

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

21<sup>st</sup> September 2023

Dear Home Secretary,

**An inspection of how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms.**

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, 'An inspection of how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms'.

I was pleased to note that the report highlights that the officers involved in armed policing are dedicated and professional and that at an operational level there are good selection process and that officers are well equipped. This is essential if they are to focus on keeping the public, and themselves, safe in what are extremely dangerous situations. This is supported by the comment from the Chief Constable in response to this inspection report:

*'I welcome this inspection report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services which examines how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms, including specialist munitions. As the report highlights, this is a high-risk area of policing and I am pleased that the inspectorate found effective processes for the selection of firearms officers and that officers are well-trained and well-equipped. However, the report also highlights there are areas for improvement regarding resources and equipment, training and exercising and governance. As our firearms capability operates as a joint unit, I will work closely with Chief Constable colleagues in South Wales and Dyfed Powys Police to ensure the recommendations made in the report are implemented'.*

I note in the report that concern was raised regarding the investment in training facilities not keeping pace with the increase in the number of armed officers and that many of these facilities were deteriorating. This is an area already being developed by the three southern Welsh forces with the design and planning stage for a new firearms training facility being well advanced. I am committed to the development of this new facility in order to meet the required standards but also recognise it places a significant financial challenge on the three forces in relation to capital spend.

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 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024, Chief Constables should make sure there is access to both specialist strategic firearms commanders and specialist tactical firearms commanders, through a 24-hour rota covering their region.**

The Joint Firearms Unit (JFU) have in place a specialist Tactical Firearms Commander (STFC) Rota with 24/7 coverage. This is supplemented by a specialist strategic firearms commander (SSFC) call out feature facilitated by the recorded telephone system used to make calls to the on-call individual. This is a 24 hour rota. Numbers of both STFC/SSFC are identified by the Command and Compliance Inspector.

**Recommendation 3: By 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023, all Chief Constables should make sure the armed response vehicle asset tracking equipment, as provided by Counter Terrorism Policing, is available and used in their forces. They should train relevant staff in its use. Asset tracking equipment is in current use is by our CTSFO's only. A new version of this equipment is being purchased regionally. Regional training will then be provided.**

*Plans are now in place for a roll out process to all armed response vehicle and Force control room officers and staff to have additional training when the package is delivered. There is currently a national delay with the project roll out due to concerns that are being explored further. It is anticipated that the roll out will commence in early 2024.*

**Recommendation 5: By 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, all chief constables should make sure that all strategic and tactical firearms commanders have observed the firearms tactics and the use of specialist munitions they can authorise, before being operationally deployed. JFU training is available to facilitate this recommendation by appointment. All attendees at the Initial Tactical Firearms Commander (ITFC) course are advised how to contact JFU training to attend and view the tactics. The JFU will ensure that available dates are circulated to all commanders who will be invited to attend to observe tactics and use of specialist munitions.**

*JFU film the tactics which are delivered on command courses and the Tactical Firearms Command Courses have a structured video describing the tactics. All commanders will be invited to attend and observe the tactics and use of specialist munitions in person.*

**Recommendation 6: By 31<sup>st</sup> December, Chief Constables should make sure that the annual accreditation process for strategic and tactical firearms commanders includes familiarisation with any new weapons systems and observation of any new tactics or specialist munitions the force has introduced or is planning to introduce. This is covered during Command mandatory training in training modules such as CBRN, New Weapon System, learning from siege module. Mandatory training for commanders in firearms covers the roles:**

- Operational Firearms commanders (OFC's),
- Tactical Firearms commanders (TFC's), and
- Strategic Firearms Commanders (SFC's).

*Command training will also include familiarisation with new weapon systems. The training department will circulate a list of training dates and invite commanders to attend to observe tactics/specialist munitions in person.*

**Recommendation 8: With immediate effect, each Assistant Chief Constable regional firearms lead should attend all National Armed Policing Portfolio meetings. If they are unable to attend, they should make sure another Assistant Chief Constable armed policing lead from a force in their region attends on their behalf.**

*This is the one meeting that the regional ACC portfolio holder would always ensure they attended. If the ACC was not able to attend, the JFU Superintendent and/or Chief Inspector would attend. Attendance would be agreed by the three force ACCs at the JFU Oversight board. This has been agreed with National Armed Policing. Also, as an exception, other ACCs from the region could attend.*

**Recommendation 10: With immediate effect, Chief Constables should improve senior officer oversight of their armouries, including an independent annual audit.**

*The JFU undertake regular audits within all armouries owned by the unit. Weekly audit checks of the main HQ armoury are completed by the armourers and each Hub armoury is checked weekly where all audits are held on chronicle. An annual audit takes place by the JFU Planning Inspector. This was last carried out on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023 by the Planning Inspector, Planning Sgt and 1 armourer. This is recorded and fed into the APSTRA and Oversight Board. These internal audits feed into strategic governance meetings chaired by an ACC so there is senior officer oversight.*

*Two Inspection officers from HMICFRS conducted an external audit of the armoury in January 2023. A review of options will take place, at the strategic level, for an independent and continued external annual audit mechanism.*

**Recommendation 12: With immediate effect, Chief Constables, through their armed policing governance structure, should make sure that all armed deployment records are stored and auditable.**

*The JFU uses a specific system to maintain all records, training, armoury, and operations. This includes in depth operational data regarding deployments undertaken by the JFU. Each deployment (dated back to 2012) is recorded on the system and kept for easy retrieval and audit. Each Command log is also hyperlinked to the deployment record for ease of reference.*

*Auditing of records takes place as part of the firearms licensing process. The JFU has a permanent Business Support Unit which inputs all deployment data and has responsibility for Data quality (with a specifically appointed role of a chronicle assurance officer for this purpose).*

*Each deployment is supplemented by the submission of a chronicle form usually by the Tactical Advisors into the Business Support Unit (BSU). Each deployment is listed on the bronze report which is completed by each team on a 24-hour basis and again submitted into the BSU so they know which forms will be submitted. Deployments are further backed up with the Force Incident Manager logs from each of the three forces which also lists all authorities for both Taser and Firearms so that the BSU can also double check against any chronicle forms which need to be submitted. All information from the forms are input onto the database by the BSU. The chronicle assurance officer then data quality checks the information.*

I am encouraged that such a high risk area of policing has been found to be working well and that there are good systems and structures already in place. As the Chief Constable has mentioned, Gwent share firearms resources with South Wales and Dyfed Powys Police. I will

support the Chief Constable in working with our colleagues to ensure our firearms unit considers the outcomes of the recommendations made and implements them as appropriate.

Yours sincerely,



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