Rt Hon Theresa May MP, Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
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Dear Home Secretary

RESPONSE TO HMIC INSPECTION ‘PEEL: Police Legitimacy 2015 published on 11 February 2016

I am pleased Avon and Somerset were rated as good when inspecting legitimacy, and that the national picture for legitimacy is a positive one.

I am delighted that the Local Policing Directorate were found to understand and appreciate the benefits of community engagement. The Constabulary is making excellent progress in problem-solving and working collaboratively with partners and communities to address concerns and tensions. It was interesting to note that HMIC found the Local Policing Directorate and the Communications department of the Constabulary to be engaging well with the public and yet still receive feedback that few people felt their views had been sought on crime and anti-social behaviour issues. The PCC has a clear role in engagement with the public and I intend to explore this issue further and consider what can be learnt from this.

I was also pleased the inspection found the Code of Ethics was embedding well through the establishment of the ethics committee and within training where the national decision model was used; and that inspectors found there to be appropriate use of Taser and stop and search powers. However, I share their concern that the Constabulary continues to disproportionately stop and arrest people with BAME backgrounds. I will discuss with the Force Lead for Stop and Search and will identify ways in which appropriate scrutiny of the use of both Taser and Stop and Search can be carried out.

I will also be taking an active interest in how the Constabulary plans to address the issue of under-representation of BAME in its workforce. A key aspect of legitimacy relates to being representative of our community, and this is a national challenge. It is reassuring though that no racial/ethnicity bias was found in the treatment of officers and staff in relation to complaints and misconduct.

I am concerned by the findings that staff reported they would be reluctant to challenge the decisions or behaviour of senior managers and that there were mixed views around the Constabulary’s commitment to wellbeing. The inspection report makes reference to the link between fair and respectful treatment of employees and how they then treat the public, and the benefits of this. I will discuss this with the Chief Constable in due course.
The decline in victim satisfaction rates is worrying and the Constabulary are prioritising addressing this and have set up a dedicated working group. I have replied separately (in response to the vulnerability inspection), outlining my views on the importance of victim contact and the impact of the need to prioritise resources (through the threat, harm and risk policy) has had on the victims where there are low levels of risk or vulnerability – we must meet the Service Promise for all. It is, however, worth noting that the data on victim satisfaction does not currently capture satisfaction rates of those identified as eligible for the enhanced victim care service provided by Lighthouse. The Constabulary is developing methods to measure satisfaction of these victims and early indications are that satisfaction rates are high. This is not the only indication for me that needs measuring. I want to ensure that the service provided brings positive outcomes for the victims – that they are able to cope and recover – and this is indeed part of the evaluation that Lighthouse are endeavouring to undertake.

This response is published on the OPCC website http://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/Openness/Her-Majestys-Inspectorate-of-Constabulary.aspx, and I will ensure findings from my activities to establish recommendations in this report are being followed are also available.

In conclusion, I agree that we must improve our performance on stop and search to ensure our officers treat all the communities within Avon and Somerset fairly. There is a lot of good work though which accounts for our ‘good’ rating. The inspection found evidence that call-handlers and front desk staff were demonstrating the force values of being professional, friendly and interested. Considering this, and the recognition of the work of the Local Policing Directorate, I am reassured that the public are both responded to well in their time of needing the police, and are suitably engaged with in order to actively prevent and resolve problems of crime and anti-social behaviour. I remain committed to ensuring the public receive excellent service throughout their experience through the criminal justice system, and the Constabulary has an opportunity to improve their contact with victims during investigations and as cases progress. I will follow this up in recognition of the Police and Crime’s plan to prioritise putting the victims first.

Regards

SUE MOUNTSTEVENS
Police and Crime Commissioner
for Avon & Somerset

cc. Wendy Williams, HMI
Chief Constable Andy Marsh, Avon & Somerset Constabulary

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