

The Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

2nd February 2023

Dear Home Secretary,

Digital forensics: An inspection into how well the police and other agencies use digital forensics in their investigations

As required by statute, I am writing to you to respond to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection report entitled, 'Digital forensics: An inspection into how well the police and other agencies use digital forensics in their investigations'.

The report highlights the significant growth in the use of technology over the past 20 years and although its advancement has created new issues and has changed the way in which we police, it has also provided us with many opportunities and has assisted in the investigation of many cases that may not otherwise have been resolved.

As the Chief Constable states in her comment below, Gwent was one of the forces selected to participate in the fieldwork for this inspection. I am pleased that the good work of the force was recognised in the report in relation to the development of their understanding of current demand and that a workforce plan that aligned appropriate numbers of digital staff to digital forensic demand had been prepared.

"I welcome this inspection report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) which examines the provision of digital forensics in police forces and regional organised crime units. As the report highlights, demand in digital forensics continues to grow and presents law enforcement with significant challenges to secure and preserve evidence. Gwent were selected as a fieldwork force for this inspection and I am pleased that our work to understand current demand is referenced in the final report.

In terms of ongoing work, I am pleased to report that an assessment into our Digital Media Investigator (DMI) capacity and capability was reviewed in November 2022. The Force recognises that DMI's are critical to identifying digital lines of enquiry in volume crime and play a major role in reducing demand within DFU. Departments that generate the most DMI demand have been identified, and we are in the process of identifying suitable individuals to receive training as part of a phased uplift. Furthermore, the report highlights the many varied approaches to achieving accreditation. I am pleased to report that we are already working with South Wales Police, Dyfed Powys Police and our Regional Organised Crime Unit towards one quality management team and are also supporting the 'All Wales Forensic Alliance'.

We will continue to improve in this important area and provide the best possible service to victims."

Digital forensics is a key area within policing as timely examination of devices as part of an investigation can have a positive impact on a victim's wellbeing and also of a successful prosecution. I am therefore pleased that the Chief Constable has already recognised its importance and has highlighted the work that is in progress to review the capability and capacity of their DMIs which supports the third recommendation in this report, even though it is not one directly for forces to progress.

I share below Gwent Police's response to the relevant recommendations within the inspection report, which detail the work underway to make the improvements called for by the inspectorate:

➤ **Recommendation 2**

By December 2023, each force in England and Wales should develop a governance and oversight framework to better understand the local demand for digital forensic services.

Gwent Digital Forensic Unit (DFU) has been collating statistical data relating to performance and demand since 2021. There is an existing structure already in place. Weekly DFU team meetings feed into monthly Cybercrime performance meetings, with the Cybercrime Detective Inspector then reporting directly to senior management with Crime Operations. Demand, caseload and performance is currently scrutinised in the monthly Serious Organised Crime (SOC) meeting. It is recognised that this may not be the optimum forum for some of the data that is not directly relevant to SOC. To address this, work is ongoing to align DFU demand and performance data with the force's wider performance framework. This will include digital forensic submissions to the Digital Forensics accredited laboratory and all submissions to frontline digital 'kiosks'. This performance meeting will be chaired by the Detective Chief Inspector of Crime Ops and will be in place by April 2023 which will in turn feed into the wider Gwent Police governance framework for performance oversight.

➤ **Recommendation 4**

By September 2023, the National Police Chiefs' Council and all forces within England and Wales need to include the management of digital forensic kiosks in their governance and oversight frameworks.

Gwent DFU/Cybercrime has been collating data specifically relating to Kiosk submissions since February 2021. Since this date, the newly implemented kiosk model has enabled a greater understanding of demand, as well as embedding a formal submission process that is transparent and auditable. Within Gwent, the digital forensic kiosks sit under the same management structure as Cybercrime and DFU. As a result of recent changes to streamline submissions for frontline officers, DFU and Kiosk now share the same submission forms and e-mail submission inbox, with both managers co-located and providing resilience. As detailed above, there is an existing structure already in place to scrutinise the demand and performance of Kiosk submissions. As of April 2023, Kiosk data will be scrutinised in the Crime Operations performance meeting.

➤ **Recommendation 8: By November 2024, chief constables should integrate digital forensic services under their existing forensic science structure.**

There is a general recognition that Digital Forensics would benefit from being aligned to some of the existing structures that are fully established within traditional forensic science services. This becomes increasingly apparent when assessing Force's individual efforts to achieve ISO accreditation. To fully integrate Gwent DFU into our existing forensic science structure would cause a number of operational issues, both within DFU and impacting service delivery to frontline policing.

Gwent's forensic science service provision is through the Joint Scientific Investigation Unit (JSIU), which is a collaborative unit with South Wales Police. Fully integrating Gwent DFU into JSIU would therefore inevitably result in collaboration between Gwent and South Wales DFUs. This is a collaboration that has been previously explored and was not supported. In part, this was due to the significant differences in processes, operating models and resourcing. Whilst collaboration at an operational level is a significant hurdle, efforts are being made to collaborate within Quality Management Teams. The 'Southern Wales Collaboration' consists of Quality Managers from Gwent DFU, South Wales DFU, Dyfed Powys DFU and ROCU. The vision is for one Quality Management Team and one 'Electronic Quality Management System' [eQMS] that will provide regional consistency of process and provide significant efficiencies in demonstrating compliance with ISO. Gwent DFU and Quality Manager are also supporting the 'All Wales Forensic Alliance'. This project is being co-ordinated by an ACC from South Wales Police, with the scope covering all forensics disciplines within Wales.

As evidenced, Gwent Police is already undertaking work to understand and improve digital forensics for local people. It is important that we get it right and that we do not fall behind the continuous developments in technology as those most impacted by delays in this area of work are victims of crime. I provide my full support to the Chief Constable in ensuring that these recommendations are implemented.

Yours sincerely,



Jeff Cuthbert B.Sc., MCIPD
Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent