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An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1. Response from Simon Foster, Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands.

In response to the widespread unrest and violent disorder that affected numerous towns and cities across the United Kingdom during the summer of 2024, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) conducted a rapid review of the policing response. This review sought to identify key lessons learned from these events and provide actionable insights to enhance future policing strategies for public order and public safety.

The review was structured into two tranches, with the findings from the first tranche published on the 18th of December 2024. It involved an in-depth examination of eight police forces, where violent disorder had occurred. Although West Midlands Police (WMP) was not one of the forces reviewed, the scope of the assessment extended beyond individual police forces, to include contributions from key partners such as Counter Terrorism Policing, the Fire and Rescue Service and the National Crime Agency. This collaborative approach provided a comprehensive view of the multi-agency response to large-scale incidents.

The inspectorate commended the police service for its national mobilisation of public order public safety (POPS) resources and the swift identification and prosecution of offenders. These actions were pivotal in bringing an end to the disorder and restoring peace to affected communities. The report also praised the professionalism and leadership that took place during the response. However, it highlighted significant deficiencies in the systems and processes governing public order policing, which require reform. The findings underscored the need for improved planning and resource mobilisation at force, regional, and national levels to better anticipate and address violent disorder.

To address these challenges, the inspectorate issued three key recommendations, directed to the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) which includes the collaboration of Chief Constables. These recommendations focus on strengthening capacity, improving coordination, and prioritising officer and staff well-being. I support these recommendations, as they address critical areas of strategic and operational importance, ensuring police forces like WMP are better prepared for future incidents.

Recommendation 1: With immediate effect, the National Police Chiefs' Council, and chief constables, working with the College of Policing and the Home Office, should create a plan and begin work to improve the police service's capacity and capability to respond to widespread violent disorder.

The first recommendation emphasises the need to enhance the capacity and capability of the police service to respond effectively to violent disorder. This requires collaboration between the NPCC, Chief Constables, the College of Policing and the Home Office to develop a comprehensive action plan. Key priorities include reviewing the Strategic Policing Requirement to ensure it aligns with modern demands, evaluating the adequacy of personal protective equipment (PPE) for officer safety, expanding the use of emerging technologies such as drones and investing in tactical training and equipment. These measures will help ensure officers are well-prepared to respond swiftly and safely during times of crisis, protecting both themselves and the public. I advocate for enhanced collaboration among partners, to develop a plan that strengthens the capacity and capability to address widespread disorder effectively.

Recommendation 2: With immediate effect, the National Police Chiefs' Council, and chief constables, working with the College of Policing, should create a plan and begin work to improve how the police service mobilises public order public safety (POPS) resources.

The second recommendation calls for a more coordinated national approach to resource mobilisation during large-scale incidents. Strengthening regional coordination centres, enhancing technology for real-time resource management and implementing structured debriefing processes are essential to achieving this. I support this recommendation as it ensures police forces can deploy resources effectively, respond swiftly to evolving situations and learn consistently from each operation. By fostering greater collaboration and ensuring consistency across all police forces, the service will be better equipped to adapt to emerging threats and respond cohesively to incidents of public disorder.

Recommendation 3: With immediate effect, the National Police Chiefs' Council, and chief constables, working with the College of Policing and the Home Office should create a plan and begin work to improve the well-being support the police service gives to its officers and staff.

I support the final recommendation, which prioritises the well-being of officers and staff, by ensuring they have the necessary support to carry out their duties effectively. Formal agreements with ambulance services and hospital trusts will provide injured officers with timely medical care, while addressing essential needs such as rest, food, facilities and protective equipment will safeguard their physical and mental health. These measures are vital to enhancing resilience, morale and overall operational effectiveness.

In conclusion, I emphasise that WMP worked tirelessly during the period of public disorder, engaging closely with our communities to prevent any repeat of the appalling scenes of violence and disorder that affected towns and cities across the country. The Force not only safeguarded our region, but also extended assistance and support to other forces nationwide. Every community in the West Midlands is entitled to feel safe and secure and there is no place for division, hatred, or intolerance in our region. Such behaviour will not be accepted.

The recommendations put forward by HMICFRS address critical operational, strategic and welfare challenges faced by modern policing. Implementing these recommendations effectively will demand robust collaboration among the NPCC, Chief Constables, the College of Policing and other key stakeholders. I remain firmly committed to supporting this work, which is essential not only for enhancing the police response to violent disorder, but also for fostering safer communities and ensuring the well-being of the officers and staff who serve them.

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