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Inspecting policing
in the public interest

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The British model of policing must be nurtured

IT is time to reassert the principles of the traditional British model of approachable, impartial and accountable policing based on minimum force for major public order events, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary says today.

Introducing the second part of HMIC's review of policing protest, he warns that winning public order through tactics that appear to be unfair, aggressive or inconsistent risks losing public consent by damaging the reputation of the police service and individual officers alike.

He stressed that the principles of the traditional model are well suited to handling the highly-charged, high-profile events that have challenged conventional public order policing tactics, training and leadership in recent years, compared with others on offer internationally.

Mr O'Connor said these events are small in number and differ in character from everyday policing because they include protesters who are highly mobile and are well versed in exercising their rights and testing legal boundaries.

The protesters are also intent on securing support nationally and internationally using modern technology and a strong message.

Even so, said Mr O'Connor, the British policing model, first articulated by Sir Robert Peel, is well suited to the challenges of these highly-charged events.

The British model is an approachable, impartial and accountable style of policing based on minimum force. It is designed to win public consent through tolerance and is adaptable to modern crowd dynamics and the increase in demands on police forces to support each other during public order operations.

The Chief Inspector said protests like those at Kingsnorth (Kent), Blackheath (London) and more recently in Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham should be seen as critical events, where the effectiveness of the police response has the potential to impact on wider public confidence.

During these events, officers are very much on display. And he warned the British model can be undermined if formidable public order uniform and tactics are perceived to dominate, the law is misused, the police appear to take sides or thoughtless acts of aggression are perceived to have occurred.

Mr O'Connor said: "British police risk losing the battle for the public's consent if they win public order through tactics that appear to be unfair, aggressive or inconsistent. This harms not just the reputation of the individual officers concerned but the police service as a whole."

He warned that public order events have exposed inconsistencies in the training, standards and leadership of public order policing, in particular:

- **An absence of clear standards on the use of force:** Some forces train officers in defensive and offensive shield tactics (including the use of the edge of the shield against individuals) which are not nationally recognised.
- **Inappropriate use of public order powers such as stop and search and overt photography:** Police use of overt photography and the retention of the images raise human rights issues.
- **Variation between forces in understanding of the law:** This was seen at Kingsnorth Climate Camp, particularly in relation to stop and search.
- **Inconsistent equipment and tactics:** There is no common standard for public order personal protection uniform and different approaches to training – 19 forces train with intermediate and round shields, 2 with long and round shields and one with all three types.
- **Out dated training and guidance:** The current tactics training manual was written in 2004 and has not been revised since.

Mr O'Connor added: "The world is changing and policing needs to change with it. Public order policing needs to evolve as we move towards the London Olympics in 2012 and beyond. This will protect the rights of protesters and the wider public as well as protecting the integrity of the British policing model."

The report makes a number of other recommendations, including:

- The adoption of a set of fundamental principles on the use of force which run as a golden thread through all aspects of police business.
- Codification of public order policing to ensure consistency in public order training and use of equipment, tactics and police powers.
- Clarification of the legal framework for the use of overt photography by police during public order operations and the collation and retention of photographic images by police forces and other policing bodies.
- Review of the status of the Association of Chief Police Officers to ensure transparent governance and accountability structures, especially in relation to their quasi-operational role of the commissioning of intelligence and the collation and retention of data.

Notes to editors:

1. The full report and further information on the role of HMIC can be found at www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic.
2. Part II of HMIC's review looks at the national picture of public order policing and explores the question 'How best should the police as a service adapt to the modern day demands of public order policing whilst retaining the core values of the British model of policing?'
3. HMIC published Part I of its review *Adapting to Protest* in July, 2009, following the G20 summit on April 1 and 2, 2009.
4. HMIC is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest and rigorously examines the effectiveness of police forces and authorities to tackle crime and terrorism, improve criminal justice and raise confidence.
5. HMIC inspects and regulates all 43 police forces in England and Wales together with other major policing bodies such as the Serious Organised Crime Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the British Transport Police and HMRC.
6. The HMIC press office can be contacted on 0207 035 2712.

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