

State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2022 ('the Assessment'). Response from Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Assessment was published on 9th June 2023. It provides an informed assessment of policing, acknowledging factors, that are beyond police control. Limited resources and increased demand, placed on the police, have a material effect on how well officers and police staff can fulfil their duties. It is reassuring, that the Inspectorate acknowledges the pressures that police forces face, particularly as some forces, including West Midlands Police (WMP), do not have adequate and fair funding, or the resources to provide the public with the service they are entitled to.

It was recognised within the assessment, that the current national funding formula is not fit for purpose, because it does not properly have regard to the difference in needs between forces. The national funding formula, has urgently required review, for the past eight years. Despite, amongst many other matters, being the second highest force for receiving 999 emergency call demand, WMP are continuously underfunded.

Whilst the government stated, it was committed to having a new funding formula in place, by the end of this Parliament, which will adequately and fairly reflect the different demands facing each police force, current funding cuts of £28 million pounds, both this year and next year, continue to seriously undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of West Midlands Police. Inadequate resources, means less ability to tackle the main issues, emphasised within the annual assessment.

Improving Public Confidence and Satisfaction

It is stated within the Assessment, that police forces are not always focusing on the issues that matter most to the public, including the need to improve public confidence and satisfaction. This is a key aim of the Police and Crime Plan (PCP) and alongside the force, work has been underway to have a clearer picture of public confidence in policing within the West Midlands. In the June 2023 Strategic Policing and Crime Board (SPCB), the force was asked to produce a report, providing an update on current confidence and satisfaction levels. One of the key changes intended to impact trust and confidence, is the force's new Change Programme.

This is the new operating model, introduced on the 3 April 2023. It combines Birmingham East and West, into one Local Policing Area (LPA). Alongside the 6 other LPAs, Birmingham is now commanded by a Chief Superintendent, who has increased authority and control of resources, to meet local needs more effectively. The Change Programme aims to improve engagement, enhance understanding of local priorities and flex resources accordingly. I will continue to monitor the impact of the Change Programme on public confidence within the SPCB and whether the intended impact of WMP, being a 'police service that is big enough to cope with everything that is asked of them, whilst also showing that they are small enough to care about the things that really matter to communities' is in fact being realised.

Improving confidence and satisfaction, is driven by victim experience of the police. A new Victims Strategy is being finalised within the force, with a supporting delivery plan, to track and ensure progress through the monthly Victims Thematic Board. The force is imminently due to launch an internal campaign, to raise the profile in this area, remind staff of their role and provide further guidance.

Performance in this area is measured through SMS Surveys, which are sent to all citizens that are dealt with by Force Contact, Force Response and Investigations. The surveys ask questions on whether the police dealt with their issue and if their interaction was polite and respectful. Results are reported and monitored in the SPCB meetings and further insights are also provided to the [Police and Crime Panel](#).

An effective method of improving confidence and satisfaction levels, is to increase neighbourhood policing so as to ensure that issues that matter most to the local community are being dealt with. This was recognised within the assessment, noting that it is not 'just a 'nice to do', but rather fundamental to the police's relationship with the public and to preventing crime'.

One of the aims within the PCP, is to rebuild community policing. That includes, increasing the number of police officers, allocated to community policing by 450 and ensuring we aim to retain the number of Police Community Support Officers, at the establishment of 464. That is because we need preventative, proactive, problem solving and visible policing out on the streets, keeping people, families, businesses and the local community safe.

Better understanding of Stop and Search

It is stated within the assessment, that stop and search needs to be better targeted within police forces. The Chief Inspector is correct, that public support for stop and search is dependent on them being done fairly, effectively and proportionately. I would add, lawfully. The power to detain and search someone is intrusive and when improperly used, it can damage trust and confidence in policing, particularly for Black, Asian and young people.

Within the West Midlands, we have 10 active community-led scrutiny panels that review stop and search reports and view Body Worn Video footage. Panels review whether the correct procedure has been followed, aiming to ensure full transparency, gauge better practices and improve confidence in policing. Within the force, compliance of body worn camera is monitored by a Silver meeting, which is chaired by a superintendent and in which teams or individuals can be scrutinised, for any failure to comply.

