

**'STATE OF POLICING – THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF POLICING IN ENGLAND AND WALES
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AVON & SOMERSET PCC REPOSE DATED 28TH SEPTEMBER 2021**

Workforce wellbeing

This report starts with an overview which focuses on the bravery and dedication of those in the police service. It recognises that working in policing brings with it a risk to individuals' physical and mental wellbeing.

Policing is about looking after people. To do this externally the police must ensure they look after their own people internally. I will be looking to the Chief Constable to ensure those that serve our communities through Avon and Somerset Police are properly supported physically, mentally and emotionally.

As stated in my manifesto I am also eager to see the introduction of the Police Covenant through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. This will help ensure the continued health and wellbeing support for those who worked in the police service.

Policing during the pandemic

Although this reports on a time before I was elected as Police and Crime Commissioner my view is the police responded to the crisis period very well. Although, inevitably mistakes were made, I am of the opinion the communities were largely supportive of the approach taken.

This is confirmed by the local survey commissioned by my office and the Constabulary. Collectively the residents surveyed reported the highest levels of confidence in Avon and Somerset Police since the survey began six years ago. This survey has also shown a link between when people last saw a police officer or PCSO and their confidence. This visibility level also increased during the pandemic.

I talked about the importance of visible policing in my manifesto, and it will be included in my Police and Crime Plan. I will be looking for the Constabulary to maintain and build on this increased visibility and confidence across Avon and Somerset.

Vulnerability

I agree with the views about online safety. We should work with 'tech giants' to help make these digital spaces safer. As well as working with these companies I am supportive of there being tougher sanctions, including imprisonment, for those who do not fulfil their legal responsibilities.

Domestic abuse is a significant problem in our society which has wide reaching impacts on people's lives. Social restrictions and lockdowns would have no doubt exacerbated the harm caused, especially for those people living with their abuser. It also highlights the impact this can have on children living in a household where domestic abuse is happening. I welcome the new Domestic Abuse Act which see children recognised as victims in their own right. It is essential that this and other changes in the Act are embedded in the Constabulary's work to help support victims and prevent future offending.

Prevention is an overarching focus for me and will be the top priority in my Police and Crime Plan. A key way of preventing future crime is to work with those people who have already offended and break the revolving door of criminality. This requires support with accommodation, substance misuse, education and employment to name but a few. This is far beyond the scope of the police and I will be looking to bring partners together from across the criminal justice system, local authorities, health sector and the voluntary and community sector to be able to achieve this.

Mental ill health also plays a significant part in vulnerability and criminality and this report highlights that the mental health system is failing people and leaving the police to pick up the pieces. I raised this in my manifesto and I will use my position to try and influence change locally and nationally so that people get the right support, from the right agency at the right time.

Local democratic accountability

It is important to highlight the separation of powers between PCCs and Chief Constables and that their operational independence is crucial. It is really important to me that the police are not political and can enforce the law in an impartial and inclusive way. When I set my priorities through my Police and Crime Plan and hold the Chief Constable to account I do this as an elected representative of the people of Avon and Somerset not for a political party or agenda.

The criminal justice system

"Still dysfunctional and defective" is an appropriate description for the broader CJS. The backlogs of cases and length of time it takes for cases to go to trial are undermining justice in this country. Both victims and suspects are failed by the system.

Although I chair the Local Criminal Justice Board and will continue to seek incremental improvements at a local level this will not be enough. This requires reform and proper funding which must start with the Government.

Modern technology – on too slow a track

Like HMICFRS I am disappointed with the progress of the national programmes mentioned. They are not currently providing good value for money and the delays can hinder operational delivery of policing across the country. There needs to be a stronger grip of these programmes centrally so that local forces are not left to pick up the pieces.

The technological challenges are not limited to the programmes cited. Niche is the record management system used by over half of the forces across the country and there is potential to improve this system; making these changes can also be a slow process. There is

opportunity for greater connectivity and consistency across forces which we have started to work on at a regional level.

The extra 20,000 officers

As noted at a national level, Avon and Somerset have also been successful in recruiting the additional officers ahead of schedule. However the public should be aware it takes three years for officers to be fully qualified. Even after that three years officers will continue to build their capability and confidence. The benefits of these additional officers will not be realised immediately but will start being realised during my first term in office. I will be expecting the Chief Constable to maximise the benefit of this additional resource in successfully delivering the Police and Crime Plan.

The report talks of the risk, with recruitment on this scale, that people with criminal intent or views incompatible with policing will become officers. It is critical vetting is done thoroughly to try and prevent this from happening. If these people were to get past this first line of defence it is paramount that the Constabulary can spot these officers in their employ. Supervisors are critical in this, they must be able to properly manage people so as to spot potential signs such as the officers who do not switch on their body worn video cameras, or who routinely use force or fail to properly record information about their activities. Only when they have been identified can they be removed from policing.

Diversity of the workforce is a national priority as the police should be representative of the communities they serve. In terms of ethnic diversity the police are not representative of the population either nationally nor locally. The Constabulary have not yet been able to capitalise on the recruitment of additional officers to improve their representation. As observed nationally this is particularly the case for people who are Black. I do not underestimate the commitment from the Constabulary in this priority but unfortunately this ambition has not translated into outcomes in this respect. I am working closely with the Chief Constable on this and there needs to be some risk taken to do things differently.

Multi-year settlements (funding)

It has been the case for many years that the police are funded through single year settlements i.e. the police only ever know how much funding they will have for the next year alone. This is neither efficient nor effective: the police service needs to be able to plan further into the future. Proper planning has to be based on the funding received. At the moment any planning past the next year relies heavily on educated guessing. I will use my role, collectively with other PCCs, to try and influence Government to provide longer term funding settlements.

Lessons from elsewhere

It is absolutely right that police forces should work more closely together to share best practice and learning. This will help make policing more efficient and effective across the country. I have already started working more closely with the other PCCs in the South West region to try and improve policing for all our communities.

The concept of a network code is sound in theory but I would need to understand and consider in more detail any proposal before committing to one. I do agree however that police ICT is a good place to start as systems should be able to integrate with one another

and ICT absolutely has scope for greater efficiencies. In the South West Region work is already underway to join up the four forces that use the Niche record management system.

Work of HMICFRS

The work HMICFRS do is essential in improving policing and supports my scrutiny of the Constabulary. I am keen to elevate the status of their work locally. I am incorporating this into my Police and Crime Plan and I will be putting in place more robust governance around compliance with HMICFRS recommendations. I also seek to make this more visible to the public through open scrutiny.

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