



Report of the Independent Ethics Panel following publication of the independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service (the Casey Review)

Our Panel

Our Panel is independent of both the Police and Crime Commissioner (the Commissioner) and the Chief Constable. We are drawn from the communities of Cheshire that we represent, and provide an independent and candid view on ethical issues within policing. We are invited to consider issues of importance by both the Commissioner and the Chief Constable, as well as raising other issues of interest for further review which we believe merit further scrutiny. We welcome the transparency that has been offered to the Panel in undertaking its work. Consequently, we have taken up the offer to observe training and operational activities to help inform our understanding of the organisation. Whilst we may make recommendations arising from our work, they are advisory and non-binding, but nevertheless we would expect all parties to consider any recommendations we do raise in the spirit in which they are offered.

Purpose of the Report

Our Panel was tasked by the Commissioner and the Chief Constable to consider the implications of the Casey Review and the impact it may have on the perceptions of the police by the population of Cheshire. The Panel recognised that the report had specifically looked at the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), and that many of the recommendations were force specific. We also acknowledged that the policing environment in Cheshire is very different to London.

We recognise the work that Cheshire Constabulary is doing to address the Violence against Women and girls (VAWG) agenda, and noted the increases in charge rates for offences in this area. The report highlighted a disconnect between the key people at the top of the MPS. Our Panel acknowledged the change in the leadership of the organisation in Cheshire, with the appointment of a new Chief Constable in April 2021 and election of a new Commissioner a month later. We believe that this has enabled the leading players in the governance of the organisation to develop a common agenda focusing on key issues and priorities such as the VAWG agenda. However, the Panel does not wish to be complacent and was therefore pleased to be asked to consider the report and offer our views for further consideration.

The Panel met on 30 March 2023 to consider the report, and were advised and supported by representatives of both the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the

Constabulary's Professional Standards Department. The latter was particularly important as they were able to respond to a number of technical issues that were raised in the Casey Review and were able to offer advice as to how similar issues are handled in Cheshire.

General thoughts on the Casey Review

The Panel was deeply concerned by the report's findings. It was clear that this was a thorough, wide ranging review and that the author had been afforded the opportunity to speak with many people both within and without the service to help support her recommendations. The report was also based on data that was already available to the MPS leadership. The Panel is aware of the recently reported tragic cases that had involved serving police officers and clearly accepted that, despite this happening in the MPS, could happen anywhere and sought reassurance that the risks of this happening in Cheshire were minimised as much as possible. The Panel found the report's evidence of homophobic, racist and misogynistic attitudes of some officers abhorrent, and were concerned that such attitudes would not only alienate a significant percentage of the population in London, but also potentially from police forces further afield including Cheshire.

Recruitment & vetting

The Panel was keen to learn more about how discriminatory attitudes could be identified in not only serving police officers, but amongst those that were applying to become police officers and staff. We discussed at length how police officers and staff were vetted. The Casey Review highlighted areas where vetting had lapsed for officers in the MPS, or had not been carried out sufficiently, and we were keen to understand how this was undertaken in Cheshire.

The Panel heard that all staff and officers in the Constabulary and the OPCC were currently the subject of an historic data wash, to ensure that offences committed elsewhere or historically were identified. The Panel discussed the ethical issue of an individual's right to a private life, but accepted that people in a position of responsibility and in an organisation such as the Police, should mean that an individual's private actions could impact adversely on their ability to undertake their role and accepted that the 'bar' had to be higher. The Panel agreed that all people working in policing organisations should have high ethical standards to ensure that they could act in their role fairly and impartially without fear or favour and this would outweigh a qualified right to privacy. Reflecting on the importance of this issue, the Panel calls on the Chief Constable and the Commissioner to ensure and demonstrate that all officers, staff and other relevant personnel receive the appropriate level of vetting at the right time and that this is reviewed regularly to ensure their vetting status remains valid.

Review of the misconduct process

We do have some concerns about the ability of Chief Constables to have the final say on the makeup of their own force, reflecting on the Review's recommendations that Chief Constables should be given the right of appeal to Police Appeals Tribunals where they conclude the sanction is inadequate. The Panel discussed this in the context of how the

determination of misconduct allegations by an independent person would play out in organisations in which they have worked. The Panel agreed that it would be helpful if this could be revisited to enable Chief Constables to enhance sanctions against officers who they felt had not achieved the right level of behaviour or standards to continue as police officers. The Panel agreed that it would support any such moves locally to make this happen.

Specialist units and development of cliques

Dame Casey's review highlighted the development of cliques and inappropriate behaviour amongst groups of officers, particularly in specialist units. The Panel accepted that due to the sheer size of the MPS, it would be easier for such groups to develop and be hidden from view and were encouraged to hear that the Chief Constable here in Cheshire personally meets with sergeants upon promotion to that rank, which inevitably helps instil the force's culture and leadership at any early stage.

