



Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner (PCO) response to inspections of Norfolk Constabulary published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Section 55 of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 37 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017) requires local policing bodies to respond to recommendations in inspectors reports within 56 days.

Inspection Title:

An inspection of how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms

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Firearms

Police Forces:

All local forces in England and Wales

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[An inspection of how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms](#)

Section 55 Response Deadline:

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Key Findings

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) examined how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms, including specialist munitions. They sought to establish whether the public can be confident that police policies, structures and processes comply with relevant guidance and legislation. Furthermore, they wanted to determine whether the selection, training and deployment of those in command roles was effective and to understand whether they had the capacity and capability to effectively deploy firearms and, where necessary, work across force boundaries.

The inspectorate found officers involved in armed policing are dedicated, professional and focused on keeping the public safe. At an operational level there are good selection

processes and officers are well trained and well equipped. But improvements need to be made in the selection of strategic and tactical firearms commanders (TFC). Strategic firearms commanders (SFC) would benefit from improved training.

The number of armed response vehicles (ARV) that each force deployed daily was at least the level the force stated it needed. But forces achieved this by changing armed officers' shifts, cancelling rest days, or paying officers to work overtime.

Generally, HMICFRS found forces had a good process for selecting authorised firearms officers (AFO). This includes applications, pre-course selection, vetting and checks of complaint and misconduct records. But they did not find regular complaint and misconduct checks throughout an armed officer's career. This is an omission in a higher-risk area of policing.

Forces generally had a good selection process for operational firearms commanders (OFC) and firearms tactical advisors (FTA). However, the inspectorate found that forces need to improve the selection process for TFC and SFC positions. The police have a more robust selection process for public order commanders, so a similar process should be used for the selection of those undertaking firearms command roles.

The inspectorate found two other areas of concern. The first relates to the ability to track armed assets across England and Wales. All the forces inspected had the equipment to do this, but some force control room staff did not know how to use it. The second area of concern relates to body armour. Three of the forces inspected highlighted an issue with the procurement of body armour. While this is not an immediate safety concern, the scale of the problem needs to be assessed nationally.

HMICFRS found that there is an effective governance structure overseeing the training of armed policing across England and Wales. All those involved in armed policing have annual refresher training and accreditation.

Forces need to improve record keeping in relation to armed operations. As part of the inspection, HMICFRS conducted a review of 70 firearms operations. For several operations, forces were unable to provide some records requested. This was of particular concern at a senior level where forces were unable to provide the SFC logs in nearly half of the operations.

Recommendations

Eight recommendations were put forward by HMICFRS to police forces and Chief Constables within their report:

Recommendation 2:

By 31 July 2024, chief constables should make sure there is access to both specialist strategic firearms commanders and specialist tactical firearms commanders, through a 24-hour rota covering their region.

Recommendation 3:

By 31 October 2023, all chief constables should make sure the armed response vehicle asset tracking equipment, as provided by Counter Terrorism Policing, is available and used in their forces. They should train relevant staff in its use.

Recommendation 5:

By 31 December 2023, all chief constables should make sure that all strategic and tactical firearms commanders have observed the firearms tactics and the use of specialist munitions they can authorise, before being operationally deployed.

Recommendation 6:

By 31 December 2023, chief constables should make sure that the annual accreditation process for strategic and tactical firearms commanders includes familiarisation with any new weapons systems and observation of any new tactics or specialist munitions the force has introduced or is planning to introduce.

Recommendation 7:

By 31 October 2023, the regional armed policing lead should share armed policing exercises with the National Armed Policing Portfolio. This would allow opportunities for learning to be identified and shared.

Recommendation 8:

With immediate effect, each assistant chief constable regional firearms lead should attend all National Armed Policing Portfolio meetings. If they are unable to attend, they should make sure another assistant chief constable armed policing lead from a force in their region attends on their behalf.

Recommendation 10:

With immediate effect, chief constables should improve senior officer oversight of their armouries, including an independent annual audit.

