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Office of the
**Police & Crime
Commissioner**
West Yorkshire

My Reference: OPCC/MBW/NF

Your Reference:

April 29th 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

Re. HMICFRS report: An inspection of the effectiveness of the Regional Organised Crime Units

I am writing in response to HMICFRS's recent inspection report on the operation of our national framework of Regional Organised Crime Units.

As the largest police force in the Yorkshire and Humber Region (YH), West Yorkshire Police have lead responsibility for the YHROCU. Currently, West Yorkshire Police's (WYP) Head of Crime has responsibility for the oversight and management of the ROCU.

As elsewhere, our ROCU's specialist areas of work include cyber investigation, digital forensic examination, financial investigation and specialist intelligence resources alongside traditional detective work tackling serious drug trafficking and firearms offences across force boundaries. Notable teams within the YHROCU include the Regional Cyber Crime Unit, the North East Region Asset Recovery Team, and the Regional Intelligence Unit.

West Yorkshire Police and myself have worked together to tackle serious and organised crime on a number of fronts. Examples of work we have embarked on include Programme Precision (the force's co-ordinated work to disrupt organised crime, in collaboration with key local partners), investment in a dedicated WYP Cyber Crime Team and associated digital forensic resources, and the West Yorkshire Financial Exploitation and Abuse Team (WYFEAT), which brings local agencies together to fight fraud through the exploitation of the vulnerable.

Other key milestones include the establishment of the WY Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), investment in a WYP Economic Crime Unit, and the building of enhanced partnership work to collect intelligence on organised crime through a Partnership Intelligence Portal project, launched in 2017.

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Firstly, we would feed back that the YHROCU senior leadership team felt HMICFRS's report was a fair reflection of the challenges locally and across the wider ROCU network. In addressing specific points made in the report, we would like to make the following comments:

A Whole System Approach

The NCA cannot under their national tasking powers directly task ROCUs, but the agency can task police forces. Although WYP have an excellent relationship with their regional counterparts in the NCA, the NCA regional teams are not always able to be working on threats within our region, and may well be leading or supporting work on other national threats at any one time. As a consequence, we would like the YHROCU to retain its operational independence, but would support the development of a more efficient and effective overall SOC tasking system.

YHROCU were the pilot area for the national SOC System Tasking, and so are as advanced as any area in the strength of this NCA-ROCU relationship. Nonetheless, there are still some gaps. As a ROCU network we need to be on a national shared system to support existing business and the transfer of sensitive information between the NCA and ROCUs.

For example, where the full version of the tasking system (APMIS) rolled out to all individual forces, we would all benefit from a much more joined-up approach. The issue of a joined-up IT system is a perennial problem, and we hope that discussions here will be resolved swiftly.

Accountability and Oversight

As the report suggests, on occasions some forces can be quite introspective and less focussed on what a ROCU can truly offer at regional level. Locally, we also find that despite providing funding, some forces can be reticent in approaching the ROCU for support. WYP are currently working to re-establish a Strategic Governance Group for the YHROCU which we hope will help address some of these issues across the four contributing forces.

YHROCU are one of the national ROCUs who do not have a dedicated Chief Officer who has independence from their force responsibilities. This issue will be reviewed by WYP's Chief Officer Team and if necessary the Chief Constables of the four contributing forces. I look forward to seeing their operational views in due course.

Resourcing Capacity and Workforce

The challenge of maintaining appropriate funding for the ROCU network is easily the biggest barrier to its development. The 12 monthly 'cliff edge' funding means ROCUs are not able to have any sustainable business planning model, and this can hamper staff recruitment, retention and morale. We would recommend that (at least) a 3-year funding model is adopted.

Although the YHROCU has an agreement with contributing Yorkshire and Humber region forces that each force should advertise ROCU vacancies and support secondments, West Yorkshire Police currently provide 70% of the officers and staff within the YHROCU, and contribute 43% of the annual funding provided by the four contributing Yorkshire and Humber police forces.

The issue of pay differentials between police forces and the NCA affects all ROCUs who find themselves losing key members of staff (especially analysts and financial investigators) to

superior salaries at the NCA. There is also emerging competition in recruitment for those with cyber skills, even more so when it comes from the private sector.

As police forces pay the least in the pyramid behind the private sector, the NCA and ROCUs, they are inevitably hardest hit by the progression of staff to higher paid roles. More needs to be done nationally to match market factors around these salaries, and the development of retention or payback clauses in employment terms and conditions **and Police Regulations. This is a significant challenge now and a major risk in months and years to come if not addressed.**

In conclusion, we would concur with the principal finding of HMICFRS's report that addressing the issue of the appropriate and sustainable funding of ROCUs is of primary importance. Whilst as a regional area we can work to improve systems of collaboration and governance, the funding issue is one which can only be resolved by the Home Office and through central spending reviews.

In the meantime I will assess West Yorkshire Police's response to the report's recommendations through my usual local accountability structures, pending the transition of the PCC role transferring to the new West Yorkshire Mayor and Combined Authority model following the elections on 6th May 2021.

Yours sincerely



Mark Burns-Williamson
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire