significant preparation prior to the inspection, including demonstrating a response to the Manchester Arena Inquiry findings, even before they had been published formally. I understand that feedback to the force noted strong processes, log keeping and depth of knowledge from Operational Policing Command and those tasked with conducting firearms operations.

The force is supportive of the recommendations, although conscious that there may be some implications in relation to cost or training budgets for the Force to remain fully compliant with the national recommendations. At a time when budgets are under pressure it is hoped that additional costs can be kept to a minimum.

I will continue to maintain close scrutiny of the work of Essex Police in this regard, and to hold the Chief Constable to account for the timely compliance with the outstanding recommendations.

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

Appendix A – Recommendations

Recommendation 1

By 31 July 2024, the College of Policing should introduce new entry criteria for those attending initial training for strategic and tactical firearms commander. The selection process should be similar to the process used to select public order commanders.

Recommendation 2

By 31 July 2024, chief constables should make sure there is access to both specialist strategic firearms commanders and specialist tactical firearms commanders, through a 24-hour rota covering their region.

Recommendation 3

By 31 October 2023, all chief constables should make sure the armed response vehicle asset tracking equipment, as provided by Counter Terrorism Policing, is available and used in their forces. They should train relevant staff in its use.

Recommendation 4

By 31 July 2024, the College of Policing should review the content and extend the length of the strategic firearms commander course. It should make sure candidates have sufficient opportunities to learn and practise the skills of strategic firearms command.

Recommendation 5

By 31 December 2023, all chief constables should make sure that all strategic and tactical firearms commanders have observed the firearms tactics and the use of specialist munitions they can authorise, before being operationally deployed.

Recommendation 6

By 31 December 2023, chief constables should make sure that the annual accreditation process for strategic and tactical firearms commanders includes familiarisation with any new weapons systems and observation of any new tactics or specialist munitions the force has introduced or is planning to introduce.

Recommendation 7

By 31 October 2023, the regional armed policing lead should share armed policing exercises with the National Armed Policing Portfolio. This would allow opportunities for learning to be identified and shared.

Recommendation 8

With immediate effect, each assistant chief constable regional firearms lead should attend all National Armed Policing Portfolio meetings. If they are unable to attend, they should make sure another assistant chief constable armed policing lead from a force in their region attends on their behalf.

Recommendation 9

By 31 December 2023, the College of Policing should issue updated armoury guidance.

Recommendation 10

With immediate effect, chief constables should improve senior officer oversight of their armouries, including an independent annual audit.

Recommendation 11

By 31 December 2023, the National Armed Policing Portfolio and the College of Policing should issue minimum standard guidance for the completion of records in relation to armed policing operations. That guidance, in support of the authorised professional practice – armed policing, should include the requirement for the retention, recovery and audit of those records.

Recommendation 12

With immediate effect, chief constables, through their armed policing governance structure, should make sure that all armed deployment records are stored and auditable.