

13 February 2025

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

Dear Chief Inspector

**Response from Oliver Coppard, South Yorkshire's Mayor, to the HMICFRS report: An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024**

I welcome the findings of this report and the recognition of the immense bravery and resilience that police officers showed in dealing with public disorder events in July and August 2024 to protect innocent people going about their day to day lives.

It is clear from this review that there is work to do to strengthen and improve central mechanisms for deployment and resourcing. I am therefore pleased that two of the three recommendations are focused on these processes.

Each of the recommendations will require Chief Constables to work in partnership with national bodies to improve the local response to public disorder. These have all been accepted by the Chief Constable of South Yorkshire Police, and as Mayor with PCC responsibilities in South Yorkshire, I will oversee local implementation through my existing governance arrangements.

As well as working through the recommendations set out in your report, South Yorkshire Police commenced their own local de-brief, and it is important that this learning is brought together in the coming months. The Chief Constable and I have spoken to a number of officers about their experiences on the day of the disorder, and also to understand the impact this has had on them in the subsequent days and months. I'm sure this was of real value when recently giving evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee. This approach and commitment to shared learning will be of great benefit in enabling South Yorkshire Police in continuing to provide the best service to our local communities as well as ensuring the safety and wellbeing of its officers.

**(Recommendation 1) With immediate effect, the National Police Chiefs' Council and chief constables, working with the College of Policing and the Home Office, should create a plan and begin work to improve the police service's capacity and capability to respond to widespread violent disorder. They should plan to:**

- a) in consultation with the Home Office, review the public order public safety (POPS)-related elements of the Strategic Policing Requirement and add relevant specialist capabilities, beginning with investigators and intelligence resources;
- b) complete a full assessment of the suitability and availability of personal protective equipment for all POPS trained officers, including mounted branches and dog units;
- c) make sure that every police force or region can rapidly deploy drones during POPS incidents;
- d) develop and provide guidance on the use of drones within the College of Policing's POPS authorised professional practice;

- e) **review the range of available tactical options, equipment and technology to make sure officers can quickly and safely disperse people who take part in disorder; and**
- f) **review POPS training at all levels, including an assessment of the adequacy of the current fitness test for level 2 officers.**

I agree with this recommendation in principle. It is imperative that officers have access to the most suitable personal protective equipment to allow them to operate safely and I welcome the recommended assessment.

However, to effectively address the capacity and capability issues identified, this will either require additional resourcing, or the redeployment of local resources to support a centralised function. It is therefore important that a robust needs and risk assessment is completed to understand the potential impact of centralisation on the local policing response. Policing public disorder often requires officers to be re-distributed away from other demand to focus on the response. This diversion of resource can be protracted, for example in order to progress investigations associated with the violent disorder. As highlighted within the latest Annual Assessment of Policing (2023), there is a necessity for policing to prioritise getting the basics right to support victims of crime, and to do so, fully resourced policing teams including local neighbourhood teams are required. I welcome the governments Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee and the commitment to community policing.

I welcome the review of POPS training at all levels. In reviewing training requirements for officers, due regard must be given to the capacity of local training teams to facilitate. Appropriate job-related fitness levels must be maintained so that local forces are always prepared for and able to respond to emerging and actual threats of violent disorder. However, forward planning and a comprehensive assessment will be required to minimise the potential impact on existing schedules of training which continue to experience increasing demand as we see a continued move towards the professionalisation of policing specialisms such as public protection.

In considering the use of drones, national guidance must address the wider impact of digital mass surveillance on the trust and confidence of the public in policing. I am generally supportive of the use of digital technology and Artificial Intelligence to increase efficiency in policing. However, public transparency and consultation throughout implementation are essential to ensure that the principle of policing by consent is maintained.

It should also be noted that in aiming to improve the response to violent disorder, there are human rights implications that will need more careful consideration. In South Yorkshire, I will continue to seek assurances through an Independent Ethics Panel to provide challenge and scrutiny of integrity, standards, and ethical decision-making in the local policing response. Current workstreams include a specific focus on Digital Policing and Use of Force as part of a wider work programme. We have a Policing Protest Panel in South Yorkshire. The panel was convened in relation to the violent disorder and helps to understand how the police approach protest.

**(Recommendation 2) With immediate effect, the National Police Chiefs' Council and chief constables, working with the College of Policing, should create a plan and begin work to improve how the police service mobilises public order public safety (POPS) resources. They should plan to:**

- a) **give the National Police Chiefs' Council POPS lead (national co-ordinating gold commander) explicit authority to set the national strategy for POPS mobilisation, and full command and control of the deployment of tier 3 resources;**
- b) **improve the capacity and capability of all regional information and co-ordination centres, including providing better guidance and a common operating framework;**

- c) **improve the technology available to the National Police Coordination Centre, so that it can deploy and manage mutual aid more effectively and efficiently – the police service should be able to access information on the identity, number, location and nature of resources; skills available; length of deployments; and operational status of vehicles;**
- d) **prioritise a national structured debriefing process about the police response to disorder that supports rapid learning and improvement; and**
- e) **increase the police service's POPS mobilisation testing regime and take decisive action on its results.**

I agree with this recommendation.

