

4 April 2024

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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 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection Efficiency Spotlight Report: The Impact of Recruitment and Retention on the Criminal Justice System.

This is a timely report which articulates the issues we are aware of in South Yorkshire. Resourcing issues are directly impacting on parts of the criminal justice system in being able to function as efficiently or effectively as it should. This is a concern locally and ought to be high on the agenda nationally. A criminal justice system that is not working as it should, will negatively impact on public trust and confidence.

Whilst my holding to account focus is on the police force, I am acutely aware of resourcing issues across the wider criminal justice system through my role as Chair of the South Yorkshire Local Criminal Justice Board.

Some agencies, including South Yorkshire Police (SYP), have recruited additional officers successfully. The issue for the police now is the knock on effect of that recruitment in respect of providing support. Support to new staff as well as support and guidance to those who are newly recruited to supervisory and leadership roles following the recruitment drives. This support is crucial in retaining those new officers in post.

South Yorkshire Police's strategic response to providing this support has been to re-focus its values and behaviours framework aimed at enhancing its positive organisational culture for new recruits to come into and to support longer serving officers to progress.

As part of this positive culture focus, the force is concentrating its efforts not just through traditional HR functions but also through its Organisational Development Team. This team is instrumental in providing support and training, including mentoring, to all staff within the force. The team also have a key role in creating a positive and supportive culture within the organisation.

My Independent Ethics Panel (IEP) currently have two bespoke work programmes focussing on providing assurance for me on South Yorkshire Police's (SYP's) positive culture and on the recruitment, retention, and progression of officers from under-represented groups within South Yorkshire communities.

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The force is acutely aware of the issues raised in this joint inspection report and I am assured through the IEP's work and through other conversations I have with SYP's senior leadership team that the focus, certainly around culture, is positive. The force has been less successful in recruiting and retaining those from under-represented groups, but it is aware of the issue and has positive action initiatives in place aimed at addressing it.

Of concern to me is the inability of certain areas of the criminal justice system to actually recruit sufficient numbers of staff with the relevant skills or to be able to create sufficient capacity to deal with backlogs and increases in demand. Some of these work areas are either particularly specialised or the organisations concerned are not able to present a sufficiently attractive work offering. Particular specialist areas include IT – a very competitive and expensive market for skills and experience. The judiciary are reporting to me that there is a shortage of qualified prosecution and defence barristers and sometimes judges for certain cases, such as serious sexual offences. Locally, the large numbers of prisons in South Yorkshire, and the increasingly large prison population puts pressure on probation resources as well as local government resources as prisoners are released.

Locally, through the Local Criminal Justice Board and other local partnership meetings, we aim to encourage dialogue between criminal justice partners so as to be able to understand each other's pressures, aid preparations and respond as far as possible. Partnership working allows us also to understand the various terms and remuneration rates on offer at different organisations which may be impacting on recruitment and retention across the criminal justice system.

These are difficult issues to resolve locally in the short term and will take more focussed attention from central government to overcome.

I note that there are no specific recommendations in this report – however I am confident that the risks identified are understood in South Yorkshire and where it is possible for organisations locally to address and mitigate, they are receiving attention.

All good wishes



Dr Alan Billings
South Yorkshire Police & Crime Commissioner