



10<sup>th</sup> September 2024

## **POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER RESPONSE TO THE HMICFRS STATE OF POLICING REPORT: 'THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF POLICING IN ENGLAND AND WALES 2023'**

This annual assessment of policing in England and Wales reveals a stark picture of the issues that the policing service has been facing nationally, and a reminder of the ongoing challenges that need to be addressed, particularly in restoring public trust and confidence.

This report summarises the national focus on the policing workforce through improving vetting, tackling corruption and misconduct, resourcing key areas such as neighbourhood policing and ensuring officer numbers and funding are adequately balanced. The report also outlines that the inspections conducted on service to victims and those who are vulnerable show this remains at a poor level of performance nationally. South Wales Police continues to work hard to ensure that these issues remain at the forefront of their work to maintain good service delivery already ongoing, or improvement work wherever needed.

The work of South Wales Police has been acknowledged by HMICFRS in a previous inspection on vetting, corruption and misconduct, with a good performance grading being awarded. Neighbourhood policing is an area that South Wales Police have also received a good rating in their most recent PEEL inspection; however, I will continue to monitor policing in local communities with my team this year through our planned Scrutiny & Accountability programme of work.

Since February 2023 the Commissioner's team have ensured that these areas within the report have been scrutinised, providing local level recommendations to help improve policing within the communities of South Wales. For instance, Scrutiny & Accountability Boards have been held on the topics of:

- Child Exploitation and Vulnerability
- Public Perception of Policing: Officer Conduct and Integrity
- Domestic Abuse: Initial Response (with further Boards scheduled to be held on Investigation and Victim Services)

Furthermore, the Commissioner's Police Accountability & Legitimacy Group (PALG), which consists of external partner agencies and independent community members, had an opportunity to discuss the policing impacts with the Force for the above-mentioned scrutiny topics, as well as the 'Right Care Right Person' initiative, at their meetings throughout that period. Not only did this facilitate transparency and scrutiny of how South Wales Police was dealing with these areas, but it also enabled partner agencies to discuss their ways of working to enhance collaboration where needed.



As part of my oversight role, I request and will continue to monitor progress against ongoing HMICFRS recommendations made to address any areas of concern or for improvement.

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

*"Public trust and confidence are critical to policing by consent and remain a very real challenge for forces across England & Wales. Here in South Wales, we place a strong emphasis on the importance of neighbourhood policing, of being part of the communities we serve and tackling the issues that matter to them, as this is vital to maintaining their confidence in our service. Whilst our most recent PEEL inspection shows that we are good at preventing and deterring local crime and ASB, we know that the conduct of our officers and staff is of equal importance and under greater scrutiny than it has ever been. I must stress that the vast majority of officers and staff who work for South Wales Police conduct themselves impeccably and work tirelessly to protect the public, however the few who choose to breach the standards expected of them undermine all of this good work and erode the public's trust in us.*

*South Wales Police is one of four forces that have been assessed by the HMICFRS as a good performing force in relation to how it deals with corruption and the vetting of staff. As the Chief Constable, I continue to send a clear message that I will not tolerate inappropriate behaviour and there is no place in the police service for misogyny, racism or any other form of discriminatory behaviour. This is particularly relevant to our efforts to tackle violence against women and girls as, whilst early investment in initiatives such as Op Soteria is helping us to safeguard and improve outcomes for victims, we need every person impacted by these issues to always feel safe and confident to report.*

*South Wales remains one of the safest places in the UK to live, work and visit but as we seek to improve confidence, it is critically important to reflect on the experience of victims, to ensure we meet their expectations in terms of the service they receive. At the first point of contact we continue to invest in our Public Service Centre and have seen improvements to our call answering times, whilst our phased implementation of Right Care Right Person is helping to ensure that those that call us receive the most suitable support, from the most appropriate agency in light of their need. As we seek to respond to reports, I am reassured that most criminal investigations audited by our Inspection Team were carried out well and supervised appropriately, with victims supported and consulted but we know that we must strive to do more, particularly in light of growing and evolving demands.*

*Our people are key to this and remain the single biggest recurring spend and asset of policing and an area where we've been graded as good for our approach to building, supporting and protecting our workforce. This welcome acknowledgement by HMICFRS is reflected in our attrition rates, which are amongst the best in England & Wales; the people of South Wales Police understand that their contribution is valued and that we will support and develop them throughout their*



*careers. Whilst the Uplift Programme has helped to replace some of the capability lost during austerity and is assisting us in addressing demand, the complexity of the policing mission continues to increase and there is a need for greater flexibility to ensure the right person is undertaking the right task with the necessary skills to get policing right first time.*

*Policing is only now recovering from the reduction of over 16,000 officers and is still feeling the impact from the reduction of over 20,000 members of police staff. The implications for South Wales Police resulted in the reduction of over 250 officers as well as over 400 members of police staff. More than a decade of austerity and removal of capital funding has left policing woefully underfunded and under protected.*

*As such, the recommendations made within the State of Policing Report are both supported and welcomed; an increase in capital funding supported by a multi-year funding settlement that ensures funding is distributed according to the needs of communities would enable better financial planning and more considered investment to enhance the service we provide to the public.*

*As we look to the future, HMICFRS continues to have a critical role to play in holding policing to account, working with forces to enhance our delivery and ultimately improve public trust and confidence in policing.”*

I am grateful for the Chief Constable’s comments and the commitment to improve in the areas highlighted; I will use my Scrutiny & Accountability programme to track progress against these matters. I acknowledge of the hard work and commitment of the officers and staff of South Wales Police and the efforts being made to keep people safe in our communities. I look forward to collaborating with the Chief Constable and his team to ensure the highest quality policing service within South Wales.

**Emma Wools**  
**Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales**