

Cheshire PCCs Response to His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Police and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspections

Title of Inspection	An inspection of how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms	
Date Inspection Published	11.7.23	
Type of Inspection	National Thematic	
Recommendations	National	x
	Local	

Report Summary:

This inspection examined how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms, establishing whether the public can be confident that police policies, structures and processes comply with relevant guidance and legislation. The report also determined whether the selection, training and deployment of those roles was effective. It also sought reassurance that forces had the capacity and capability to effectively deploy firearms and, where necessary, work across force boundaries.

The deployment of armed officers is a high-risk area of policing, and the report found officers involved in armed policing are dedicated, professional and focused on keeping the public safe.

The observations and recommendations that are made in the report seek to improve a national system that has good governance and structures.

Recommendations:

There were twelve recommendations in the report, eight of which concerned forces.

- By 31 July 2024, chief constables should make sure there is access to both specialist strategic firearms commanders and specialist tactical firearms commanders, through a 24-hour rota covering their region.
- By 31 October 2023, all chief constables should make sure the armed response vehicle asset tracking equipment, as provided by Counter Terrorism Policing, is available and used in their forces. They should train relevant staff in its use.
- By 31 December 2023, all chief constables should make sure that all strategic and tactical firearms commanders have observed the firearms tactics and the use of specialist munitions they can authorise, before being operationally deployed.

- By 31 December 2023, chief constables should make sure that the annual accreditation process for strategic and tactical firearms commanders includes familiarisation with any new weapons systems and observation of any new tactics or specialist munitions the force has introduced or is planning to introduce.
- By 31 October 2023, the regional armed policing lead should share armed policing exercises with the National Armed Policing Portfolio. This would allow opportunities for learning to be identified and shared.
- With immediate effect, each assistant chief constable regional firearms lead should attend all National Armed Policing Portfolio meetings. If they are unable to attend, they should make sure another assistant chief constable armed policing lead from a force in their region attends on their behalf.
- With immediate effect, chief constables should improve senior officer oversight of their armouries, including an independent annual audit.
- With immediate effect, chief constables, through their armed policing governance structure, should make sure that all armed deployment records are stored and auditable.

Commissioner's Response:

I am pleased that the report recognises the professionalism and dedication demonstrated by armed officers. This important area of policing carries a high risk for those involved, with high levels of physical skill required alongside a tactical and strategic mentality.

These specialist skills are essential to the organisation, and as such, Regional Armed Policing Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) leads are coordinating proposals to create an "on-call" collaboration to ensure there are no vulnerability in specialist capability. Work is underway and ahead of schedule in terms of having an operational tracking system and is anticipated ahead of the due date.

It has been agreed that the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit and Collaborations ACC lead attends the National Armed Policing Portfolio Meetings, but should this not be possible, Cheshire's ACC Ops has volunteered to deputise and will cover any meetings that the regional lead is unable to attend.

The Firearms Alliance, a collaboration between Cheshire and North Wales, delivering armed policing across two forces has robust operating procedures around armoury audits. The bi-annual audit undertaken by the Chief Inspector is bolstered by the daily and weekly checks undertaken by operational officers as part of their tours of duty. The North West regional superintendent will now undertake additional reviews in each of the collaborating forces.

The Constabulary was already compliant with some recommendations such as the observation of firearms tactics and it is pleasing that the accreditation process already included familiarisation with weapons systems, tactics and specialist munitions. Sharing of armed policing exercises are already taken through to the North-West Armed Policing Practitioners and / or Management Board and incidents of note are also incorporated into day-to-day training. The Constabulary was also compliant with the recommendation concerning deployment and auditing of records.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Dwyer'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J' and a distinct 'D'.

John Dwyer

Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire