

21 September 2023

Dear HMICFRS

I acknowledge that the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) team published on the 19 May 2023, An inspection of the eastern regional response to serious and organised crime - <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/inspection-of-the-eastern-regional-response-to-serious-and-organised-crime/>

The eastern region consists of seven forces (Bedfordshire Police, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Essex Police, Hertfordshire Constabulary, Kent Police, Norfolk Constabulary and Suffolk Constabulary) and their ROCU, the Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU).

I note during this inspection you found some distinct differences in how forces tackled SOC and the extent to which they worked with ERSOU and the other forces in their region and that ERSOU needs to do more, with its constituent forces, to improve regional performance. The two below Areas for improvement (AFIs):

Area for improvement: *Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) and its constituent forces should improve how the region works to tackle serious and organised crime (SOC)*

ERSOU, with constituent forces, should:

- *improve the effectiveness of the lead responsible officer (LRO) role;*
- *improve the quality and consistency of 4P plans;*
- *improve partnership structures across the region;*
- *improve how SOC disruptions are recorded to accurately reflect regional performance; and*
- *identify and promote good practice.*

Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Police Headquarters | Woburn Road | Kempston | Bedford | MK43 9AX
Tel: 01234 842064 | Email: pcc@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk

LROs should prepare 4P plans to manage SOC threats. These plans are important and should support joint working with relevant partner organisations. The content and quality of the operational 4P plans we reviewed across the region was inconsistent. We found that LROs in some forces were more effective in this area than others.

We found that relationships with partner organisations varied between forces. While some forces appeared to have effective arrangements, others struggled to share information and promote joint working, when appropriate.

ERSOU and its constituent forces record SOC disruption data in different ways. Consequently, it is difficult for the region to fully understand how effectively SOC is being tackled.

ERSOU is good at recording and analysing disruption data relating to its own investigations. It should work with constituent forces to help them improve their recording of disruption data.

Area for improvement: *Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) and its constituent forces should improve how they procure and deploy technical surveillance equipment*

Technical Surveillance Units (TSUs) provide specialist surveillance equipment to support organised crime investigations. In the eastern region, ERSOU and the constituent forces have retained their own individual TSUs.

Most other regions have collaborated fully on the provision of technical surveillance. This has allowed efficient methods of buying equipment. It also makes sure that equipment is compatible and can be shared across the region.

ERSOU and its constituent forces should consider following the approach of other regional organised crime units, by collaborating in a single regional TSU.

I note that you determined that ERSOU is **good** at tackling serious and organised crime, however, has recommended the following AFI:

Area for improvement: *Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) needs to improve the way that the region manages organised criminals in prison.*

Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Police Headquarters | Woburn Road | Kempston | Bedford | MK43 9AX
Tel: 01234 842064 | Email: pcc@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk

At the time of our inspection, responsibility for the regional prison intelligence unit (RPIU) was passing from the counterterrorism unit to the organised crime unit within ERSOU. It was acknowledged by senior management in ERSOU that some organised criminals weren't being effectively managed while in prison.

The RPIU should:

- *map and monitor high-threat individuals in prison;*
- *make full use of available covert resources to disrupt offenders in prison;*
- *manage offenders in conjunction with HM Probation Service; and*
- *manage ancillary orders to prevent organised criminals continuing to commit crime.*

Since our inspection, ERSOU has updated that the handover of the RPIU is now complete. It states that this now means that the highest-harm offenders are prioritised for management. We were unable to assess the effectiveness of this change

I also note within the report that Bedfordshire Police is **good** at tackling serious and organised crime.

I also note the Innovative practice mentioned specifically:

Innovative practice: Lead responsible officers (LROs) are supported by specialists to tackle serious and organised crime (SOC)

Bedfordshire Police provides training and support for LROs, who manage its response to individual SOC threats. At the time of our inspection, there were 24 LROs in Bedfordshire Police. Around two thirds of the LROs were from specialist SOC departments; the remainder were from neighbourhood policing teams. The force allocates SOC threats to LROs based on their skills and expertise. A dedicated team provides support to LROs concerning 4P plans and how to access specialist support. This team includes:

- *a tactical advisor to advise LROs on specialist tactics;*
- *an SOC co-ordinator to improve how the workforce understands SOC threats; and*
- *an SOC intern to develop learning and good practice, including an SOC toolkit to identify opportunities to tackle SOC.*

The outcome of this is that the force manages SOC threats effectively and includes good 4P planning. This has the overall impact of increasing SOC disruptions

Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Police Headquarters | Woburn Road | Kempston | Bedford | MK43 9AX
Tel: 01234 842064 | Email: pcc@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk

Additionally, Bedfordshire Police has provided LRO training to representatives from each of the local authorities it works with. We heard examples of partner organisations (such as leaders from the local authority and trading standards) assuming the LRO role for some organised crime groups. This has improved working relationships with partners and their understanding of SOC.

The above will be monitored by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner through the ERSOU governance board meetings.

Yours Sincerely

Festus Akinbusoye
Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire

Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Police Headquarters | Woburn Road | Kempston | Bedford | MK43 9AX
Tel: 01234 842064 | Email: pcc@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk