SOUTH YORKSHIRE SYMCA MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY

To: The Home Secretary and
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

Dear Home Secretary and Chief Inspector,

Response to the HMICFRS report: State of Policing – The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2023.

I welcome the report, findings and recommendations of this latest assessment of policing in England and Wales.

Within the report there are four recommendations.

1. **By 1 April 2025, the Government should abolish the fixed police officer numbers target in favour of a more balanced performance framework.**

   I am supportive of this recommendation.

   In South Yorkshire our highest combined workforce strength was in 2010 when our communities were served by 2945 police officers and 2715 police staff. In 2023 these numbers stood at 3001 and 2346 respectively, some 312 FTE fewer.

   Whilst the Police Uplift Programme was of course welcome following the years of significant cuts to police officer and staff numbers necessitated by government austerity policies its rigidity has brought with it limitations. As the report highlights somewhere in the region of 6000 officers are occupying roles that could be filled by police staff members nationally, often at higher cost, and while raising public expectations of a level of front-line service that cannot be delivered by officers fulfilling middle and back-office functions.

   I support autonomy and greater flexibility for chief constables working with Mayor's and PCCs to agree their workforce mix based on local circumstances, removing the limitations of the current system.

2. **By 1 April 2026, as part of the next spending review, the Government should provide police forces with a multi-year funding settlement that covers at least three financial years.**
   As part of this, the Government should:
   • conclude its review of the police allocation formula and make changes to ensure that funding is distributed according to the needs of communities; and
   • substantially increase the amount of capital funding that it provides to forces.

   I am engaged in active conversations across government on the issue of multi-year funding settlements and am supportive of this recommendation.

   I agree that the financial certainty a three year settlement would provide would result in improved efficiency and effectiveness as both police services and others funded by police

grant allocations, such as those providing services to victims of crime, would be better able to take undertake more strategic planning on spend, service provision and particularly for those in the voluntary sector improve retention of skilled staff whose employment is made vulnerable by annual funding allocations. I would ask for the same funding certainty to be extended to violence reduction units.

I further agree that the outdated funding formula must be urgently addressed. Urban areas with bigger populations and higher crime rates such as South Yorkshire rely more heavily on the police grant than more affluent areas that receive a greater amount of income through the police precept. I look forward to working with the government to ensure that funding and resources are allocated equitably and in line with need. I would welcome the inclusion of funds such as Safer Streets funding into main grant, ending the inefficient, competitive bidding processes implemented in recent years.

I am pleased that the issue of capital funding has been highlighted following an extended period of underinvestment and would welcome conversations with the Home Office on our local needs and how these can be best met.

3. **By 1 April 2025, the Home Secretary should develop legislative proposals to grant additional powers to the inspectors of constabulary. And they should write to HM Chief Inspector to explain these plans.**

   I recognise the work done to date to engage both PCCs and chief constables on the 5 specific proposals set out in the report. As a Mayor that has taken on PCC functions this year I have not yet had the opportunity to discuss these details with the Chief Inspector. I would like to have the opportunity for these discussions before commenting in detail on the additional powers requested.

4. **By 1 December 2025, as part of the next spending review, the Government should increase the funding allocated to the inspectorate to adequately reflect the scope and scale of the work of the inspectorate**

   I agree that adequate resources which allow the Inspectorate to deliver its critical contribution to community safety and public confidence ought to be made available but am unable comment on the quantum required. I would support engagement between HMICFRS and Home Office colleagues in advance of the spending review so the needs the Chief Inspector has identified can be considered alongside other priorities for funding.

Commenting more broadly on the report I was pleased to see that this year, once again, the Chief Inspector has acknowledged the ongoing work needed to repair the understandable damage to public trust and confidence seen in recent years. Multiple incidents and serious offences committed by officers contributed to this damage and all of us working in and with police services should acknowledge that the action required to restore confidence must address the concerns of all our communities and be long lasting. While the apparent slow-down in any further decline in confidence is welcome I agree that improvements in both confidence and satisfaction will only be made when we combine greater community engagement and collaboration that allow communities to have a real say on what the police do with the work already underway that seeks to deal with fundamental areas of concern such as vetting, dealing robustly with wrong doing, increased visible, neighbourhood policing and bringing a much greater focus on offences predominantly committed against women and girls.

I am committed to work to improve trust and confidence in South Yorkshire Police in the coming months and years through the delivery of my manifesto commitment to establish a Community Confidence Board. This new board will provide advice and insight to myself and the Chief Constable not only on the issues affecting the confidence of communities across South Yorkshire but crucially to be involved in the design of our work to address concerns and assessment of its effectiveness.

I have also made commitments to address what can often be seen as 'low level' anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping and graffiti that blight communities and undermine feelings of safety, dangerous driving which not only ends and ruins lives but again impacts negatively on how safe people feel, and on the violent knife crime that terrorises young people and communities. Visible, neighbourhood policing teams have a critical role to play in all of these areas and I am also working to bring together local authority, fire and rescue, NHS, voluntary sector and probation service colleagues to scope how these programmes of work could look and how we can use restorative justice, community payback and POCA funds to support this work.

I was pleased to note the focus in the report on the service provided to victims and the most vulnerable. Too many victims are being failed, too few offenders are being brought to justice, where criminal justice outcomes are achieved they take too long and reoffending rates are too high. As the Chief Inspector rightly identifies crime will not be prevented, and these problems solved, by the police alone. That's why in South Yorkshire I have asked Lord Blunkett to chair a series of strategic partnership roundtables which will be supplemented by work with operational staff and our communities to help me devise my first police and crime plan - placing victims at the heart of what we do, ensuring the response is right when things do go wrong and critically taking an early intervention and prevention approach so that we can prevent people ever becoming victims at all. These roundtables will bring together partners from within and beyond the criminal justice system, convening the wider system under the scope of the Mayor to identify opportunities to work together differently and take best practice from other places and sectors.

Since the Chief Inspector published his report widespread violent disorder was seen across the country. I look forward to the outcome of the urgent inspection he is now undertaking and would welcome engagement in that process to provide my input on events in South Yorkshire.

I look forward to working with you both to keep people safe across South Yorkshire.

Best,

Oliver Coppard
Mayor of South Yorkshire