Recommendation 12:

With immediate effect, chief constables, through their armed policing governance structure, should make sure that all armed deployment records are stored and auditable.

Areas for Improvement

There are no areas for improvement made.

Chief Constable response to report and any Recommendations/Areas for Improvement

This report by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) examined how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms, including specialist munitions.

The inspection sought to establish:

- Whether the public can be confident that police policies, structures and processes comply with relevant guidance and legislation.
- Whether the police have the capacity and capability to effectively deploy firearms and, where necessary, work across force boundaries.
- Whether the selection, training, and deployment of those in firearms command roles is effective.

The report was informed by field inspection work that HMICFRS undertook in nine police force areas. Norfolk Constabulary was not one of these forces.

The inspection resulted in twelve recommendations for the police and other bodies. Eight of these recommendations were directed to all police forces and Chief Constables across England and Wales. Norfolk Constabulary accepts all the recommendations.

The joint Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies Specialist Operations Directorate, in conjunction with the Eastern Region Seven Force Firearms Collaboration, has reviewed our current position against each recommendation and where necessary, have developed a clear plan to achieve the standards outlined within the timescales set by HMICFRS.

Recommendation 2

By 31 July 2024, chief constables should make sure there is access to both specialist strategic firearms commanders and specialist tactical firearms commanders, through a 24-hour rota covering their region.

Should the constabulary need to access specialist strategic and tactical firearms commanders, we are able to do so through arrangements that exist between all the forces in the Eastern region as part of a seven-force Cross Boundary Command Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for high threat incidents, sanctioned by the seven Eastern region Chief Constables in 2022. However, in recognition of the need to formalise these arrangements to ensure that there is a robust system for 24-hour cover for the Eastern region, a Section 22A Police Act 1996 seven-forces collaborative-services legal agreement is being progressed for a Specialist Firearms Commander cadre.

Recommendation 3

By 31 October 2023, all chief constables should make sure the armed response vehicle asset tracking equipment, as provided by Counter Terrorism Policing, is available and used in their forces. They should train relevant staff in its use.

Norfolk Constabulary, together with the other six police forces in the Eastern region, currently uses the Airbox MOSAIC system for armed response vehicle asset tracking. In 2024, the national Surveillance Situational Awareness Systems (SSAS) Project, overseen by the National Police Chiefs Council Armed Policing Lead, will deliver a national product for surveillance and armed policing across the UK. This will include asset tracking. In the interim, the Eastern Region 7-Forces Procurement team are seeking to extend the current Airbox MOSAIC contract.

There is work ongoing to ensure that Norfolk Constabulary Contact and Control Room staff are suitably trained in the use of Airbox MOSAIC.

Recommendation 5

By 31 December 2023, all chief constables should make sure that all strategic and tactical firearms commanders have observed the firearms tactics and the use of specialist munitions they can authorise, before being operationally deployed.

All Tactical Firearms Commanders (TFC) and Strategic Firearms Commanders (SFC) are mandated to attend the national annual TFC and SFC refresher training course and the annual Armed Police Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment (APSTRA) refresher course. The APSTRA refresher addresses any new tactics that have been, or are likely to be, implemented and any new weapon systems or ammunition/specialist munitions that are going to be introduced. TFCs are also mandated to attend an annual training session which is part of the Armed Response Vehicle (ARV) officer's mandatory refresher training programme, during which they observe ARV tactics. As part of this training, they are required to take an active command role in a training scenario, for example resourcing a Forward Control Point.

In addition, the Constabulary is implementing a requirement for all new Firearms Commanders to undertake a bespoke session with a Firearms Tactical Advisor after they have completed their national accreditation course. During this session they will observe footage of different tactics and will discuss the tactics that are detailed in the seven-force Tactical Options menu. This session must be undertaken before they can be mentored for operational deployment. Existing Tactical Firearms Commanders and Strategic Firearms Commanders also receive a session on tactics on the APSTRA mandatory refresher training if the need is determined by our Chief Firearms Instructor.

Recommendation 6

By 31 December 2023, chief constables should make sure that the annual accreditation process for strategic and tactical firearms commanders includes familiarisation with any new weapons systems and observation of any new tactics or specialist munitions the force has introduced or is planning to introduce.

This is already being achieved. The APSTRA refresher course that all Tactical Firearms Commanders and Strategic Firearms Commanders are mandated to attend addresses any new tactics that have been or are likely to be implemented. In addition, the course

addresses any new weapon systems or ammunition/specialist munitions that have been or are going to be introduced.

Recommendation 7

By 31 October 2023, the regional armed policing lead should share armed policing exercises with the National Armed Policing Portfolio. This would allow opportunities for learning to be identified and shared.

The Eastern Region Armed Policing Lead includes details of armed policing exercises when providing a regional update at the National Armed Policing Portfolio (NAPP) meetings, held on a quarterly basis. The agenda for the quarterly Eastern Region Seven-Force Strategic and Tactical Firearms meetings also includes an item on armed policing exercises so that relevant information can be taken forward to these meetings. The Eastern Region Armed Policing Lead is currently Deputy Chief Constable Simon Megicks of Norfolk Constabulary.

Whilst it is not directly within the scope this recommendation, there are plans to include British Transport Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, and the Ministry of Defence Police in the seven-forces exercising programme. These non-Home Office forces have also been invited to partake in the forthcoming multi-agency Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) exercises due to take place September/October 2023.

Recommendation 8

With immediate effect, each assistant chief constable regional firearms lead should attend all National Armed Policing Portfolio meetings. If they are unable to attend, they should make sure another assistant chief constable armed policing lead from a force in their region attends on their behalf.

This is being achieved. If the Eastern Region Armed Policing Lead is unavailable to attend the NAPP meeting, an agreement is in place that one of the four Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) Operational leads from the region will attend in their absence.

Recommendation 10

With immediate effect, chief constables should improve senior officer oversight of their armouries, including an independent annual audit.

Following recent inspections by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and the College of Policing, the constabulary's firearms training armoury was found to have robust processes in place. All armouries in the Eastern region were inspected. This has resulted in improved processes being implemented across the region and each armoury is now subject to its own Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). Good practice and lessons learnt from the inspections has been shared at the Seven-Force Chief Firearms Instructor Forum meetings.

Independent audits are conducted by a specialist business assurance provider (TIAA), although not on an annual basis. In line with Recommendation 9 of this report, by December 2023 the College of Policing will be publishing revised armoury guidance, which

will provide further direction about the independent annual audit requirement. This will be implemented when issued.

Recommendation 12

With immediate effect, chief constables, through their armed policing governance structure, should make sure that all armed deployment records are stored and auditable.

Norfolk Constabulary armed deployment records are collated and stored within the College of Policing approved Chronicle system. The system provides an auditable framework including individual breakdowns to support accreditation processes for Strategic/Tactical Command and operational purposes. Deployment records include the logging of officers attending, the type of incident and assets/tactics utilised. The Constabulary is currently reviewing how protracted deployments are managed with associated recording of National Decision Making assessments set alongside intelligence and are also exploring opportunities to improve recording of rescinded and non-deployment decisions.

PCC response to report and any Recommendations/Areas for Improvement

I welcome HMICFRS' report, 'An inspection of how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms' as such reports are a helpful 'handrail' for my scrutiny of Norfolk Constabulary.

I also welcome my Chief Constable's responses to the eight recommendations applicable to Norfolk Constabulary. I note that these responses refer to processes that are already in place, action already in hand, and also to collaborative arrangements that exist under the Eastern Region's Seven Force Collaboration structure.

I will continue to monitor activity through my Strategic Governance Board as part of my scrutiny role.

For Office Use Only:

- Response forwarded to HMICFRS Section 55 Responses and submitted onto the HMICFRS portal
- Response forwarded to Chief Constable
- Response forwarded to Police and Crime Panel
- Response published on the OPCCN website