

Rt Hon Alun Michael JP OStJ FRSA

Comisiynydd yr Heddlu a Throseddu De Cymru
Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales



5 May 2021

**POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER RESPONSE TO THE HMICFRS REPORT:
'GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT? AN INSPECTION OF HOW EFFECTIVELY THE
POLICE DEAL WITH PROTESTS'**

This report relates to the policing response to protests, a subject of particular relevance given the number of public protests that have taken place nationally over the last year. The intention of this inspection was to consider how effectively police were responding to protests and if they had adequate powers to respond.

The report notes the difficult balance that is to be struck when policing protests i.e. the rights of protestors and the need to ensure protests do not lead to violence. I support the stance the report takes in this regard and feel that the recommendations and areas for improvement in the report look to fairly address the issues.

I welcome the report's update on further measures that may be taken nationally on the matter of policing protests, including the consideration of proposals put forward by the Metropolitan Police. In relation to the recommendations around Community Impact Assessments relating to protests, South Wales Police runs regular Community Impact Assessment meetings, which involve a number of operational officers and strategic leads. These meetings are also attended by members of my team in order to ensure there is learning and effective planning in relation to public protests and community tensions. I am pleased with the way in which South Wales Police looks to engage with communities ahead of protest plans and this has been evident over the last year. However, I welcome the recommendations on strengthening this process where relevant, including looking at the wider community and business impacts as the report identifies.

I am pleased that the report references that support will be given to forces to use live facial recognition technology in a way that improves police efficiency and effectiveness, while addressing public concerns about its use. You will be aware that South Wales Police has utilised this technology to positive effect. Whilst the force is committed to ongoing trials around this use, particularly in relation to

Ty Morgannwg, Pencadlys yr Heddlu
Pen-y-Bont ar Ogwr, CF31 3SU
f: 01656 869366
e: commissioner@heddlu-de-cymru.pnn.police.uk
g: southwalescommissioner.org.uk

Ty Morgannwg, Police Headquarters,
Bridgend, CF31 3SU
t: 01656 869366
e: commissioner@south-wales.pnn.police.uk
w: southwalescommissioner.org.uk

Mae'r Comisiynydd a'i dîm yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg
The Commissioner and his team welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English

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identifying possible bias, the Chief Constable and I are also hoping to continue to use Automated Facial Recognition to protect the public from harm.

The Chief Constable responds to the content of the report as below, particularly relating to the Covid-19 challenges that have had an effect on recent protests in the area:

'Policing protests is challenging and complex and South Wales Police has a proven track record of negotiating with protest organisers to facilitate peaceful protest within the law.'

The last 12 months have been unprecedented times and we have a duty to uphold the Coronavirus legislation which was introduced to protect the NHS and save lives. Public safety is, and always will be our top priority, and this hasn't changed throughout our approach to the pandemic. We have always sought to find the right balance between the rights of protestors and those of local residents and businesses, while also considering the very real risks from the spread of the virus.

As we continue to navigate our way through the ever-changing landscape of Covid-19 and the different challenges it presents, we will constantly be planning and preparing for every eventuality, particularly in light of the recent protests that have taken place in South Wales and other parts of the country. Where lawful, we will seek to facilitate peaceful protests, but any violence will not be tolerated'.

We have experienced a number of police protests in our force area over the last year. It is my duty to ensure that the Chief Constable and his officers respond to these appropriately, and I will continue to do this whilst also considering the implementation of the report recommendations.

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