

Cyber: Keep the light on. An inspection of the police response to cyber-dependent crime

RESPONSE OF DAVID KEANE, POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR CHESHIRE

We're living in a world where we are becoming increasingly reliant on digital technology and it is estimated that nine out of ten people use the internet every day on either smartphones or tablets. Unfortunately, however, we're not the only ones embracing new technology, with the criminal fraternity and organised crime groups also adapting how they operate. Cyber crime is one of the fastest growing crimes in the UK and accounts for almost half of all recorded crime. It can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, occupation or location. Such criminality gives little attention to regional, national or even international borders. It is imperative, therefore, that all law enforcement agencies involved in the response to cyber-dependent crime work together efficiently and effectively. As such, I welcome Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report, published 24 October 2019, which sets out the findings of the inspection of the police response to cyber-dependent crime.

It should be noted that this is a national thematic report following the inspection of ten forces, all Regional Organised Crime Units, the National Crime Agency, Action Fraud and the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau between April and June 2019. Although Cheshire Constabulary was not one of the ten forces visited by the inspection team, I agree that *'having 43 forces operating independently does not provide an effective response to cyber-dependent crime'*.

It is pleasing to read that at a national and regional level, there is a *'positive picture'* with law enforcement agencies involved in the response to cyber-dependent crime working together efficiently and effectively. Although the law enforcement response to cyber-dependent crime is good and victims who report cyber-dependent crime are generally satisfied with the service they receive, challenges remain and more needs to be done, particularly at a local level. It is perhaps unsurprising that, as outlined in the report, *'the level of capability and capacity are often based on the available budget rather than an understanding of the demand'*. There is a clear requirement for a consistent and co-ordinated response to cyber-dependent crime but this will, of course, require adequate resources at a local, regional and national level to increase the capacity and capability of policing.

I note that HMICFRS has recommended that *'by 01 November 2020, the Home Office, the Cabinet Office, the National Police Chiefs' Council's lead for cyber crime and Coordinator for Economic Crime, the Director General of the National Crime Agency, and interested parties should revise the current police structure for the response to cyber-dependent crime'*. I fully support this recommendation as well as the four areas for improvement identified within the report. I have discussed the inspection report with the Chief Constable and I have been assured that work is ongoing to ensure that Cheshire Constabulary evaluates the use of cyber specials and volunteers to ensure that they are used effectively.

Cheshire Constabulary continues to increase awareness in relation to cyber crime prevention and online safety via the Think5C Campaign. As Police & Crime Commissioner, I remain fully committed to tackling cyber crime and supporting victims. I am pleased to have allocated funding in this year's budget to establish a dedicated cyber crime unit, with additional resources within every local policing unit throughout Cheshire.

