



The Office of Matthew Grove

Working hard to keep you safe

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Dear Home Secretary

HMIC Inspection Report – Core Business

I am writing to you with my comments on the HMIC report entitled “Core Business”. I have also copied The Rt Hon Mike Penning MP following the recent arrival of his letter dated 25 September 2014 in response to my reply to the HMIC Responding to Austerity report.

The report makes suggestions for areas of improvement as well as identifying good practice in the Humberside Police area. I am pleased to see that in many of the generic areas highlighted Humberside Police are already well on the way to achieving significant improvements. There are some areas which need attention and I am content that these are being addressed.

The report itself is over 160 pages long and there are 40 recommendations, none of which are costed. I will of course hold the Chief Constable to account regarding those recommendations which help maintain the quality of service to the public. Some of the national recommendations are, in my opinion, unhelpful and at odds with the aims in my Police and Crime Plan. They have the potential to restrict local police from meeting the needs of our communities. All forces have different priorities and this leads me back to the national vs local concern, which I have specifically raised with you in my response to previous HMIC reports (Crime Data Integrity response, dated 26 September 2014). Therefore, in consultation with the Chief Constable I will not take some of the recommendations forward as they do not fit with local priorities established within my Police and Crime Plan or are unachievable within current resources.

Locally, I am working on the introduction of mobile data. This major investment is being rolled out across the Force as we speak. It will significantly free up police time and increase visibility. As I previously outlined in my response to HMIC around ‘responding to austerity’, the restructure of the Force, which I recently endorsed, will eliminate the artificial boundaries created by the current geographical police divisions and centralise key operational areas of the business under a ‘one force’ model. The introduction of mobile technology will greatly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the force. In real terms allowing an individual officer to spend approximately 2 hours more per shift within the communities they serve instead of having to return to police stations to complete paperwork. This has a further implication on the public and organisational requirement for physical infrastructure, namely police buildings. There are many changes that I and Humberside Police are examining, which are based both on the necessity of providing a modern policing service whilst concurrently matching the available resources. HMIC need

to understand the scale and pace of change and the associated physical and cultural changes that Humberside, and many other forces, are having to make in order to remain viable.

I find it frustrating and take exception to some of the language used in the HMIC report and particularly their own media statements. This undoubtedly creates a perception with the public that the police trivialise some types of crime and offer little or no support to the victims of those crimes. Whilst using an emotive phrase like 'postcode lottery' is something we all expect to read in the media, I would not expect it as the main title in a media release from HMIC. This sort of language is unprofessional and inappropriate for an official report from a public body. In addition, media reports quoted the HMI Inspector responsible for the report as saying "a number of crimes are on the verge of being decriminalised". Quite honestly I find this language shallow and potentially misleading. The national debate, which played out over several days following the release of the HMIC report, was not at all insightful or informed and has caused unnecessary damage to the police service. As we move forwards with significant reductions in budgets this is not the time to deliberately reduce public confidence for little gain.

From my reading of the report, some of the data is slightly misleading as HMIC have not given any credit for positive actions the Force is taking locally, or acknowledged that they have been unable to provide some information due to the labour intensive nature that drawing it out of their systems would entail. They have represented this as the Force not having the information at all, which is clearly incorrect. The tick-box approach adopted by HMIC and the language used that we were 'unable to provide details' is not acceptable. I have explored this with the Force, and we believe the over-simplistic tick-box approach was unhelpful. HMIC asked for data in a restricted manner and they recognised that not everyone would be able to provide information in the format requested. This does not mean that the information is unavailable or that the Force was being unhelpful to HMIC. The tick-box approach also provides little specific commentary or context, which would have helped inform local people about the policing service they actually receive.

I was puzzled by the reports and suggestion that every force in the country should adopt the same approach to crime. Each force area has its own challenges, different demographics and varying priorities. For example, policing in Humberside is not the same as policing in Greater Manchester. How can policing in a major city like Birmingham be the same as in the rural East Riding of Yorkshire? Sir Hugh Orde, President of ACPO, recently touched on the fact that it is difficult to adopt a consistent approach nationally when you have Police and Crime Plans driven by different Commissioners and local agendas. It is right to have similar operating standards across police forces, but in the 'new world' the strategic direction of each force is set by local Police and Crime Commissioners through our Police and Crime Plans, which take account of local issues and may conflict with HMIC's own national template. A force who implements local objectives directed from the Police and Crime Plan should not subsequently be publically penalised for not adopting HMIC's subjective template of best practice.

In the Humberside Police area, we have a diverse landscape with a busy city, several large towns and huge swathes of rural landscape and coastline. There is no 'one size fits all', and the police must and do react appropriately. My local force must be allowed to exercise its professional judgement to provide the right type of response to every call for service. Emergencies, protection of life and vulnerable people will always take priority. For victims of less serious crime who call the Force, many are happy to be dealt with over the phone, or make an appointment to come and see an officer. We cannot expect officers to attend 100% of crimes and we must ensure we do firstly what is best for each

individual victim. Most victims have realistic expectations and nothing is trivialised, nothing is being decriminalised and local police performance will be judged on HOW they deal with a crime not whether they sent an officer out in a car or how many people they managed to get to the scene.

I have been outspoken in my own views that policing has for too long been constricted and even corrupted by a target-driven culture. My recent letter to you around the HMIC Crime Data Integrity report makes this point clear. For years it's all been about numbers and that has stripped away the common sense, freedom and confidence of many of our officers to do the right thing. That culture is changing and local officers and staff are being empowered to make common sense decisions and focus on the right outcome for the victim. Like any organisation, like any human being, the police are not perfect, they will make mistakes; but where mistakes are made they will and do learn from them.

When the Government introduced Police and Crime Commissioners it was a significant positive step forwards in moving the governance of the police away from Whitehall and returning it to the public. This begs the question as to whether HMIC has adapted its own vision since the introduction of local accountability through Commissioners; on the surface it would not appear so. I am concerned that HMIC are increasing the number and breadth of inspections; improved service delivery is not provided by this model of a large and demanding inspectorate. Additionally, HMIC are straying into locally accountable decision making, which will hamper the work of the police at a local level and confuse local partners.

HMIC have a positive opportunity to provide an inspection and advisory capability that works in conjunction with forces to identify and suggest best practice. However, demanding forces adopt the HMIC perception of best practice is of course not always in the best interest of local residents. The current approach of HMIC is unacceptable at times and at worst is dangerous and confusing; which is especially concerning as we move towards the extremely negative, subjective and unhelpful PEEL grading. I am also disappointed that HMIC prepared individual Force 'Core Business' reports but chose not to publish them.

There are many good things HMIC could do to improve the performance of police forces across the country and I will continue to work positively with them and also challenge them where I feel their approach is inconsistent or assessments unfair. As I have stated previously, I fully believe that we need to have an open and honest debate as to the future of policing and how both Police and Crime Commissioners and HMIC fit into a potential new model. If the aspiration from the centre is to have national standards across policing then let's discuss that issue openly and constructively rather than through negative and destructive HMIC generated sound bites.

I hope that HMIC will continue their work on behalf of the public, but not be so overzealous that they put a considerable administrative burden on an already stretched workforce and undermine the public's confidence in a service they should be rightly proud of.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Grove". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Matthew Grove
Police and Crime Commissioner for Humberside

cc Rt Hon Mike Penning MP
Justine Curran, Chief Constable, Humberside Police
Tom Winsor, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary
Michael Cunningham, HM Inspector of Constabulary, Northern Region
Nick Alston, Chairman, APCC