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Police Buried Under a Blizzard of Guidance, Warns Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary

Police have become bogged down in a 'snow-storm' of guidance at the expense of their availability to the public the Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Denis O'Connor, warned today. Addressing senior members of police forces and police authorities, Sir Denis said that the overly cautious approach of the service resulted in the production of 2615 pages of guidance for officers last year alone. The production of "guidance" around particular risks and legislation which has been "rising year on year" is leading to a growth of specialists and less visible officers being available to the general public.

Sir Denis said "In the last year, alone 52 new guidance documents were produced for the police amounting to 2615 pages. These manuals contained over 4000 new promises, covering duties such as policing international cricket matches and data collection for missing persons. If all the pages from currently available national guidance (6497 pages) were laid end to end they would be three times higher than the Eiffel tower."

Officers becoming experts in specialist areas of knowledge means fewer police officers are left to deal with everyday policing tasks, resulting in a steady drift away from frontline policing. Sir Denis said "In the last four years there has been a 30.9% increase in officers covering national functions such as Counter Terrorism, an 8.8% rise in investigators and a 2.4% fall in the number of uniform officers policing our communities, equating to around 1,400 officers. This fall has been masked by the introduction of Police Community Support Officers".

The vast volume seeks to cover all possible outcomes no matter how unlikely. And it affects officer behaviours; for example, officers now feel the need to escort drunk people home just in case they later come to some harm.

Sir Denis concluded, "The British model of policing is built around the presence of bobby's on the beat, preventing crime. The more policy aimed at eliminating all possible risks, the less time officers are available to those who need them."

Ends

Notes to editors

1. HMIC is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest and rigorously examining the effectiveness of police forces and authorities to tackle crime and terrorism, improve criminal justice and raise confidence.
2. 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, the British Transport Police and HMRC.
3. The HMIC press office can be contacted on 0207 802 1824