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An inspection of the West Midlands regional response to serious and organised crime. Response from Simon Foster, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

Published on 14th May 2024, this inspection presents regional findings on the effectiveness of responses to Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) across West Midlands Police (WMP), the Regional Organised Crime Unit West Midlands (ROCUWM), West Mercia Police, Warwickshire Police, and Staffordshire Police. The inspection took place during the summer of 2023 and provides a grading for each police force and the ROCUWM, highlighting areas for improvement and innovative practices.

As the report indicates, the majority of SOC demand in the region, particularly concerning high threat and high volume, originates from WMP. Consequently, it is crucial that WMP ensure their response meets the highest standards, to protect local communities by disrupting organised crime groups, individual criminals, and their enablers. The four regional police forces and ROCUWM, should enhance their collaboration to tackle SOC more effectively. I agree with the inspection findings in relation to the importance of a unified approach, noting that coordinated efforts can significantly bolster the impact on disrupting criminal activities in the region.

WMP and ROCUWM response and efforts to combat serious and organised crime were rated as 'Adequate' by the inspectorate, indicating that competent working practices are in place. However, there is room for progress, with specific areas of improvement identified in the report.

Regarding the regional response, the inspectorate recommends that ROCUWM should enhance its management of SOC offenders, particularly within the Regional Prison Intelligence Unit (RPIU). The current resourcing of the RPIU is inadequate for the number of prisons and SOC offenders in the region. There is particular concern, that only two individuals are part of the Multi-agency Response to Serious and Organised Crime (MARSOC) programme, and that MARSOC disruptions in WMROCU, are the lowest in England and Wales. To address this, a regional SOC board meets alongside quarterly Regional Governance Groups, to hold ROCUWM and local forces accountable for their progress in tackling SOC, ensuring that the improvements identified by the inspectorate are implemented.

‘West Midlands Police should improve its serious and organised crime local profile’.

After reviewing the SOC local profile, the inspectorate identified the need for improvement due to several inadequacies. Although the local profile covers the geographic area of the force, it fails to address the impact of SOC at the local, neighbourhood policing level. This is a significant oversight, as the main purpose of the profile is to focus on specific local areas of risk. Additionally, the current profile does not examine place-based harm or identify vulnerabilities within communities.

Moreover, many of the recommendations in the profile are directed at the police, and most of the data used is sourced from police records. The inspectorate suggests that, WMP would benefit from incorporating data from partnerships to enhance the local profile. By including information from various SOC partners, the profile could better recognise actions and provide more comprehensive recommendations, for tackling serious and organised crime.

‘West Midlands Police should increase its financial investigation capacity’.

The inspectorate found that there were insufficient financial investigators available, to engage at the early stages of serious and organised crime investigations. This lack of resources resulted in limited capacity, to proactively identify economic evidence and address criminal wealth. Personnel from the Economic Crime Unit (ECU) reported that, they often only become involved towards the conclusion of investigations, despite being able to provide much more valuable input, throughout the entire process. Additionally, investigators revealed that they frequently refrain from requesting ECU support, because they doubt it will be available. Consequently, I support the finding that there is a clear opportunity to enhance ECU resourcing and skills, to improve their involvement and effectiveness in investigations.

‘West Midlands Police should improve the quality and consistency of its 4P plans’.

After reviewing several 4P plans, the inspectorate recommends improving their quality and consistency. These plans, essential for addressing SOC threats and known gangs, were found lacking. One team member held responsibility for managing 4P plans for over ninety gangs, which compromised their quality and effectiveness. Some plans contained insufficient information about the SOC threat being investigated, falling short of acceptable standards.

Additionally, the force uses different systems to store 4P plans, due to concerns about the reliability of the primary crime and intelligence system. The inspectorate found minimal evidence that the force routinely evaluated efforts to tackle SOC, with lead responsible officers not consistently reviewing 4P plans. This oversight meant the inspectorate was not confident, that 4P plans were driving SOC intervention activities or that officers were recording them accurately.

Despite these issues above, the inspectorate recognised an area of innovative practice by WMP, highlighting their potential for positive development amidst the identified shortcomings.

‘West Midlands Police exploits intelligence from social media sites to tackle serious and organised crime’.

The inspectorate praised WMP use of social media sites. The force operates a proficiently staffed social media hub, where officers undergo specialised training. This hub serves as a vital tool, for gathering intelligence from various social media platforms. The information gathered is instrumental in identifying offenders, facilitating their apprehension and proactively preventing serious and organised crime. Subsequently, this intelligence is relayed to the ROCUWM for action.

In summary, I value this inspection report for its thorough examination of the SOC landscape. It provides invaluable insights and actionable recommendations, regarding the effectiveness of our strategies in tackling serious and organised crime. I am committed to integrating and prioritising these findings into our ongoing efforts to enhance collaboration and strengthen our response, ensuring the safety and security of our communities in the West Midlands region.

Yours faithfully,



Simon Foster

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner