

Surrey PCC Response to HMICFRS Report: An Inspection of the Effectiveness of the Regional Organised Crime Units

I thank the HMICFRS for this report into Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCUs). I agreed with the conclusions and recommendations made in the report. I agree with HMICFRS and am very concerned that the funding model for ROCUs was highlighted at an issue in 2015 and again in this 2021 report. It is incredibly important that in tackling serious and organised crime in the UK that we have the right structures and funding in place.

Rightly, ROCUs are praised for their heroic work on the front line, the fact that their effectiveness has improved in the last few years, and the string of success stories against well-organised and well-funded opponents. These are considerable achievements which have helped to make our county and region safer and those who lead and man our ROCUs deserve our thanks and respect.

However, my personal view, having been part of governance of a ROCU for the past 5 years, is that we need to relook at the national structures. More effective national leadership and better long-term funding are badly needed if police forces are to win the battle against serious and organised crime. The ROCU picture is one of chronic underfunding, fragmented responses to national and international criminality, short-termism and inconsistent priorities is stark. ROCUs are having to work against systems which hinder them operating nationally, taking a long-term strategic view and allowing them sustained funding.

Seven recommendations were made in the report with two of these for action by Chief Constables. One of the recommendations isn't relevant for the ROCU in the South East as there has been a Chief Officer appointed with responsibility for SEROCU for some time. I have asked the Chief Constable to comment on this report and in particular to address recommendation 3. His response is as follows:

1. Chief Constable Response to OPCC

We have read the report with interest and the contents are not surprising, although it should be noted that the picture varies from region to region. The funding of the ROCUs, in particular, has been an issue since their inception.

It should be noted that report highlights that “the primary functions of a ROCU are to provide a range of specialist capabilities to forces and to lead the regional response to SOC.” Our reflection upon this is that the force receives an excellent service from SEROCU through the provision of specialist capabilities without which we could not deliver covert operations whilst leadership in relation to the response to SOC is evolving.

It should be noted that of the 7 recommendations only 2 relate to recommendations for action by regional forces and ROCUs, the others are for the Home Office, NPCC leads and the APCC. One of the 2 recommendation for regions, the appointment of an autonomous chief officer with responsibility for the ROCU, is clearly irrelevant in the south east as this post has been in place for some years.

We have not only discussed internally but already engaged with SEROCU at a number of levels including SOC leads, intelligence leads and chief officer. This will be an ongoing constructive dialogue and we will continue to work closely with SEROCU leadership to ensure that the people of Surrey get the best possible service in relation to SOC. We will work closely with SEROCU through existing governance structures to progress the recommendations where we are able to assist and, more broadly, SEROCU effectiveness in tackling SOC directly and indirectly through assistance to forces. This will include helping the ROCU deliver a longer term business strategy particularly in relation to the SOC uplift & ensuring proper governance to drive performance and improvements.

2. Overview

The document states that “the major finding of this report is the lack of a clear and sustainable funding model to make sure that the ROCUs are a central part of the achieving the 2018 Serious and Organised Crime Strategy.” This was previously highlighted in the previous 2015 report into the effectiveness of ROCUs.

The report subsequently makes 6 recommendations and formally identifies funding as a “cause for concern”, leading to a 7th recommendation.

The recommendations seek to address issues including inconsistencies in respect of ROCU activity, a need for structured leadership as well as a lack of a clear long term funding model and that fact that ROCUs were predominately focused on pursue activity.

The report also highlights the inability of the NCA to formally task ROCUs, with a resulting recommendation, and highlights a lack of effectiveness in tasking as the chief officer responsible for ROCU lacks the mandate to formally task constituent forces, but interestingly this does not result in a recommendation.

The report additionally highlights that “local interests were found to affect prioritisation, rather than the regional and national threat, risk and harm”. There are clearly inconsistencies nationally, as the report observes, and in the South East the ROCU supports forces in tackling threat areas that do reflect both local and regional threat, risk and harm levels within an agreed control strategy, and tasking and coordination ensures that resources are deployed to enable ROCU to fulfil its mission in preventing, disrupting and enforcing against SOC in the most appropriate and intelligence led way.

It should be noted that the development of the ROCUs has been very disparate and that SEROCU is a relatively advanced ROCU. The south east region was the second to adopt SOC system tasking and there is consistent positive feedback from SEROCU in relation to our adoption of this. In some regions this process is still best described as very combative. Additionally the Strategic Governance Groups (SCGs) are well established in the south east, and reflect the collaborative atmosphere, whereas SCGs are not yet established in some other areas.

3. HMICFRS Recommendations for Police forces

As above the report makes a total of 7 recommendation and only 2 of these relate directly to forces:

Recommendation 3 - By February 2022, chief officers responsible for SOC in each region, with the chief officers of the affected forces, should make sure that systems are in place for SIOs and LROs to work effectively together.

There is already a localised Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and training package being rolled out across Surrey and Sussex to Local Responsible Officers (LROs) and Senior Investigating Officers (SIOs) with includes clarifying roles, responsibilities and cross strand/partnership working. We have sought guidance from the Home Office in putting this together in the absence of a College of Policing approved product. There is plan for this to be standardised and coordinated through SEROCU which is due for discussion and ratification at the next meeting of Heads of SOC and Intelligence across the region. This meeting is due to be held imminently.

Recommendation 4 - By February 2022, the chief constable with the lead for SOC in each region, with the chief officers of the affected forces, should ensure that a chief officer is appointed with responsibility for each ROCU, as far as practicable working autonomously of force responsibilities.

This has been the position within the South East region for a number of years. As you will be aware SEROCU currently has ACC Pete O'Doherty as an autonomous lead with oversight from CC John Campbell (Thames Valley Police).

Many of the other recommendations made related to tasking of ROCUs, exchange of information, national co-ordination and funding. The solution lies in more effective national leadership, tighter control from the centre and long-term funding. Central government needs to own the problem, setting clear priorities, establishing multi-year budgets and instituting a clearer command structure. My letter to the Home

Secretary last November urged just that, for ROCUs and other national crime-fighting capabilities.

Our enemies, those Organised Criminal Gangs who do so much damage to our country, have forceful leadership, consistent priorities, simple chains of commands, deep pockets and, alas, an ability to recruit effective people on the ground. To win the battle, we need a system that does the same.

David Munro, Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey

March 2021