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Comisiynydd Heddlu a Throsedd Gwent | Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent: Jeff Cuthbert B.Sc., MCIPD

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

4th May 2023

Dear Home Secretary,

Inspection into how well the police tackle serious youth violence

As required by statute, I am writing to you to respond to the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection report entitled, 'An inspection into how well the police tackle serious youth violence'.

We continue to recognise the significance and scale of the issue of violence affecting young people in our communities in Gwent. This is re-iterated by the Chief Constable in her comment below:

I welcome this inspection report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services which examines how well the police tackle serious youth violence. Violence and knife crime has a devastating impact on both victims and their families, as well as the wider community, and I am committed to implementing the recommendations made to Chief Constables within the report.

The report highlights the importance of partnership working to reduce serious youth violence. The force works with a range of partners across different sectors to tackle the issue. For example, in autumn 2022, with partners in youth justice services, three youth engagement projects were delivered in an area in Newport. The initiatives, which were part-funded by the Home Office's Safer Streets fund, sought to build positive relationships between police and young people, develop life skills and improve awareness of the impact of violence and knife crime on victims and the wider community.

The force also seeks opportunities to build trust and confidence with young people. For example, in conjunction with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the force has participated in a Youth Question Time Panel as well as facilitating an annual scrutiny process through a local high school. Furthermore, in November 2022, the force hosted the Knife Angel – a 27ft sculpture, which is made from more than 100,000 knives. The Knife Angel presented an opportunity to engage with our communities, particularly with children and young people, about the consequences and dangers of carrying a knife. As a result of the month's activity, Youth Justices Services set up a diversionary project and over 250 knives were surrendered at amnesties.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg, a phan ddaw i law, byddwn yn ateb yn y Gymraeg – ni fydd hyn yn gohirio ein hymateb. Os hoffech dderbyn gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg o hyn ymlaen, neu os ydych wedi cael eich gwahoddi gyfweiliad neu gyfarfod ac yr hoffech ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg, anfonwch e-bost at: Commissioner@gwent.police.uk. Darperir gwasanaethau cyfieithu.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and where received, we will reply in Welsh - this will not delay our response. If you wish to receive correspondence in Welsh hereafter or if you have been invited to an interview or meeting and you wish to use Welsh, send email to: Commissioner@gwent.police.uk. Translation services will be provided.

As Chief Constable, I am committed to working with partners across a number of sectors to reduce serious youth violence and its devastating impact.

As indicated in her comments, the Chief Constable and I remain committed to tackling serious youth violence. Preventing and reducing crimes that cause significant harm to communities and victims is a key commitment within my Police and Crime Plan. We recognise that serious violence is deeply damaging to communities and can disproportionately affect certain groups in society. To combat this, we aim to use all the tools at our disposal, ranging from proactive prevention through to tackling offending and safeguarding those at risk. Close and effective partnership work plays a fundamental role in ensuring success.

Together with Gwent Police, my office and I have made a commitment to putting the needs of children and young people at the heart of what we do, which includes taking a 'child first' approach across policing. As part of this, we are working to:

- Build stronger relationships between Gwent Police and children and young people, listening to, and respecting the voice of every young person to help understand the wide range of issues that affect their lives
- Prevent children and young people from being drawn into a life of crime.
- Improve the life chances of children and young people who are involved in crime by working with organisations such as the Youth Offending Team.
- Support children and young people who are victims of crime.

Introduced in 2019, my office continues to coordinate the Youth Question Time event. Held in partnership with the Gwent Regional Youth Forum, the annual event brings children and young people from different communities across Gwent together with local decision makers to raise the issues that they are most concerned about. Topics raised have included knife crime, county lines drug dealing, mental health, and anti-social behaviour and the feedback provided is used to inform future decisions and partnership working.

My office and I have placed a significant focus on implementing the Serious Violence Duty in Gwent and, as the convening body, have met with relevant partners to seek agreement on a local approach. A recent review of Community Safety in Gwent has also provided an opportunity to consider where best to discharge the Duty within the local community safety landscape and ensure that there is a consistent approach across partners. Working with Crest Advisory, we have held workshops to support development of readiness and needs assessments and have progressed an appropriate funding model to support the required activity.

A key element of our work to address serious youth violence is early intervention and prevention and I have provided funding and resources to support this. The St Giles Trust delivers crisis intervention to children and young people in Gwent who have been identified as at risk from, or involved, with serious and organised crime, which can lead to serious violence. The trust has been working with Crimestoppers to deliver its Fearless programme in local schools and provide targeted support to hotspot areas.

Since January 2019, Crimestoppers' Fearless team has delivered sessions on knife crime, child exploitation and drug running to over 14,000 young people. Sessions are designed to give young people the education and confidence to recognise these issues within their friendship groups and communities, but also to give them the knowledge and confidence to report them. They have also delivered training to more than 230 professionals, parents, and carers on spotting the signs of organised crime.

My office was instrumental in bringing the Knife Angel to Gwent. During its time here, we worked with Gwent Police and partners including Newport City Council, Fearless, St Giles Trust and the Street Doctors to deliver workshops to thousands of secondary school children about the dangers of violence and aggression to young people. We also worked with primary schools and youth groups to discuss these important issues, which will continue for the foreseeable future.

I also continue to contribute funding to Positive Futures, a social inclusion programme that uses sport as a tool to engage with young people. Activities are delivered free of charge in locations such as youth clubs, leisure centres, parks or in the middle of housing estates, and targeted at areas where there has been an identified problem with crime or antisocial behaviour. The Positive Futures team run a range of open access, voluntary sessions across Gwent, as well as targeted work with young people through referrals from partnership agencies. By offering children and young people the chance to take part in activities and be supported by adult mentors at an early age, Positive Futures is reinforcing good behaviours and helping to set the groundwork that will allow them to have a happy and healthy future

Over the last few years, my office has played a leading role in the 'Understanding the Triggers' work. In response to growing national concern regarding the correlation between school exclusions and children's subsequent involvement in crime, my office undertook a rapid evidence assessment to understand this issue at a local level. The research found that school exclusions provided an indicator of a series of vulnerabilities that increase both exposure to crime and exploitation, including trauma within the home (linked to adverse childhood experiences and experiences of being in care) and challenges in education (including speech, language, and additional learning needs). This work forms part of my commitment to early intervention and prevention to reduce and tackle offending behavior that may contribute to serious youth violence.

Criminal justice bodies in Wales have convened the multi-agency Criminal Justice Board for Wales (CJBfW), which is attended by the Chairs and Deputies of the Local Criminal Justice Boards (LCJBs). Key workstreams have been agreed for Wales which will be supported by the work undertaken locally. In addition to the well-established Victims and Witnesses workstream, we are working together to develop the following:

- Understanding and addressing the vulnerability and/or multiple complex needs of people who have offended. During 2022/23, the Welsh offending landscape was reviewed, and recommendations made to ensure that the right services are in place to meet the needs of people who have offended. A multi-agency Taskforce was established in January 2023 to take forward the required work at both the all-Wales and local levels.
- Utilising evidence to understand the causes and drivers of offending behaviour and build onto existing prevention and early intervention approaches to influence policy to reduce crime and make positive change (including embedding 'child first' practice). Using Public Health Wales research commissioned by CJBfW, interventions will be tested and implemented across Wales alongside further work to ensure that criminal justice agencies remain aware of Adverse Childhood Experiences and adopt trauma informed approaches to service delivery.
- Applying a 'one public service' approach in Wales to advance race equality. In September 2022, the CJBfW launched its Criminal Justice Anti-Racism Action Plan which will drive activity to improve race disproportionality, community participation, and workforce representation in Wales. A fundamental element of this is the holistic improvement of criminal justice race data quality and ensuring that it is used effectively in decision making. This work complements the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Gwent Police Joint Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 which has provided an organisation-wide focus on improving the accurate recording of protected characteristic information for victims and offenders and across the workforce.

My office coordinates the independent scrutiny process for stop and search and use of force. This provides community representatives with the opportunity to review body worn video and related data and information and provide feedback on their observations. Thematic areas of review include incidents involving children and young people, individuals from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, drug stops and offensive weapons. Outcomes and actions are included within a published report, which also includes subsequent updates from Gwent Police on their response to areas for improvement or further review.

I will now continue to work with the Chief Constable to ensure that Gwent Police's response to serious youth violence is effective and sustainable and makes a positive difference to the lives of children and young people.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Cuthbert', written in a cursive style.

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