

Homicide prevention: An inspection of the police contribution to the prevention of homicide. Response from Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

Published on the 11th of August 2023, this thematic inspection examined how effectively the police understood, and contributed to the prevention of homicides. It was jointly supported by the National Police Chiefs' Council, the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct. West Midlands Police (WMP) was one of eight forces inspected; eight forces which collectively accounted for 37% (260) of the 696 homicides in England and Wales in year ending March 2022.

Whilst the inspectorate found that most police forces were able to effectively identify the patterns and causes of homicide and prioritise and allocate the right resources to tackle them, a number of shared deficiencies were identified across the force areas. It was considered that there is still far too much inconsistency in homicide prevention. Two recommendations were made for Chief Constables:

By 31 August 2024, chief constables in England and Wales should devise an approach to make sure their force can, on a sufficiently frequent basis, produce an analytical report concerning its death investigations. This will help the force to:

- a) **better understand the pattern of death reports across the force area, drawing on force data and information gathered by other organisations, including the NHS and local authorities; and**
- b) **identify any linked series of death reports.**

I am grateful to the Inspectorate, for highlighting a deficiency in the analysis of death investigations and, therefore, assessment of similarities between incidents. The report notes that police forces are overly reliant on examining this information within their Daily Management Meetings, where the level of detail discussed about cases is not always sufficient to identify associations.

By 1 December 2023, chief constables should make sure their force can quickly identify lessons from homicides and serious violence incidents. The process should be capable of involving partner organisations when appropriate, so that lessons can be learned more widely.

I am grateful to the Inspectorate, for identifying that whilst most forces were able to effectively identify learning from major crime and statutory reviews, operational improvements were not consistently made from this learning. It was found that the governance meetings within forces, which allocate recommendations were not effective.

Additionally, the inspection made aware concerns, that the partner organisations were not always willing to share information about serious violence, a missed opportunity, that should be rectified by the introduction of the Serious Violence Duty (SVD). I agree that homicides cannot be prevented by policing alone. Public authorities have a significant role to play and must work well with the police, in order to prevent circumstances which may lead to homicide. I will offer my support to the Chief Constable in liaising

with partner agencies, to ensure that where they do not respond, we identify them and report this back at the highest levels.

Lessons can be learnt more widely through improved engagement with the public. Whilst there is often so much in the media which highlights the negative impact that social media can have, it is equally a vital tool in reaching young audiences that constitute the majority of homicide victims and offenders and potentially influencing their behaviour in a positive manner. In this regard, I note that the Inspectorate commended WMP, for innovatively connecting with key social media influencers, to spread homicide prevention messages to young people.

Prevention and intervention must be at the heart of the response against homicide. This is reflected in the West Midlands Police and Crime Plan and the work that the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) do, in order to reduce serious violence and the number of individuals committing homicide within our region.

I am the Chair of the VRP Strategic Board, which co-ordinates the regional response and has oversight of the local arrangements for preventing and reducing serious youth violence. The Board has recently agreed a Data Sharing Framework, which will support the sharing of data across the specified authorities and other agencies, in order to improve our understanding of risk, threat and harm and inform our public health approach.

Yours faithfully,

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

Simon Foster

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner