



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

23 January 2023

Dear Home Secretary,

Digital forensics: An inspection into how well the police and other agencies use digital forensics in their investigations

I am writing to you in response to the above HMICFRS report published on 1st December 2022.

The inspection of 8 forces and the subsequent national report examined the provision of digital forensics in police forces and regional organised crime units. The focus was on understanding and management of demand, and the quality of service being provided to victims of crime. HMICFRS made 9 recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of digital forensic services. 3 of these recommendations were for Chief Constables of local police forces.

I welcome the focus on digital forensics, with the report providing clear direction to national bodies and local forces to address the challenges in this area. Over the last 3 years I have invested significantly (over £5m) in West Mercia Police's Digital Forensics service to support a programme of transformation to address many of the challenges set out. As a result of this programme of work, I am pleased to report that West Mercia Police is in a good position to respond to the 3 force-level recommendations made by the inspectorate.

The force has already established a governance and oversight framework to better understand the local demand for digital forensic services. This includes departmental governance in respect of the management of local digital kiosks, as well as strategic governance and oversight through the Digital Forensics Transformation Programme Board, and a new Digital Investigation Board. These arrangements ensure there is clear

tactical and strategic oversight of current and projected demand, and consistency of approach and standards in relation to digital investigations. These boards report into the Assistant Chief Constable's Crime & Vulnerability Board, which includes a representative from my office.

The Digital Forensics department work to specified service level agreements and a performance framework is in place to further strengthen monitoring and scrutiny of digital forensics demand and timeliness. The force is in the process of procuring a new digital forensics case management system for 2023, which will further improve oversight and understanding of the workflow through the department and the impact on victims.

The final recommendation for local Chief Constables was to integrate digital forensic services under their existing forensic science structure. The significant majority of West Mercia's digital forensic service has been part of Forensic Services for many years, and are fully integrated from a governance, leadership, budgetary and accreditation perspective. There are a very small number of bespoke, specialised digital forensic activities (e.g., to support major investigations, cyber and the serious and organised crime unit) which currently sit outside of these arrangements. Work is already underway to transition these areas into the overarching governance of the forensic science structure.

My Safer West Mercia Plan includes specific commitments to ensure West Mercia Police will be an organisation fit for the digital age. These commitments are reflected in budgetary decisions I have made since 2020, including significant investment in a 3 year programme of digital transformation. Following the conclusion of this programme, my budget for 2023/24 will include continued, significant capital investment within digital forensics to ensure West Mercia Police has the right resources to deliver improved effectiveness and efficiency in this space. The delivery and impact of these budgetary investments will be monitored through various governance mechanisms including holding to account activity.

I will continue, as Commissioner, to use the findings from the national HMICFRS report to inform my oversight and scrutiny of the force's digital services provision.

Best wishes



John Campion
Police and Crime Commissioner
West Mercia

cc West Mercia Police Chief Constable
HMICFRS