The report showed that national mobilisation of POPS resources was instrumental in ending the disorder and so it is right that steps are taken to streamline decision-making and increase effectiveness. In addressing the proposed actions, this would support local forces to better adapt to a rapidly changing operating environment. This is especially significant given the advanced use of digital technology and social media and the role it can play in fuelling such events and at great speed. Findings from tranche two of this review will be paramount in understanding arrangements for rapid learning particularly in relation to the gathering and use of local and national intelligence, and it is essential that preparedness for future disorder is prioritised.

However, as with many other areas of policing, capacity to improve information and intelligence sharing is hindered by an ageing IT infrastructure and poor interoperability of systems. IT systems are not all joined up, and information can quickly become out-of-date as situations evolve. There is also a lack of skills effecting capability within local forces. Retaining officers and staff with the required technical knowledge remains a challenge in a heavily competitive market. To address this issue, I would welcome and support further collaboration between Mayors/PCCs, HMICFRS, the Home Office, NPCC and Police Digital Service to explore these challenges together.

As much of the detail relates to operational policing, I will be liaising with my Chief Constable to examine the impact of these actions and how South Yorkshire Police can support this common aim of improving the policing response to violent disorder.

**(Recommendation 3) With immediate effect, the National Police Chiefs' Council and chief constables, working with the College of Policing and the Home Office should create a plan and begin work to improve the well-being support the police service gives to its officers and staff. They should plan to:**

- a) **create formal protocols with ambulance services and hospital trusts for the treatment of police officers who are injured on duty;**
- b) **assess how public order public safety planning and mobilisation, at force, regional and national levels, considers and prioritises the well-being of officers and staff, such as making sure they have access to food and drink, rest and rotation, personal protective equipment and toilet facilities;**
- c) **consider whether public order public safety roles should be defined as 'high risk', particularly in police forces that face frequent, extensive and severe disorder;**
- d) **review whether officers deployed in hostile incidents need additional support on a case-by-case basis; and**
- e) **examine the level of contribution that each police force, and the Home Office, makes to police treatment and well-being centres, so that all officers and staff who need treatment can access it.**

I agree with this recommendation. South Yorkshire experienced one of the highest numbers of officers injured because of the violence. I am keen to understand this further and any learning both locally and from other forces affected. I am committed to ensuring that a high level of support is available to those affected, as well as the wider workforce.

Locally, established protocols were utilised to ensure that injured officers were treated as swiftly as possible following the disorder. However, improvements can always be made, and ongoing conversations with ambulance services and hospital trusts will be aided by a strong foundation of existing partnerships. This is both through me, as the chair of the Integrated Care Partnership, and key officers who have been collaborating in areas such as the implementation of Right Care Right Person in South Yorkshire.

My Chief Constable is the national wellbeing lead for the NPCC, and I am assured that positive provisions are in place at a local level. This has been evidenced through the work of the Independent Ethics Panel and additional monitoring as completed by my office to assess the level of support provided by the senior command team immediately following the disorder.

On the day of the disorder in South Yorkshire, muster stations were available and there was a great deal of effort to maintain morale for both local and mutual aid officers. In the proceeding weeks, ongoing support continued to be promoted across the force. In its winter edition, South Yorkshire Police's internal wellbeing publication (SYP&Me) spoke to the challenging nature of the violent disorder, and the fact that for some, this will have been their first experience of POPS policing. The publication is well utilised by officers and staff across the force, and the feature offered an additional mechanism to signpost to local provisions such as TRiM assessments, the Employee Assistance Programme, back up buddy, and wellbeing champions with applications being readily available on officer devices promoting ease of access at any point day or night. This was one method that helped raise the profile of wellbeing and available support and helped reinforce the message that 'it is ok to not be ok'.

More widely, there is a need to examine mental health and wellbeing of the police workforce and the impact this has on recruitment and retention. I would suggest this is required before it can be established what additional support may be needed for POPS officers, and that this is more pertinent than defining certain roles as high risk. The latest Pay and Morale survey (2023) indicated that poor mental health was a key factor impacting a large proportion of the police workforce and a significant indicator in those wanting to resign. Events such as the violent disorder in July and August 2024 bring these issues to the fore, but a holistic approach will be required to fully understand the challenges faced by policing. This may take some time to understand as the full effects of the violent disorder may not be known for some time.

Commenting more broadly, this report deals with some disturbing and distressing issues that are important to face head on. The violence that took place in South Yorkshire was appalling. What we saw was not a protest, but brutal thuggery focused against some of the most vulnerable people in our society with police officers subsequently becoming a further target for those intent on using violence.

I am pleased that this interim report recognises the great job that South Yorkshire Police did in keeping people safe and the support that our communities showed to them. Officers had leave cancelled, spent time away from their families and faced unbelievable levels of violence, something that all of us in South Yorkshire are extremely grateful for.

In examining these events, we need to better understand what can be done at a local, regional, and national level to better protect our communities and our officers when violent disorder arises and to work together to understand and prevent disorder from happening in the first place. I welcome the national drive for improvement, and the emphasis this report places on collaboration between policing and government bodies.

I have copied this letter to the Home Secretary for her information.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'O. Coppard', with a stylized, cursive script.

**Oliver Coppard**  
South Yorkshire's Mayor