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To: The Home Secretary
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
and Fire and Rescue Services

Dear Home Secretary and HMICFRS

Response from Dr Alan Billings, Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire to the HMICFRS Report: State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2022.

The report makes for sober reading which raises significant concerns. From the impact of police officers abusing their position, through to a dysfunctional and an unfit criminal justice system. The Inspectorate lays bare its assessment of the current state of policing and should have us all extremely concerned. What are the public to make of such a negative assessment? What impact will it have on those who work within the police service and wider criminal justice system?

In the same period as this annual assessment, HMICFRS inspectors gave South Yorkshire Police an unquestionably positive verdict in its Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) inspection report, rating them as outstanding in three areas of assessment and good in all but one of the rest.

Such a positive inspection of policing in South Yorkshire is one which we welcome and supports our continued efforts to build trust and confidence. However, what will the public of South Yorkshire make of these mixed messages? Which report should they rely on to tell them about their police service? It's likely to be a mixture of the two, but it can be confusing for local residents, partners and the police workforce alike.

The annual assessment covers all 43 police forces and is a general view which, unfortunately, omits some of the positive things the HMICFRS will have found during 2022. In that general view there are many things I agree with.

The report says that the police aren't always focussing on the things that matter most to the public. I agree that this is vital for policing and having the ability to focus on the things that local people say matter to them is a key focus for me.

For example, to understand what those priorities are, last year I engaged with over 4800 people across 217 events, responded to over 1400 pieces of correspondence and surveyed a further 2800 people. I question my Chief Constable and the Senior Command Team on their performance in those local priority areas through my regular public accountability board meetings and more informal meetings on a day-to-day basis. The

public can see what the police are doing in South Yorkshire to address their issues and can see where performance is good or where it needs to improve – public accountability is a key driver of performance.

I agree with the assessment that getting the basics right is essential, as is the case for a change to how the police receive funding.

But in giving a general, mainly negative view, there's a danger too. Mr Cooke may inadvertently be adding to some of the things he flags as significant issues such as a deterioration in trust and confidence and an increasing risk to policing by consent. The constant coverage of failings in some forces, through the media, social media, and other reporting, filters into the local consciousness and creates an unease about the state of policing whether there is local evidence to support that or not. What starts as perception can quickly become a version of reality.

Mr. Cooke's general view and the inclusion of some sweeping statements in the assessment does not help PCCs and local forces increase trust and confidence. The assessment says:

“The police and the wider CJS aren't getting the basics right, as shown through the withdrawal from neighbourhood policing.”

In South Yorkshire, Neighbourhood Policing has remained a core part of the force's operating model. The HMI's own inspectors in their inspection report released four months earlier than this assessment rates South Yorkshire Police as “Outstanding” in this area

“The force has a highly effective neighbourhood policing model that prioritises the prevention of crime, anti-social behaviour and vulnerability”

Source: HMICFRS South Yorkshire Police PEEL 2021/22

Within this section of the South Yorkshire Police inspection report, the local HMICFRS inspectors also highlighted six areas of innovative practice.

Of course, issues at the Met and elsewhere, and Mr. Cooke's less than positive report gain national coverage and debate. By contrast the publication of South Yorkshire's positive PEEL assessment got very little coverage locally (it would have been different had it been a negative report). The impact of this on public trust and confidence cannot be underestimated and years of hard work in South Yorkshire to increase trust in the police can be quickly lost.

Mr Cooke's answer to some of the issues is to give more power to HMICFRS to intervene, whether that is a direct role in the appointment of police leadership or in assessing the work of a Police and Crime Commissioner's commissioned services. I don't think this will help. In fact, it may make things worse. I am not sure that HMICFRS could objectively



assess the performance of a force whose leadership has been appointed by them – what would the public think?

I cannot, therefore, agree with the two recommendations to the Home Secretary to increase HMICRS legislation powers where these would cut across PCC statutory functions.

What I can agree with is Mr Cooke's observation that the majority of the police service is comprised of decent and honest police officers and staff. Something that none of us should ever forget in our quest for a constantly improving police service.

All good wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Billings".

Dr Alan Billings
Police and Crime Commissioner