The Panel was intently aware that the Casey Review was about the MPS and not the wider policing of England and Wales, but accepted that many of the points raised were worthy of further scrutiny. We noted that the MPS's officer numbers were significantly different to those in Cheshire – approximately 35,000 in the MPS whilst the number in Cheshire was around 2,350. Additionally, we were interested to learn that the number of chief officer rank officers (National Police Chiefs Council or NPCC) in the MPS is approximately 30, as opposed to 4 in Cheshire. We felt that this was important as it was inevitably easier for unified messages to be relayed to officers and staff from a small command team such as in Cheshire than when the organisation was so large with so many leaders.

Specialist units in Cheshire are not of the same size as they are in the MPS and there was no evidence provided that such attitudes were prevalent in these units. However, and not being complacent, the Panel was interested to note that officers are held to account through the misconduct process for a wide range of issues which were deemed to be inappropriate behaviours. To assist our learning on this matter, we have asked for sight of the report which is shared with the Commissioner on the number and types of misconduct cases being managed to get a full understanding of the scale of the issue in Cheshire.

Violence against women and girls

Baroness Casey's review states that 'women and children do not get the protection and support they deserve'. As a Panel, we considered this and how the people of Cheshire feel about their police service. We asked about how both the Constabulary and the Commissioner seek the views of the public and how the diverse views of our communities are heard. We acknowledge that it appears that a lot is done to seek people's views but we also accept that lots more could be done to engage with diverse communities and younger people. To help inform our work, we would find it helpful to better understand how both organisations gain the views of people in Cheshire on policing.

The Panel reiterated its concern about Baroness Casey's findings that women and girls do not get sufficient protection. The Panel has previously heard about the work that the Constabulary is doing on the domestic abuse agenda and is aware that this is a key priority

and well embedded into the force strategy. We have been impressed by the significant focus applied by the Constabulary and we remain confident that women and children do get protection in Cheshire. We did, however, raise a query about how young people who are accused of criminal activity are dealt with by the police and would be interested to learn more through one of our regular sessions about this.

Use of Stop and Search powers

The Casey report states that the use of stop and search within the MPS needed a 'fundamental reset'. Our Panel has had several discussions about the use of stop and search powers in Cheshire and is currently undertaking some further work around the disproportionality of stop and search use which may not be reflective of the resident population of Cheshire. We have scrutinised the data that has been presented to us and we are in the process of attending training sessions for new officers to see how they are trained in these powers. This work has not yet concluded, but to date, we have been satisfied with the data presented to us, but feel this area needs further scrutiny before we are in a position to report back formally on our findings.

Neighbourhood Policing

The report is very critical of how local policing is delivered in the MPS and recommends the imposition of new structures to ensure there is greater challenge at the local level. As residents of Cheshire, we are aware of the '122 Policing Model' that is operated by the Constabulary and supported by the Commissioner. From our interaction with the Constabulary and Commissioner, we are reassured that the neighbourhood policing model in Cheshire remains very much a key focus and provides a strong foundation through which policing is delivered to our diverse communities across the nine individual policing units. We understand that our communities are very different from those policed by the MPS, and that the challenges are also very different. Many of our communities are remote and feel isolated and we know the public call for more visibility in their communities. However, we are not picking up similar concerns highlighted in the report, but accept that local policing is fundamental and that the Constabulary needs to continue to capture the views of the public to remain responsive to their needs across all communities of Cheshire.

Conclusion

The Panel welcomes the opportunity to consider the issues arising out of the Casey Report and offer its initial views on the key findings, and welcome the open and transparent way in which our queries have been responded to. We accept that we have not looked into the full detail of the report but we have discussed at length the findings and some of the implications for Cheshire. We have not heard anything from our discussions to date which raise significant concern, but we are not complacent, and understand that many of the issues raised in the Casey report could very easily occur in any police force in the country. We are reassured that there is effective leadership in place, which ensures that both the Chief Constable and the Commissioner are working together in a positive partnership for the benefit of the people of Cheshire. We have been impressed by the continuing pursuit of perpetrators of domestic abuse which we feel sends a strong message not only to those

committing such crimes, but also to the organisation who understand that violence against women and girls is a priority that needs to be addressed.

We acknowledge that our initial review of the report is in no ways the conclusion of our work in this area. We are aware that the Commissioner is to hold a more detailed scrutiny of the Constabulary on how it addresses some of the wider issues raised in this report and we call on him to consider this report alongside that enhanced scrutiny.

Independent Ethics Panel
April 2023