

PCC and CC Force Inspection response record

Version:

Force	Staffordshire
Police and Crime Commissioner	Ben Adams
Chief Constable	Chris Noble
Title of inspection	An inspection of the West Midlands regional response to serious and organised crime
Date Published	14 th May 2024
Inspectorate	 <p>HMICFRS Making communities safer</p>
Summary of inspection	As part of our overall police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy inspections, we inspected how well police forces tackle serious and organised crime (SOC). In 2022, we changed how we inspect this aspect of policing, to incorporate inspections of the ten regions, as well as the nine regional organised crime units (ROCU) throughout England and Wales, and the 43 police forces. This improves our understanding of how well forces and ROCUs work together to tackle SOC
Grade	Requires Improvement
Recommendations	
Areas for improvement	<p>Area for improvement Staffordshire Police needs to make sure it has enough frontline and specialist resources to tackle serious and organised crime.</p> <p>The force has specialist resources to tackle its highest serious and organised crime (SOC) threats. Neighbourhood policing teams lead the local response to tackling SOC threats, but we found that they lacked proactive resources. These teams deal with daily demand and personnel are frequently abstracted into response roles. As a result, they rarely have time to dedicate to tackling SOC.</p> <p>The force has a small team of financial investigators but the team is limited to carrying out reactive investigations and can't proactively support every SOC investigation. This may mean that opportunities to tackle criminal finance are being missed. The force has recruited additional financial investigators but limited available training courses meant they weren't fully operational at the time of our inspection.</p> <p>Following our 2021/22 PEEL inspection, we reported an area for improvement relating to delays in securing digital forensic evidence. During this inspection, we found that the force was still experiencing delays in downloading data from mobile devices. The force was aware of this problem and was carrying out a review.</p> <p>Since this inspection, the force has reviewed its resources for tackling SOC and told us that it plans to invest in additional teams to increase capability.</p> <p>Area for improvement Staffordshire Police should improve the quality of its 4P plans. We reviewed several 4P plans and found that their quality and content were inconsistent. There was little attention to recording actions, outcomes,</p>

intervention activity or objectives. There was no quality assurance in place to maintain standards of these plans.

Various force IT systems were being used to store 4P plans, which made it difficult for some personnel to access them. Since our inspection, the force has made sure that all 4P plans are stored on the same system and has introduced a consistent template.

Some lead responsible officers told us that competing demands mean they frequently have to delegate the creation and management of 4P plans to other staff. Most of the 4P plans we reviewed weren't subject to management oversight and some didn't have a clear author. We found that many 4P plans concentrated on activities aimed at pursuing offenders.

Lead responsible officers receive little support from subject matter experts or serious and organised partners to inform their 4P plans. We were surprised to find that force leads for prepare, protect and prevent weren't involved in formulating 4P plans. A lack of consultation with partners means that the force is missing some opportunities to use partners' powers to tackle serious and organised crime.

As a result, we aren't assured that 4P plans are driving serious and organised crime intervention activity or that officers always record it accurately.

Area for improvement

Staffordshire Police should improve how it records serious and organised crime disruptions on the national database.

Analysis of disruption data for the year ending 30 June 2023 showed that 85 percent of disruptions were categorised as pursue activity. During our fieldwork, we saw evidence that the force was working to prevent people from becoming involved in serious and organised crime and to protect victims. During interviews, some force personnel explained that they hadn't received any training in disruption recording, including personnel who lead work to protect vulnerable people and prevent crime. We found that lead responsible officers and prevent and protect leads weren't always working together, which resulted in disruption opportunities not always being identified.

We found examples of work such as cybercrime prevention messaging and safeguarding referrals being completed. But the force hadn't recorded any corresponding disruption activity. The force hadn't recorded disruption activity for fraud, modern slavery and human trafficking, offender management, organised acquisitive crime (theft, robbery or burglary), firearms or child sexual abuse.

At the time of our inspection, the force was preparing to get access to the agency and partner management information system to record its serious and organised crime assessments and disruptions. Since our inspection, the force has introduced the system and has told us that disruption recording has improved.

