

Rt Hon Alun Michael JP OStJ FRSA

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



10 September 2021

**POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER RESPONSE TO THE HMICFRS REPORT:
'STATE OF POLICING: THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF POLICING IN ENGLAND
AND WALES 2020'**

This annual assessment of policing in England and Wales confirms what a challenging year 2020 was in policing, and how hard the service worked to ensure it continued despite unprecedented demands. Covid-19 has indeed been hugely challenging, and continues to be so, not only for the people living in the South Wales area, but also for officers and staff working for South Wales Police. Notwithstanding these challenges, our officers and staff have continued to keep the public safe from harm, whilst quickly adapting to new ways of working.

This report summarises the many different challenges that policing has faced during the pandemic, and this has included the difficult balance of protecting the public whilst needing to enforce changing Covid restrictions. The report also outlines the many challenges in terms of the protection of vulnerable people during lockdown. Many people were less likely to be able to report harm, such as those living with domestic abuse, as well as children facing abuse and other issues that may ordinarily have been picked up in schools. South Wales Police worked very hard during this time to ensure that the public were aware of ways of reporting and that partners were well informed and supported to assist in providing these key messages.

The demands and challenges on our partner agencies in South Wales in 2020 were clear. They all needed to develop new ways of working, but I was pleased to see how our partners worked well together and continued to offer vital services, including to victims of crime. I ensured that my Police Accountability & Legitimacy Group, which consists of external partner agencies and independent community members, had an opportunity to discuss the policing impacts of Covid19 in the June 2020 meeting. Not only did this enable transparency and scrutiny of how South Wales Police was dealing with the challenges, but it also enabled partner agencies to discuss their ways of working to enhance collaboration where needed.

I agree with Sir Winsor's assessment of the ongoing challenges related to diversity in policing. The report states that '*If all ethnic minorities are not better represented in the*

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service, this will have long-term adverse implications for public confidence in and co-operation with the police'. This continues to be a priority issue that is close to my heart and continues to feature in my Police & Crime Plan. The Chief Constable is committed to working with me on this matter and we are both working to develop new and innovative ways to improve the representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in South Wales Police. Whilst South Wales Police's efforts were not referenced directly in this report, our positive action work is yielding results, although we still have a long way to go to have a workforce that truly reflects the diversity of South Wales. This remains one of my key priorities and I regularly ask for data and strategy updates from the Chief Constable at my Strategic Board.

Last year brought the issue of race relations in policing back to the forefront of our minds due to the tragic death of George Floyd in the United States. I responded earlier this year to the HMICFRS report on the 'Disproportionate Use of Police Powers', and I would reiterate what I stated then i.e. that this is a longstanding issue in policing across the country and it cannot be right that we just accept it. I am well aware that the issue of community trust and confidence amongst our ethnic minority communities is linked to our ability to recruit members of ethnic minority communities into policing. I am determined to keep a focus on this in South Wales Police, particularly through the implementation of the Joint Race Equality Plan that the Chief Constable and I launched earlier this year.

I support the Chief Constable's comments on this assessment report, which are outlined below:

'I am pleased to see that this report recognises the importance of our staff and the outstanding contribution they bring to the progression of policing. We have a duty to inspire, nurture and foster development to improve the service to the public.

As a force, we continue our focus on high harm areas. We recognise that crime patterns and trends are changing and welcome 'The Online Safety Bill'. We must be alive to the potential of abuse taking place behind closed doors, which makes it absolutely critical that victims and our communities have confidence to report crimes and that we get the support to people early. To this end, it is imperative that we work closely with our partners to identify and help those at risk, through early intervention and prevention and innovatively working with our criminal justice partners to reduce re-offending.

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We recognise and accept that access to support services is limited and that our partners are working under increased pressure. However, if the police are to respond to emerging threats while maintaining our presence on the streets, we must focus on doing the work that most requires our unique powers and capabilities. That said, we have worked tirelessly with partners to develop new ways of working effectively and engaging with our communities.

We are grateful for the acknowledgement of the need to reform the Criminal Justice System in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness and to maximise opportunities.

We have demonstrated we are an efficient and effective force, year on year, through independent inspections. Our innovation through technological advances has been recognised. However, we appreciate that there will always be a need to advance in an everchanging environment and we accept that continued focus is required to continue to increase efficiency.

South Wales has been pro-active in ensuring investment through the Uplift Programme, targeted to maximise benefits to the organisation. We completely recognise that the recruitment programme provides an opportunity to improve diversity.

The force remains committed to developing new ways of working, to develop sustainable solutions and takes on board and welcomes the findings of the report, to ensure that we continue to meet the needs of our communities'.

This assessment report has helpfully acknowledged that it is 'essential that our public services work well together' for the criminal justice system to improve where there are ongoing issues. I am in agreement with the report's conclusions that without other public services being as efficient and effective as they can be, more people may be drawn into crime and cycles of reoffending as well as becoming victims of crime. The increasing demand on policing continues to be of concern, and it is important that partnership and joined-up working is prioritised in order to provide a holistic approach to crime prevention and the reduction of reoffending.

The report is a useful assessment of the current issues affecting policing and a helpful reminder of the ongoing challenges that need to be addressed.

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