



21 January 2019

**POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER RESPONSE TO THE HMICFRS INSPECTION REPORT: POLICING AND MENTAL HEALTH: Picking up the Pieces**

I very much welcome this report as it highlights many concerns that I, and indeed Matt Jukes as the Chief Constable of South Wales Police, share about the challenges of policing mental health issues in our area. Whilst this report does not relate specifically to South Wales there are recognisable issues within it that have rightly been picked up as national issues across Wales and England and there are three recommendations that are for all forces to work towards, which I welcome.

This report highlights the immense burden being placed on policing by the mental health crisis, at a time of evolving demand and continuing financial pressures being applied by Central Government. It rightly points out that 'people with mental health problems need expert support' and that 'those in crisis need to be cared for in a healthcare setting'. Essentially this is not about a policing problem but a lack of more appropriate responses and services. South Wales Police is seeing high levels of calls and workloads relating to people with mental ill health and/or requiring immediate crisis intervention support for these reasons. Our officers and staff are dedicated to providing a high level of service to vulnerable people, including those with mental health needs, and the empathy that they show has been reflected increasingly by people they have dealt with. However there is only so much that a police service can do and I am grateful that the tone of this report supports this. This challenge is not going away and I am concerned that the burden is actually increasing as financial challenges are increasing for us and for partners.

The report recommends that all forces should carry out a snapshot exercise to assess mental health-related demand. That is something we have already conducted, and our recent exercise found that 12% of calls in a 24-hour period related to identified mental health issues. The average time that officers committed to mental health incidents in our snapshot review was three and three quarter hours, however, in a quarter of cases, officers committed in excess of five hours.

Accurate recording and awareness of demand is something we need to improve and I will work with the Chief Constable to ensure that this does and that the identification of mental health needs is as good as it can be as early as possible.

## Rt Hon Alun Michael JP OStJ FRSA

Comisiynydd yr Heddlu a Throseddu De Cymru  
Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales



Work is taking place to develop an app for officers in South Wales Police, which should provide real time information and automatically record the amount of time an officer spends dealing with a mental health incident.

The report also recommends that all forces evaluate their mental health triage services, which I also welcome. The new triage pilot in our Public Service Centre (control room) has now commenced, as of January 2019, and we have already commissioned an evaluation of this process that will focus on outcomes and involve the views of those with lived experience (something else that is rightly called for in the report). This will certainly help to inform officers where there is a straight-forward medical or mental health response but we are sometimes talking at cross-purposes with other professions. Only last week I raised this at the Welsh Government meeting that provides reassurance on observance of the Crisis Concordat between Police and the NHS in Wales, suggesting that we should talk more about “Mental Health and Well Being” and there was support for that concept from policing and from health colleagues.

The report also recommends that all forces review their mental health training programmes and I will ensure that this is conducted thoroughly in South Wales. My pre-planned scrutiny programme for 2019 includes a focus on mental health and policing, and this will provide me with an excellent opportunity to ensure that South Wales Police is pursuing the recommendations as well as the other issues highlighted in the report.

Chief Constable, Matt Jukes, shares my views on the report in his comment below:

*‘The report is welcomed as it shines light on the additional demand placed on South Wales Police, and indeed policing throughout Wales, in dealing with mental health. It is important that those individuals affected by mental ill-health receive an appropriate and adequate response from the best placed professionals and in many cases the police are left to deal with people who would be better served by other agencies. South Wales Police will always help those in need but the key to dealing with mental health crisis is to try and prevent it in the first place through early intervention and prevention. To this effect, South Wales Police are working closely with the Welsh Government, local Health Boards and other partners and the force has recently funded the recruitment of community psychiatric nurses in the public service centre. These nurses will be able to provide early advice and intervention to ensure that those in a mental health crisis receive the correct support they require and, if appropriate, divert them from needing the assistance of a police officer’.*

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Mae'r Comisiynydd a'i dîm yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg  
The Commissioner and his team welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English

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This still leaves us with the large number of calls where there is a crisis of some sort but not a diagnosis of the need for medication or psychiatric treatment, but at least we are discussing such issues openly and seeking ways to address them such as through joint “sanctuary” provision and by working with the Third Sector.

I am pleased that the report is supportive of the work that the police are doing to ‘pick up the pieces’ and that the police approach to people with mental health problems was found to be ‘generally supportive, considerate and compassionate’.

I believe that our officers are in the forefront of such a humane and well-informed approach but welcome the fact that the report acknowledges that ‘there is only so much the police can do to improve the overall picture’.

The most important and pressing challenge that forces face is that of getting our partner agencies to take more responsibility for those with mental health issues that are not policing-related so that we can decrease the amount of time our officers and staff spend on ‘picking up the pieces’. We are committed to a public health approach to prevention with partners in respect of mental health but it is clear that more needs to be done to reduce reliance on the police and ensure people can get the specialist support they need, when they need it and less specialist support if that is what they need. I am working hard with the Chief Constable to do this in our area but do find that there is resistance because of financial pressures and hesitance to share the wider need for crisis support. I am therefore grateful that the Inspectorate has acknowledged the challenges and I intend to increase our focus on these issues during the coming year.

**Rt Hon Alun Michael**  
**Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales**

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