Police Crime and Commissioner's initial response

On 14 May 2024, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published its report: 'An inspection of the West Midlands regional response to serious and organised crime'.

In respect of the Regional findings from the inspection and the three local areas for improvement (AFIs) identified, a Regional SOC Board is responsible for progressing the operational improvements in ROCUWM activity and providing oversight of the arrangements to address the AFIs.

I have noted the three local AFIs below:

- Area for improvement: Staffordshire Police needs to make sure it has enough frontline and specialist resources to tackle serious and organised crime
- Area for improvement: Staffordshire Police should improve the quality of its 4P plans
- Area for improvement: Staffordshire Police should improve how it records serious and organised crime disruptions on the national database

I am assured that the three local AFIs are being monitored and actioned in force.

Together with my other Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) colleagues in the West Midlands region, we provide strategic governance of the ROCUWM through a formal collaboration agreement) and a quarterly Regional Governance Group (RGG), which I currently chair. This RGG will therefore be performing the holding to account function for the ROCUWM to ensure that the AFIs are addressed. In addition, the PCC's also fund Regional Policy Officers with responsibility for coordinating our collective responsibilities towards the ROCUWM, which will assist in this process.

Chief Constable's response

In July last year we were inspected by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Service on how we deal with serious and organised crime.

It focused on our understanding of SOC and setting priorities to tackle it, our resources and skills, and how we tackle SOC and safeguarding people and communities.

While there were some extremely positive findings, our overall rating is Requires Improvement.

There are no surprises in areas we need to work on and much of this was well underway by the time of the inspection, and we've made significant progress since. However, there are some longer term and more difficult challenges where we continue to adapt, change and resource.

Our understanding of SOC and priority setting feedback was positive, highlighting the effectiveness of our risk assessment process to identify and prioritise threat.

Our investment in the capacity and capability of our harm reduction hubs and violence reduction teams were recognised in combatting the criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults by organised crime groups.

Our prevention initiatives to address and disrupt pathways into SOC and focus on vulnerable groups and individuals were noted, as well as how alive we are to the importance of lifetime offender management. Our work on our Making Great Places initiative is an example of this.

The key areas we are focused on since the initial feedback from HMICFRS are:

- Neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs) lead the local response to tackling SOC threats. The Inspectorate found that they lacked proactive resources. We now have a dedicated specialist resource aligned to SOC work. In 2023 proactive teams made over 250 arrests, recovered six firearms, closed 19 county lines and secured prison sentences totalling over 110 years
- Inconsistencies in the preparation and ongoing monitoring of our policing plans and information sharing with partners. We have made improvements to our plans and are recording them on police systems. There is also a new process working with partners to better share information and collectively respond to actions
- Intelligence is not always being developed quickly enough to support investigations and proactive disruption activity. We have significant investment within our intelligence teams for SOC work including our SOC and exploitation team (SOCEX) who focus on specific threats

Assistant Chief Constable Becky Riggs, said: “The inspection has identified we have some clear gaps around our ability to effectively tackle SOC, but it also recognises we understand this and have plans in place and underway to address some of these issues.

“They also acknowledged our clear aspiration to improve our work in this area through a measured approach and that we know our operating model needs to be a sustainable one. We are working on this; some remedial work has been done since the inspection and plans for the longer-term work is ongoing. We are committed to reducing the harm caused by serious and organised crime and protecting those vulnerable to this threat.”

Police Crime and Commissioner’s overall comments

I note the force’s support of the findings of this HMICFRS inspection and the commitment to addressing the AFIs identified in the report. I also welcome the aspiration to further improve the force’s response to SOC in the long term, ensuring that it provides the best possible service for people across Staffordshire.

Progress will be scrutinised through the existing governance arrangements of the OPCC and Staffordshire Police. It is my expectation that all the recommendations from the inspection will be fully completed in the specified timeframe. I will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account for affecting these changes and I look forward to seeing Staffordshire Police achieve and demonstrate the required improvements.

This response will be published on the Staffordshire PFCC website.