

South Yorkshire
Mayoral Combined Authority
11 Broad Street West
Sheffield, S1 2BQ

16 October 2026

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

Dear Chief Inspector,

Response from Kilvinder Vigurs, South Yorkshire's Deputy Mayor, to the HMICFRS report on State of Policing: Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2025-26

I welcome these findings and the opportunity to reflect on how policing serves communities here in South Yorkshire, as well as the challenges and opportunities presented by the Government's planned policing reforms for England and Wales.

As this report highlights, we are at a pivotal moment. Decision-makers must carefully consider how reforms are coordinated to ensure they deliver the best outcomes for local communities. Responses gathered through your assessment indicate that unresolved decisions regarding force mergers are already creating uncertainty and instability. Effective collaboration will be essential to ensure governance and scrutiny arrangements remain robust, accountability is maintained, and that local policing functions that underpin effective service are protected.

While there were no formal recommendations, the report identified a number of strengths and areas for future focus.

The report highlights a deep commitment to continuous improvement across policing, and this is a strength I recognise here within South Yorkshire Police. Locally, there is a strong commitment to transparency, accountability and learning through constructive engagement with scrutiny and evaluation processes. This includes:

- **Internal Scrutiny Boards** - with the senior command team and appropriate thematic leads
- **Community Confidence Boards** - a public forum whereby communities can hear directly from South Yorkshire Police and SYMCA, and ask questions and take part in discussions that help inform local-decision making
- **The Independent Ethics Panel** – providing independent challenge and assurance regarding the integrity, standards, and ethics of decision-making in policing

I was encouraged that the assessment recognised that police reform should not be driven by force size alone. There remains limited evidence that larger forces deliver better outcomes. Wider consideration should be given to how structural change, including a number of

proposed national functions, will better meet the needs of the public and improve outcomes for the communities policing serves. There should also be greater consideration given to the opportunities that Mayoral Combined Authorities bring to help break the cycle of reoffending and tackle systemic issues impacting policing.

The report notes that rising demands and complexity of crime is impacting ability to provide a consistent and effective level of service. This will be felt even more so in forces such as South Yorkshire where we see:

- Higher overall levels of police recorded crime (+20%) than the England and Wales average.
- Fewer FTE police officers (-11%) per 100,000 population than the England Wales average to deal with that demand.
- Funding received per crime is 24.3% less than the England and Wales average.

The ability to raise police funding locally is also significantly constrained by an area's housing profile, with areas with a high proportion of properties in lower council tax bands negatively impacted. For example, in South Yorkshire, only around 27% of funding can be generated through the council tax precept, compared with a national average of 35% and around 50% in some higher-property-value areas, increasing reliance on national funding allocations.

Making improvements with finite resources will therefore remain a challenge. We continue to highlight in our conversations with government that financial sustainability is a matter of significant concern and I am pleased that your report has recognised the risk that this creates.

Technology and artificial intelligence offer opportunities to improve productivity, but their use must be carefully managed to maintain public trust and confidence. I have highlighted this concern within previous responses to inspection reports and was pleased to see this reflected within your annual assessment. Through bodies such as Police AI and the College of Policing, there is an urgent need to develop robust national frameworks and more centralised regulation. This extends beyond emerging technologies and AI to the wider digital landscape underpinning modern policing. Almost every investigation now contains a digital element, and that digital footprint continues to expand as mobile devices increase in both capacity and capability.

As a result, the volume of digital material requiring examination is growing significantly, leading to longer download and review times and, consequently, delays in outcomes for both victims and suspects. National reform of digital forensics and investigative technology should provide clearer direction and consistency, enabling forces to adopt proven and tested digital solutions at pace rather than developing local approaches in isolation.

I would welcome the support of HMICFRS and the Home Office in ensuring appropriate safeguards and national standards are in place so that technology is adopted ethically, consistently, sustainably and in a way that improves outcomes for the public.

The report highlights policing's ability to mobilise resources and respond effectively to crises. This is a clear strength here in South Yorkshire, but the increasing demand around policing protests alongside sustained periods of overall increased incident demand means that managing community cohesion is a key challenge. Despite this, South Yorkshire Police continues to demonstrate strong capability in managing critical incidents and major investigations, supported by effective command structures and robust risk assessment processes.

As the report highlights, consistent and effective leadership is essential to support the workforce. Demands highlighted above further impact workforce resilience, and it is essential that effective supervision, sustained focus on wellbeing, and skills development across the workforce is prioritised.

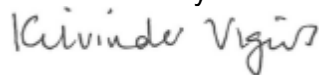
Commenting more broadly,

While there are opportunities for increased focus on performance to promote improvements, I support your conclusion that the reintroduction of national targets through the new Police Performance Framework must not encourage perverse behaviours. This is a risk which must be carefully managed. Approaches must remain victim-centred by focusing on service quality, accountability and the delivery of better outcomes when assessing performance. I would also add that nationally mandated performance frameworks must not constrain to local forces' ability to prioritise local needs.

We should also recognise reform beyond policing and consider that it is also a pivotal time for wider criminal justice reform. Recent legislative and policy changes relating to the Sentencing Act are increasing the requirement to manage risk within communities, without the necessary infrastructure to support. The longer-term impact of this shift on policing demand is not yet fully understood. We continue to work with partners to tackle these challenges together, through the work of the Local Criminal Justice Board which I chair, Community Safety Partnerships and other partnership arrangements.

I would like to express thanks to the officers and staff working at South Yorkshire Police and all of our partners for their continued collaboration to help keep communities in South Yorkshire safe.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kilvinder Vigurs', written in a cursive style.

Kilvinder Vigurs

Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime