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Office of the
**Police & Crime
Commissioner**
West Yorkshire

My Reference: OPCC/MBW/NF

Your Reference:

23 January 2019

Dear Home Secretary,

HMICFRS Response: Policing and Mental Health – picking up the pieces

I am writing in response to the recent national HMICFRS inspection report on how our police services are protecting and supporting members of the community suffering mental health issues.

It is common knowledge that police services are experiencing an unprecedented volume of incidents which have a mental health dimension. In November last year, I received a report from West Yorkshire Police which identified that they are handling 450 mental health related incidents each week - a near doubling of the picture of two years prior. The Home Affairs Committee report on 'Policing and Mental Health'¹ has also reported that between 20 and 40% of police time is associated with demand involving a mental health component. We know from our work to reduce re-offending that most prison leavers are carrying mental health or substance misuse disorders.

The importance of this issue has meant that I have included Mental Health as one of the 16 priorities in my Police & Crime Plan 2016-21, and because this is a topic which requires a partnership approach, since 2015 my office has hosted the West Yorkshire Criminal Justice and Mental Health Forum to bring together the expertise of key health, social care, third sector, and law enforcement partners working in West Yorkshire.

One of the group's key outputs has been the successful implementation of 'health-based places of safety', aligned to the requirements of the revised Section 136 of the Mental Health Act. Successfully developing pathways away from custody to appropriate mental health provision has been a significant achievement for the Board.

We have also had success in co-funding the provision of mental health nurses in police control rooms in Leeds and Bradford, to support better decision-making between call-handlers and officers about appropriate care responses for those in distress.

¹ Home Affairs Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2014–15, *Policing and Mental Health*, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmhaff/202/20202.htm>

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Related to this service is our Liaison and Diversion project (L&D), which has been established in Wakefield, Leeds and Bradford, to improve the health outcomes of people admitted into custody. By identifying people's mental health vulnerabilities at the earliest point, L&D practitioners can evaluate whether an individual should be referred for treatment or further support, and help guide people to appropriate services after their release from custody. We hope to extend this service in conjunction with NHS England in 2019/20 to cover the whole West Yorkshire area.

The HMICFRS report makes a number of recommendations for police services. Specific areas of activity currently being progressed by West Yorkshire Police in relation to these recommendations are:

- **Recommendation: All forces should carry out a 'snapshot' exercise to assess their mental health-related demand.**

A detailed manual review of incident files is to be undertaken by researchers in West Yorkshire Police's Safeguarding Central Governance Unit (SCGU). A review will be carried out of crimes and incidents over a 12 hour window to examine if the mental health issues of the victim or perpetrator are a significant factor in why the incident/crime has occurred.

- **Recommendation: All forces should evaluate their mental health triage services.**

West Yorkshire Police's SCGU are to submit a research proposal to the N8 consortium of universities² in January for an evaluation of the mental health nurse triage programme run from our police control rooms. An academic partner at Sheffield University has been identified who will independently evaluate the service with a view to sharing best practice across the N8 partnership.

- **Recommendation: All forces should review their mental health training programmes.**

West Yorkshire Police have been running the College of Policing's mental health training programme for officers over the past year; this work will continue over forthcoming months. In addition, West Yorkshire Police have worked to tailor these inputs to meet local police district needs, working with mental health nurses and crisis teams to promote the contact details of local support groups and partner agencies.

Feedback received from officers attending the training has been very positive.

- Furthermore, as a significant proportion of those who West Yorkshire Police arrest have associated mental health risks. WYP are working with colleagues at the **Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS)** to identify those individuals who are high intensity users of both services. YAS have a team dedicated to building a joined-up approach to supporting these patients by linking with partner agencies including the police.

This first HMICFRS report to specifically address mental health in isolation is a welcome publication. The point where people in mental health crisis meet the criminal justice system presents many challenges – particularly at a time when many feel that the police are under pressure to fill the void left by other depleted public services. The report's assertion that the police should not be "the first port of call" where other services are unavailable is one I would fully endorse.

² N8 Policing Research Partnership is a consortium of eight universities in the north of England working to promote knowledge exchange between research and policing practice: <https://n8prp.org.uk/>

Whilst we have worked hard to train our police officers, and worked in partnership to co-ordinate the countywide response to mental health incidents, if we are to do more than simply manage the current levels of demand - as the report recommends - it will take a nationwide review of the way health and social services care for people suffering mental ill-health. Ultimately, the resources needed to drive these changes in early intervention through to crisis care will need to be provided by central government.

Yours sincerely



Mark Burns-Williamson
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire