

JOINT INSPECTION OF POLICE CUSTODY SUITES IN CHESHIRE

RESPONSE OF DAVID KEANE, POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR CHESHIRE

I welcome Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) joint report, published 01 February 2019, which sets out the findings of the unannounced inspection visit to police custody suites in Cheshire between 03 September 2018 and 13 September 2018. It was particularly pleasing to read that '*overall this was a very good inspection*' and that Inspectors found that the Constabulary was properly focused on the good treatment of detainees, particularly given that detainees are, at times, some of the most vulnerable people in which the police come into contact with.

I applaud the Constabulary following the Inspectors findings that the '*leadership and accountability for custody services in Cheshire were good*' and '*there was a clear objective to divert vulnerable people away from custody*'. I, along with the Chief Constable, will continue to ensure a specific focus upon reducing reoffending, the provision of health services and mental health liaison, the importance of child safeguarding within the custody environment and the ongoing commitment to divert people experiencing mental health issues away from police custody.

Inspectors also commented upon the effective Independent Custody Visiting Scheme that my office administers. The findings of this report are testament to the hard work of police officers and staff who work within the custody environment and to the dedication of volunteer Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) who give up their free time to ensure detainees are treated with respect and have access to appropriate facilities. ICVs continue to act as 'critical friends' providing me with invaluable feedback on a weekly basis in relation to the welfare of detainees from an independent, impartial and non-discriminatory view of all parties involved in the custody process.

I note in the report that Inspectors have made one recommendation to the Constabulary addressing a key cause of concern in relation to compliance with PACE codes of practice C and G for the detention, treatment and questioning of suspects. I have discussed this with the new Chief Constable of Cheshire Constabulary and I have been assured that work is ongoing to ensure necessary improvements are made and that the Constabulary will also focus upon the additional 19 areas for improvement identified by Inspectors.

Although this was a positive report, it was disappointing to read that of the 15 recommendations made during that previous inspection in 2013, only seven had been achieved, three had been partially achieved and five had not been achieved. Given the importance of such inspections and the welfare of detainees within police custody, I find it unacceptable that Cheshire Constabulary has not implemented recommendations since 2013.

Again, I have discussed this with the new Chief Constable of Cheshire Constabulary and explained my clear expectation that the Constabulary will implement recommendations provided by HMICFRS and HMIP. Nevertheless, if some recommendations are considered disproportionate, the Constabulary must provide a clear rationale as to why such recommendations will not be implemented. As such, I have requested that a full action plan (detailing all 2013 and 2018 recommendations / areas for improvement) is presented at the Public Scrutiny Board in May 2019 that details: i) completion; ii) progress towards completion; or iii) a clear rationale as to why a recommendation / area for improvement will not be implemented by Cheshire Constabulary.

