



The police response to burglary, robbery and other acquisitive crime

Response from Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner

As Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands, I acknowledge the concern that the response to serious acquisitive crime from policing is not consistently good enough and that low positive outcome rates impact upon public confidence in policing.

It is concerning that a common issue which is picked up in HMICFRS inspections now is the lack of capacity within police forces to properly investigate and respond to crime. Within the 2021/22 PEEL inspection it was noted that West Midlands Police are not investigating crime well enough due to a lack of capacity and capability in investigation teams. In short, the inspection found that West Midlands Police is an efficient police force, yet, lacks the capacity and resources to cope with the demand it faces.

I note the following finding from HMIC's report: 'No communities are immune from SAC, but nearly a quarter of these offences are concentrated in just 5 percent of local areas. London, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands have significantly more SAC reported than other areas.' Given that areas of high crime on the whole coincide with areas of greater deprivation, it is not surprising that concentrated levels of Serious Acquisitive Crime can be found in three of the Force areas with the highest levels of deprivation. Funding therefore needs to be distributed on the basis of most need. At present, inexcusably, it is not.

I am concerned at how the current cost of living crisis will impact upon policing within the West Midlands. The cost-of-living crisis is likely to lead to an increase in crimes such as theft and domestic abuse, both of which are offences which are concentrated more within metropolitan areas than elsewhere. Coupled with this, factors associated with the cost of living crisis, such as the significant increases in energy costs, have contributed to West Midlands Police having to find £30 million pounds worth of savings in the following financial year.

The national failure to fully implement the existing police funding formula has left police forces like West Midlands Police structurally underfunded. The government's Police Grant Settlement does not maintain the baseline funding that the force needs to operate on a day to day basis, to deliver an effective and efficient police service.

I am working with West Midlands Police to ensure that as many officers gained, as part of the so called Police Uplift Programme, are posted within investigation and neighbourhood teams. However, the recruitment and training of investigation staff will take time.

Additionally, the 1,200 officers which West Midlands Police will gain as part of the so called Police Uplift Programme, will not replace the 2,221 Police Officers and many hundreds of essential police staff that have been lost following the financial cuts imposed after 2010. As such, the focus on simply increasing staffing to tackle the lack of capacity within investigations, without additional resources, is not possible to achieve.

The finding in relation to omnicompetent call handlers not comprehensively recording reports of volume crime when under pressure to answer 999 calls is also concerning. Call handlers within West

Midlands Police are omnicompetent and the pressure to answer 999 calls is a scenario being seen locally and one which is impacting on 101 call handling. West Midlands Police are receiving volumes of 999 calls which are continuously higher than ever seen before and are also tackling higher levels of serious crime, such as firearms and knife crime offences, than that of other force areas.

The increased volume of 999 calls is not a phenomenon unique to the West Midlands and, given the recent focus on answering 999 calls and the publication “league tables” for 999 performance, without providing additional resource to improve performance, it is not surprising that HMICFRS are identifying instances where the pressure to answer 999 calls is impacting upon police functions elsewhere.

The 2021/22 PEEL inspection noted that West Midlands Police’s operating model reflects its commitment to effective neighbourhood policing over the longer term with dedicated neighbourhood teams preventing and tackling local problems. Preventing crime and protecting vulnerable people are strategic objectives for both my Office and the force, with strong and sustained partnership activity being a key element to preventing and tackling neighbourhood crime as well as violence. Increasing capacity within neighbourhood policing is another priority area locally in terms of the so called Police Uplift Programme.

The speed of police response and attendance at crime scenes are important factors which can increase victim satisfaction, trust and confidence in policing. I will continue to work with West Midlands Police to increase victim satisfaction, trust and confidence, as well as with the intention of meeting Service Level Agreements outlined within the Citizens Charter.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Foster', written in a cursive style.

Simon Foster

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner