

Swyddfa Comisiynydd yr Heddlu a Throseddau, Gwent
Office of Police and Crime Commissioner, Gwent

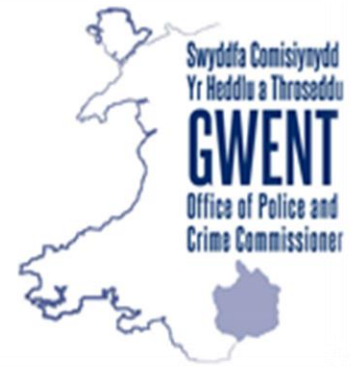
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Comisiynydd Heddlu a Throseddau Gwent | Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent:
Jeff Cuthbert B.Sc., MCIPD



The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

16th April 2021

Dear Home Secretary

Getting the balance right? An inspection of how effectively the police deal with protests.

As required by statute, I am writing to you to respond to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection entitled 'Getting the balance right? An inspection of how effectively the police deal with protests'.

As highlighted in the report, increasing amounts of police time and resources have been spent dealing with protests; this is certainly reflected in Gwent, especially over the previous 12 months where 81 protests have been managed locally, more than at any other time in living memory. This places huge strain on resources and can put significant pressure on the officers involved who can be subject to unnecessary violence. I do however acknowledge that the right to protests is an important part of our democracy and support the findings of the report; it is imperative that a fair balance is found between individual rights and the safety and wellbeing of local communities.

Even though there has been a significant increase in protests over the last 12 months, here in Gwent they are very well managed with good compliance from attendees in general. Protests always work better for all involved when there is engagement with the police in advance, although this wasn't always the case for the anti-lockdown protests.

It has proven even more of a challenge to manage protests throughout the coronavirus pandemic, allowing people their right to protest while balancing public health requirements and trying to keep protesters, officers and the general public as safe as possible. This is also an area highlighted by the Chief Constable, Pam Kelly, in her comment on the report below:

'I welcome this report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services which examines how effectively the police deal with protests.'

Policing protests is a complex balancing act between ensuring the democratic right for people to gather and express their views whilst seeking to minimise disruption and keep people safe, especially during the current pandemic. I am pleased that the professionalism of our officers who often face challenging circumstances when policing such events has been recognised by the inspectorate.

The report makes a number of recommendations for police forces and I commit to working through these with local, regional and national partners to ensure fairness and confidence within our communities'.

It is important to me to show my appreciation to the Gwent Police officers who have policed the protests here in Gwent and who have also provided mutual aid to other forces, most recently to Avon and Somerset Police, supporting them with the protests that have taken place in Bristol in relation to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

The Independent Advisory Group (IAG) also plays an important role in supporting the force, their advice on understanding community tensions during a protest is invaluable. I am also pleased to report that the IAG is involved in Gwent Police's de-briefs for protest related events and feed into community impact assessments.

I also include below an update to the relevant recommendations contained within the report:

Recommendation 4:

By 31st December 2021, chief constables should make sure that their legal services teams subscribe to the College of Policing Knowledge Hub's Association of Police Lawyers Group.

I have been assured that the collaborative legal services team that Gwent Police shares with South Wales Police do subscribe to the group, and have done for some time, with the lead operational policing solicitor being the main user.

Recommendation 6:

By 31st December 2021, chief constables should ensure that their forces have sufficiently robust governance arrangements in place to secure consistent, effective debrief processes for protest policing. Such arrangements should ensure that:

- **Force give adequate consideration to debriefing all protest-related policing operations;**
- **The extent of any debrief is proportionate to the scale of the operation;**
- **A national post-event learning review form is prepared after every debrief; and**
- **The form is signed off by a gold commander prior to submission to the National Police Coordination Centre**

All protests which involve a Gold, Silver and Bronze command structure are debriefed in force. That process also involves the Tactical Adviser and reference is also drawn from the decision log that is maintained prior to and during any such policing operation. Following the debrief, a national post-event learning review form is prepared, and this is then sent to the Strategic Intelligence Briefing for the National Police Coordination Centre. This responsibility resides with the Chief Inspector of Uniform Operations Support.

I am proud of the way in which protests have been dealt with here in Gwent, particularly in light of the extra demand this has placed on Gwent Police at the same time as managing the impact of the pandemic. I welcome the report and will support the Chief Constable in ensuring local people are able to exercise their right to protest whilst ensuring the safety of the wider community and the officers involved.

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