DORSET POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER DAVID SIDWICK

26 October 2026

Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London
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Dear Home Secretary

HMICFRS Report – State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2025-26

In line with my statutory responsibilities as Police and Crime Commissioner, I am pleased to provide the following response to the HMICFRS and the Secretary of State for the Home Office to the above report published on 8 September 2026.

I have liaised closely with the Chief Constable in submitting this response.

Dorset Police and I welcome the State of Policing Report and recognise many of the findings as reflective of the current challenges being experienced across policing nationally. The report highlights the increasing complexity of policing demand, the pressures on the workforce, the need for modernisation, and the importance of strong leadership and organisational resilience. These are not challenges unique to any one force but systemic issues affecting policing across the UK. The report rightly acknowledges the dedication and professionalism of officers, staff and volunteers who continue to deliver services to communities despite rising demand, increasing complexity of investigations, changing public expectations and ongoing financial pressures. It is acknowledged that workforce sustainability, capability and wellbeing are now among the most significant organisational risks facing policing, alongside the need to maintain effective service delivery – something all the tougher for Dorset Police, one of the lowest funded forces in England and Wales.

We agree that effective leadership is central to addressing both current operational challenges and the significant programme of national reform currently underway. Through investment in leadership development, coaching, mentoring, professional development programmes and career pathways, Dorset Police continues to strengthen leadership capability at all levels. This work is supported by revised performance and development processes, workforce planning arrangements and governance structures designed to ensure leaders are equipped to support their teams, manage demand and lead organisational change.

The report's observations regarding workforce wellbeing, morale and retention are particularly important. The Force and I recognise that sustained high workloads, increasing complexity of demand and changing expectations can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of

officers and staff. In response, the Force continues to invest in a broad range of wellbeing initiatives including occupational health provision, psychological support, early intervention approaches, workload management, peer support networks, leadership development, recognition schemes and health and wellbeing programmes. These initiatives are underpinned by the Force Health and Wellbeing Strategy and robust governance arrangements aimed at supporting retention, reducing attrition and ensuring a sustainable workforce for the future.

We also recognise the report's emphasis on inclusion and the need to ensure fair access to opportunities for recruitment, development and progression. Through ongoing positive action initiatives, workforce planning and targeted support programmes, Dorset Police continues to work towards attracting, developing and retaining a diverse workforce with the skills and capabilities required to meet current and future demand.

A key theme within the report is the role of technology, data and innovation in improving policing productivity and effectiveness. Dorset Police and I recognise that public expectations continue to evolve rapidly and that technology must keep pace with these demands. We support the increased focus on digital transformation, data-driven decision making, performance management and the responsible use of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, to improve efficiency and enhance service delivery. Across support and enabling services, there is an increasing emphasis on robust management information, utilising analysis and evidence-based decision making to ensure resources are deployed where they can achieve the greatest operational impact.

Future police reform presents opportunities, but also considerable challenges. While it is argued that reform offers the potential to improve consistency, efficiency and effectiveness across policing, it will require careful implementation, not to mention additional funding, to ensure local policing remains responsive to community needs.

Speaking as the elected Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset, I have consistently said that there is a case for modernisation and that policing must continue to adapt to changing criminality, technology and public expectations. However, change should only happen where there is clear evidence that it will deliver better outcomes for communities.

I remain concerned that there is currently no clear business case which demonstrates the full costs and benefits of some of the proposals being discussed nationally.

The proposed police reform programme centres on three key areas: the creation of a National Police Service (NPS), restructuring police forces, and changes to leadership and governance. While bringing existing national policing bodies together under a single National Police Service is considered sensible in principle, there are significant concerns about how it will be funded. With no dedicated funding identified, there is a risk that resources will be diverted from local police budgets, including Dorset’s, which already receives some of the lowest levels of central funding. This could threaten neighbourhood policing at the same time as Government is reducing investment in initiatives that target local and organised crime, such as Hotspot Policing, Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCUs), County Lines activity, wastewater analysis, and drug testing on arrest. The

reforms would also shift accountability away from local communities, as national priorities would increasingly be set centrally, with the head of the NPS reporting directly to the Home Secretary rather than local Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs).

The proposed restructuring of police forces is particularly controversial because it appears to favour merging smaller forces into larger regional organisations. Critics argue there is little evidence that larger forces are more effective at reducing crime, highlighting Dorset's strong performance despite being a small and relatively underfunded force. Concerns centre on assumptions that larger forces automatically improve outcomes, that complex organisational systems can be merged without additional funding, and that crime levels will not increase during the disruption caused by restructuring. For Dorset, the most likely outcome would be inclusion in a larger Southwest regional force, potentially leading to resources being concentrated on urban centres and serious crime, while reducing focus on issues of greatest concern to local residents, such as antisocial behaviour, shoplifting, drug dealing and rural crime.

The third strand of reform focuses on leadership and governance. As detailed in your report, the Blunkett-Herbert Leadership Commission highlighted the need for significant improvements in leadership, professionalism, and integrity across policing, citing concerns about misconduct, cronyism, nepotism and corruption among some senior officers. There are concerns that the same senior leaders criticised in the report could be responsible for implementing the reforms. Questions have also been raised about the level of consultation with PCCs and the potential weakening of democratic oversight during the transition to new governance arrangements.

These policing reforms are being introduced alongside wider changes through English devolution and local government reorganisation. During the move from PCC-led governance to mayoral systems, temporary Police and Crime Boards would assume responsibility for overseeing Chief Constables, which could reduce democratic accountability. Some argue that extending PCC terms during this period would provide greater stability and continuity. Overall, the reforms would centralise power through larger police forces, nationally set priorities and increased ministerial influence, reducing local control over policing.

The reforms represent a major transformation of policing, but concerns remain about both funding and accountability. Dorset Police is already delivering substantial savings while managing increasing demand, including pressures arising from early prisoner releases. Without dedicated investment from Government, there is a risk that the costs of reform will be met through cuts to local policing services or increased taxation, potentially undermining the very outcomes the reforms are intended to achieve.

As you would expect, Dorset residents are asking important questions about the potential impact of policing reform, particularly around the loss of local policing, local accountability and Dorset's ability to set its own priorities.

I am also concerned that ongoing uncertainty about these reforms, including delays regarding governance proposals for Dorset draws valuable time and resources away from the day-to-day business of keeping people safe.

Overall, the Chief Constable and I welcome the report and believe it accurately reflects the realities facing modern policing. Whilst operating within a complex environment of increasing demand, workforce pressures, rapid technological change and ongoing reform, the force remains committed to developing its people, strengthening leadership, supporting workforce wellbeing, embracing innovation and ensuring resources are aligned to operational demand. These priorities will be essential in maintaining organisational resilience and continuing to deliver effective policing services for the communities of Dorset.

I continue to stress the need to look again at the way the Force is funded to arrive at a more equitable methodology which reflects the seasonal influx of visitors to the county in the summer and at other times of the year.

For completeness I have copied this letter to both Mr Eatwell and CI Tamblyn.

This response will be published on the OPCC website HMIC Inspection Reports · Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely



David Sidwick
Police and Crime Commissioner

cc: CI Danny Tamblyn, Dorset Police
Simon Eatwell, Force Liaison Lead, HMICFRS