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An inspection of how well the police tackle serious youth violence. Response from Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

The inspection published on 8th March 2023 contains findings on how well the police address serious youth violence to reduce violent crime involving young people, particularly between the ages of 14 and 24 years old. West Midlands Police (WMP) were one of twelve forces inspected, with fieldwork for the inspection taking place in January and February 2022.

Reducing Serious Youth Violence (SYV) is a key priority in my Police and Crime Plan. This includes monitoring WMP's performance in this area and their participation and role in the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP). The West Midlands' VRP is one of 20 across the country and it works towards preventing and reducing violence. Highlighted in the inspection, official statistics for 2021 reveal WMP as one of the three force areas with the highest volume of knife-enabled crime.

The office monitors the number of serious youth violence offences and the positive outcome rate for victims quarterly, as part of the Strategic Policing and Crime Board (SPCB), and force leads regularly provide updates on work that is being carried out. The latest inspection report detailed current rising trends and driving factors that are particularly significant in the West Midlands including deprivation, unemployment, low educational attainment and homelessness.

It is undoubtedly more effective to counter the driving factors of serious youth violence, including trauma and normalised behaviours. One of the key lines of inquiry that the inspection looked to answer was how well the police work with partner organisations and take a public health approach to identify causes of violence and prevention interventions.

It is encouraging to observe that the inspectorate recognised the integral work of the VRP in training all force custody staff in the trauma informed approach and the work of the commissioned St Giles Trust which provides mentoring from youth workers to young people in custody suites, upon release and in Accident and Emergency departments as part of its Teachable Moments project. Adopting a Public Health Approach is also a key area of WMP's Project Guardian, a GRIP funded project which aims to suppress and reduce Serious Youth Violence, coordinating with the VRP and Local Policing Area Commanders, to drive a Public

Health Approach through Local Authority CSP structures. Alongside this, the project prioritises problem-oriented policing, analytical investment, visible policing in the form of targeted Guardian Patrols at hotspots and delivering on GRIP funding.

The inspection presented four recommendations, the latter two are of most relevance:

Recommendation 3 - By 31 March 2024, chief constables should make sure their officers are trained in the use of Home Office crime outcome 22.

Outcome 22 is used under exceptional circumstances to prevent future offending by diverting suspects to a reform programme. The inspection found that some officers have a flawed understanding of it, believing that the suspect must admit to the offence for this outcome to be used, when this is not the case. The inspectorate noted that this misunderstanding may further disproportionately affect suspects from ethnic minority backgrounds who, as research suggests, already have a heightened lack of trust in the Criminal Justice System and are less likely to admit guilt than their white counterparts.

In WMP, all applications to finalise investigations as Outcome 22 require a rationale by a Chief Inspector and submission to the Community Security Trust (CST) for checking. CST reject submissions that do not comply with the policy. There is also a force policy on Outcome 22, which is available on the Policy Portal for officers and staff to view. This includes procedural guidance, with an outline of the difference between Out of Court Disposals and Outcome 22 and practical examples of when to use Outcome 22.

Recommendation 4 - By 31 March 2024, chief constables should make sure their forces, through data collection and analysis, understand the levels of racial disproportionality in serious youth violence in their force areas.

The inspectorate found that some forces don't fully understand the extent of racial disproportionality in serious youth violence in their areas. This means that some forces do not have fully informed plans to address the over representation of ethnic minority perpetrators and victims of SYV. The latest Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA), conducted by the VRP, contains information on ethnic disparities of those involved in SYV.

Capturing good quality ethnicity data is part of a wider national issue amongst police forces but where it is captured, which is in around 50% of cases, police data reveals Mixed (White and Black Caribbean), Black (Caribbean) and Black (Other) are disproportionately over-represented as suspects and victims of violence. A key finding was that young people of Black (Caribbean) ethnicity make up almost 6% of victims of serious violence and more than 7% of suspects, whilst only being 2% of the West Midlands population. The SNA

also noted that young Black boys are hugely over-represented in the County Lines data (38% compared to 8% of the population, according to Census 2021 data). Whilst, these findings are telling of the work that needs to be done to reduce certain ethnic disparities, we agree with the inspections recommendation of improving data collection of protected characteristics, as the current 50% capture rate is not enough to provide detailed and targeted plans.

WMP have informed the office that they regularly review protected characteristics data through Service Improvement meetings, which are attended by heads of department and also regularly submit a data collection to HMICFRS, which requests breakdown of ethnicity data in custody. Doing so, has seen an improvement of how the force collate ethnicity data over the last two years.

This recommendation is part of a key line of enquiry within the inspection, which concerns how well the police use their powers to reduce SYV and whether forces truly understand racial disproportionality. This includes effective training on the stop and search power, which has long been identified as an area where racial disproportionality is prominent.

The office has set up ten stop and search scrutiny panels within the WMP area, which reflect their local communities and help to build public confidence. It is encouraging that the inspection recognised the important work of these panels in holding the police to account, by analysing stop and search records and reviewing body worn video.

Yours faithfully,



Simon Foster

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner