

Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner's Response to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Police and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspections

Title of Inspection	HMICFRS inspection of the north-west regional response to serious and organised crime		
Date Inspection Published	10 November 2023		
Type of Inspection	Thematic		
	Cheshire Specific	Yes, as part of a NW collaboration	
	Cheshire Quoted	N/A	
Recommendations	National	No	
	Local	Yes (& Regional)	

Report Summary

The North-West Regional Organised Crime Unit (NWROCU) has been inspected by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Police and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The report published on the 10th November 2023 included:

- Regional Findings
- ROCU and individual forces

The report graded NWROCU as outstanding and declared it as being the highest performing in the country. Some of the work done by the organisation is being adopted as best practice and will be documented and disseminated by the College of Policing. The individual forces were graded individually:

The North-West region experiences high demand, and in Jan 2023 had the highest number of threats compared to other regions, mostly in GMP and Merseyside.

There were a series of recommendations for the region which included improvement to the effectiveness of the lead responsible officer, as well as 4P plans (pursue, prevent, protect, prepare). Disruptions were said to be well recorded, and was effective at recognising and achieving best practise. The report does note that whilst forces were committed to recruitment, the organisation is nonetheless suffering from recruitment and retention problems in specialist roles.

HMICFRS gave many examples of good practice including the use of intelligence and mapping to disrupt activity, and that it understood the threats well and coordinates the regional response effectively. Expectations are clear for the workforce and their expertise is well developed.

New IT systems as well and threat management in prisons also received praise.

Cheshire was graded as adequate. HMICFRS said that the constabulary need to improve training on recording SOC threat assessments and disruption activity on AMPIS (national database of SOC threats), although there was evidence that this had begun to improve.

The constabulary was said to be effective at monitoring its performance, manages priorities effectively and frontline officers understand their role. Their local policing teams are aware of SOC threats, and this has contributed to effective hot spotting. The awareness and protection of vulnerable people was positive.

The report expressed concerns about vacancies in SOC teams, as well as there not being a head of intelligence analysis. It also said that the quality 4P plans needed to improve. Finally, staff and officers needed greater awareness of serious crime prevention orders (SCPO).

Areas for improvement

Cheshire Constabulary should improve the quality of its 4P plans.

Following a review in 2022, the constabulary introduced a new format for its 4P plans. During our inspection, we reviewed several of its 4P plans. We identified several concerns:

- It wasn't always clear who the plan owner was.
- Actions weren't always clear.
- Some plans were out of date.

Some plans appeared to be generic and contained actions that weren't tailored to tackle the specific serious organised crime.

We were told that the constabulary intends to improve these plans. However, we found there was still work to do and we weren't assured that 4P plans are currently driving operational activity or being used to monitor performance.

Constabulary Response

"We proactively target criminals at all levels in Cheshire, and our results speak for themselves. In the last 12 months, we have secured sentences spanning more than 100 years for those involved in organised crime, with many, many more sentences to come.

Given the broader crime challenges across the whole of the northwest, Cheshire residents should be reassured that we are punching above our weight in preventing this type of crime and the effects it can have on communities. We have not had a single criminal firearm discharge since April 2020, and are recognised nationally as having extremely low knife crime figures. Alongside this we have rolled back the number of county line drug dealing teams operating across Cheshire; reducing the negative impact this type of crime has locally, really targeting the things that matter to people.

Regionally we successfully work with our neighbouring forces in tackling county lines and nationally with law enforcers from the National Crime Agency and Interpol in tracking down criminals in other countries, bringing them back to Cheshire to face justice following their crimes.

We are working hard to ensure Cheshire is a hostile environment for criminals and our actions speak very much louder than words. We are relentless in our pursuit of those committing crime and causing others misery. Cheshire is a safe place to be, and our officers and staff make it even safer.

We are not complacent. We have ensured that the single area for improvement identified in the report in terms of how we document our activity has been addressed:

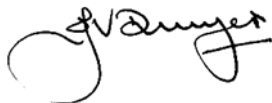
- We have rolled out improved training based on best practice from other forces and have established “super-users” in each area
- We have moved our 4P plans onto a new and improved technology platform making them more accessible, interactive, and ensuring that the officers responsible for maintaining them are more accountable

Commissioner’s Response

Cheshire has a strong track record in tackling serious and organised crime, disrupting criminal activity in our county. Organised crime often operates at a national and even an international level, but its local impact should not be underestimated. Often, criminals who are involved in serious and organised crime commit ‘low level’ offences, which can create a climate of fear in our communities.

The main threat from organised crime in Cheshire comes from county lines drug activity. Professional criminals target our towns to expand their trade through exploiting and forcing vulnerable people into selling drugs.

I am pleased that the NWROCU has been graded as outstanding, especially as I am part of the Joint Oversight Group that steers the collaboration, which gives me the opportunity to challenge any underspend in the budget. The Constabulary have satisfied me that they are well equipped to tackle Serious Organised Crime and have the positive relationship with the NWROCU to access specialist capability should they require it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Dwyer', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

John Dwyer

Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire