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for Thames Valley

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Update from Thames Valley PCC on HMIC's Undercover Policing Report

Background

In June 2013, the Home Secretary commissioned HMIC to inspect the effectiveness of the arrangements in place in all police forces to carry out, manage and scrutinise undercover operations. The inspection was to include all regional and national policing units, and the National Crime Agency.

HMIC's inspection examined all police forces and law enforcement agencies that have the capability and capacity to deploy undercover officers and this is the first time that such an inspection had taken place. The subsequent report published in October 2014 made a total of 49 national recommendations across policies, systems, training and leadership of undercover operations.

While the operational responsibility for undercover policing comes under the 'direction and control' of chief constables, PCC's must secure the maintenance of the police force for their areas and ensure that their forces are efficient and effective.

PCC Response

The Chief Constable has briefed me on the Force's response to this particular HMIC inspection report through a number of key action plans and their subsequent progress, although the detailed content of these action plans are restricted and not for wider publication.

Undercover tactics remain an extremely important operational tool for the police service for preventing crime and detecting perpetrators of crime. Given the complexity of organised crime and the threat of terrorism, I am reassured however, that such tactics in Thames Valley are subject to close supervision, control and scrutiny in their application. Furthermore, the steps being taken in the light of the HMIC inspection will further strengthen the existing safeguards in their usage across the Service.

In the wider context of this HMIC, the Home Secretary announced on 16 July 2015, an Inquiry into Undercover Policing extending to all English and Welsh police forces operating since 1968 - the Inquiry will be chaired by Lord Justice Pitchford. A recent letter (21 October 2015) was received from National Police Chiefs' Council which updated all Chief Constables and PCCs on the various requirements of the Inquiry, indeed I note that my own Force has issued relevant corporate guidance to all officers and staff in this regard.