The Assessment commented that officers must clearly communicate the purpose of searches to individuals being searched. The current positive outcome rate, is around 30% within WMP and it is an aim within the Police and Crime Plan, to have this figure closer to at least half of searches. Positive Outcome Rates and disproportionality within LPAs is monitored, via performance reports in internal group meetings and within SPCBs.

In June's SPCB, the force submitted a [report on progress towards Stop and Search \(S&S\)](#) and Use of Force objectives within the PCP. Board members were assured that all S&S records are scrutinised by supervisors, who review the grounds for the search and if body worn video was switched on. This review procedure, alongside information within the 'Fair and Effective Use of Police Powers Board' and force led 'Communities Board', help to direct which searches should be reviewed in more depth. Currently all stop searches of black

males, aged between 18 and 34, undergo an enhanced review by a supervisor, due to disproportionate search rates against Black individuals, within certain policing neighbourhoods.

The force is continuing to improve on the good work that was identified by the inspectorate previously in their 2021 report, 'Disproportionate use of police powers: A spotlight on stop and search and the use of force'. The report highlighted initiatives within WMP, such as the 'Fairness in Policing' team and the force's 'reflective learning', which were given as examples of positive practice. The office will continue working with the force, to ensure that S&S is used fairly, effectively, legally, proportionally, lawfully and only when necessary.

Standards and Culture must improve

Racist, misogynistic, homophobic or other problematic attitudes of some police officers, can impact public confidence in policing as a whole. These issues were explored within the HMICFRS inspection on vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the police service. Within our response to the inspection, we included what the force have done, to ensure that all vetting is up to date and to ensure that only officers committed to the highest standards of conduct, ethics, integrity and professionalism are employed by West Midlands Police.

In the review of progress against the recommendations, the final estimate of WMP's progress was around 90%. I continue to hold WMP to account, to ensure it complies with vetting procedures and deals with complaints and misconduct, including monitoring performance on the number of complaints resolved and resolution timeliness, concerning both schedule 3 and non-schedule 3 misconduct.

The Assessment noted public concern about standards, especially due to events such as the murder of Sarah Everard, by a Metropolitan police officer and the profoundly damning report by Baroness Casey, which concluded that the Metropolitan Police is institutionally racist, misogynistic, homophobic and corrupt.

All forces had to look introspectively concerning their organisational culture and as a response, our office decided to convene a West Midlands Police Public Accountability Forum in June 2023, at which West Midlands Police could explain to the public, key stakeholders and the media, in an open and transparent way, the work that is taking place within WMP to prevent and tackle any and all of these issues.

It is important to hold such events, to understand public feeling and be able to reflect on changes. There is no place in the police service for anyone that is not prepared to comply with the highest standards of conduct, ethics, integrity and professionalism and the public should feel confident that this is the case within WMP.

Officer and Staff Wellbeing

It was highlighted within the Assessment, that the well-being of officers and staff is an area of particular concern. Key issues that were identified included, officer fatigue levels, low job satisfaction, work related mental health issues, as well as injury. Within WMP, officer well-being is a priority and is routinely monitored. Physical assaults on officers are tracked, via police dashboards and sickness levels are reported in an executive summary every month.

In year ending May 2023, around 6% of working days were lost across the Force due to sickness absence and within this, 2% were due to psychological disorders. WMP is partnered with 'Vivup', an employee assistance programme, which provides counselling services, offering professional support 24-7 to all employees. Alongside counselling, Vivup provide additional resources, including podcasts on a range of topics such as resilience and mindfulness, self-compassion webinars and self-help books.

Additionally, 'Peer Support' was launched in April 2023, for colleagues to support each other through change. This is a voluntary role, alongside WMP's existing wellbeing support and volunteers attended a course in April, organised by the National Wellbeing Service. Other positive changes include wellbeing resources having been made more accessible, via an intranet page with links to a variety of toolkits and wellbeing rooms within certain police stations such as Chelmsley Wood, where officers, staff and volunteers have a designated place to relax and decompress.

Yours faithfully,



Simon Foster

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner