

CAMBRIDGESHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL	Agenda Item No. 10
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Report of Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

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IMPACT OF COVID ON POLICING IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Panel (the “Panel”) with an update on the impact of Covid on policing in response to a request from the Panel at their 24th March 2021 meeting.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Panel is recommended to note the contents of this report.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 3.1 Item 8 - To support the effective exercise of the functions of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (the “Act”) the Panel has a role in scrutinising the Police and Crime Commissioner’s (the “Commissioner”) in the exercise of his statutory functions. The Policing Protocol Order 2011 (the “Protocol”) is clear that an effective, constructive working relationship between Commissioners, Chief Constables, and Panels is more likely to be achieved where clarity of understanding is at their highest as this will enhance policing for local communities. The Protocol goes on to state that whilst Panels provides checks and balances in relation to the performance of the Commissioner they do not scrutinise the Chief Constable.

- 4.2 Recognising the spirit of the Protocol, the Police and Crime Commissioner (the “Commissioner”) asked the Chief Constable to provide information for this report. As such information regarding demand and partnership working is provided. The Commissioner is cognisant of the current demands on Cambridgeshire Constabulary (the “Constabulary”) in respect of dealing with the Covid pandemic, and as such the need for proportionate governance is key. As the Panel will be aware from the Business Co-ordination reports they received, the Acting Commissioner received regular performance reports from the Chief Constable in respect of how the Constabulary were dealing with the demand placed upon them, including ones on the impact of Covid on policing and Constabulary, and the budgetary implications of this. In addition, the Panel will be aware of the written responses to questions they have raised on this over the last year.

5. SUMMARY OF POLICING DEMAND TO DATE

5.1 Call Handling

- 5.1.1 Call handling demand was substantially impacted by the UK’s response to Covid particularly during the lockdown periods. In Cambridgeshire before the start of the first lockdown in March 2020, the long-term trend for 101 call volumes was decreasing, while that of 999 calls was increasing.

5.1.2 999 and 101 call volumes in the county dipped from March 2020 onwards. Average daily 999 volumes were lower in every month of 2020/21 than the equivalent month of 2019/20. There was some recovery towards normal volumes over the summer, with August and September volumes being close to those of 2019/20, but volumes fell again with the 2nd lockdown in November 2020. The summer months typically see a peak in 999 demand (usually in July) and there are indications that volumes in April and May 2021 have seen a return to more normal levels – with May 2021’s daily average of 999 calls being higher than May in any of the previous four years. Subject to new developments concerning Covid, the summer 2021 peak may be back to normal magnitude. The decline in 101 volume accelerated from April 2020 onwards. There are signs that recent 101 volumes are returning towards their previous (without Covid) trajectory of gradual decline.

5.2 **“Webchat” Services**

5.2.1 Webchat volume saw some channel shift in demand, with April 2020 seeing lows in 999 and 101 volumes, but an unprecedented spike in webchat volumes. Webchat volumes fell back following that spike but remain higher than pre-Covid, indicating a long-term change in reporting behaviour. When taken together, 999+101+webchat volume as a measure of overall live contact from the public has, with seasonal variation, been remarkably stable in recent years and currently remains at this stable, business as usual level.

5.3 **Incident Response**

5.3.1 Total Incident and response incident (those requiring physical attendance) volumes were not as affected by lockdown as call volumes: April 2020 did see an appreciable dip, but other than that most recent months saw comparable volumes to those of the same months pre-Covid. This was true overall and the proportion of incidents attributed to each policing area (North and South) remain consistent with North area seeing 46% of all incidents volume, and South 54%.

5.4 **Crime Recording**

5.4.1 The impact of Covid restrictions on recorded crime was similar to that of 999 call volumes: a substantial drop in April 2020 and lower monthly volumes in most other months of 2020/21 compared to the equivalent month in recent years. The decrease in crime was seen consistently in both operational Areas – Northern (Peterborough and Fenland) and Southern (Cambridge, East Cambs, South Cambs and Huntingdonshire).

5.4.2 Many crime types saw significant reductions over 2020, particularly acquisitive crime. Overall theft offences for 2020/21 were 33% lower than 2019/20. Winter is typically the seasonal peak for dwelling burglary, but this was absent in 2020/21. The 12 months to March 2021 saw 40% fewer dwelling burglary offences than 2019/20. There are signs that overall theft numbers may be beginning to increase, but not yet for dwelling burglary.

5.4.3 Violence against the person volumes dipped in April 2020 (1st lockdown) and February 2021 (3rd lockdown), but the long-term trend over 2020/21 was an increase – with the recent substantial rises in Stalking & Harassment offences continuing. Violence Against the Person trends were similar on both areas, though South Area saw a more substantial seasonal peak in summer 2020 than North Area. Domestic abuse also continued to rise over 2020 and to date in 2021, with the 12-month total continuing to reach a new high each month. Domestic abuse trends remained similar between the two Areas.

5.5 **Vulnerability**

5.5.1 The Constabulary and Partners have maintained a prioritised focus on vulnerability, notably domestic abuse during the period of lockdown, as the impact on domestic abuse victims and families was a significant concern for policing and partners. Therefore, a lot of work was focused on placing, adapting and enhancing the Constabulary’s response to domestic abuse with increased support services and virtual engagement sessions.

5.5.2 The Constabulary and Partners also recognised new and emerging vulnerable groups directly linked to health risks and potential future economic pandemic-hardship and its implications. Early indications are that the Constabulary is seeing more complex vulnerability and mental health demand which is being closely monitored to ensure the Constabulary work with Partners to respond accordingly.

5.5.3 The Constabulary's recent Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment (STRA) business and operational planning cycle has capitalised on increased officer levels to further boost investment in mitigating risk to the most vulnerable. This includes a "Vulnerability Focus Desk" in each operational area, with specialist, experienced risk mitigators supporting front-line staff in safeguarding and protection.

5.6 **Policing Public Spaces - Pandemic Context**

5.6.1 Health Protection Regulations – Enforcement

To date 895 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for breaches of Health Protection Regulations have been issued in the county; leaving the Constabulary roughly in the middle of range nationally of FPNs issued by all police forces. Strategically the "4 Es" "(Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce") have been adopted effectively throughout, using a graduated approach to breaches.

5.6.2 Protest / Events

Planned events declined significantly during 2020, with a recent recurrence of some as Summer 2021 has progressed. The pandemic period to date has seen a regular picture of small protest events, usually peaceful and with evidence of respect for any national lockdown and socialising restrictions in place at the relevant time. A small number of protest events have seen a proportionate policing response in the last year, with a number of arrests among a small minority of participants in environmental protests centred on the south of the county. These have been for substantive criminal offences, in most cases criminal damage, rather than pertaining to Health Protection. The Constabulary retains a good level of experienced and able Public Order and Public Safety Commanders. Larger events were able to operate and continue to receive Multi-Agency Safety Advisory Group attention, bolstered in the last 15 months by a strong presence from Public Health.

5.6.3 Unlicensed Music Events

The County has not seen any notable Unlicensed Music Events.

5.6.4 Community Impact

There are no notable community tensions relating to the pandemic or policing of it to report.

5.6.5 Night Time Economies

Following a period of extensive closure of night time economy premises in compliance with measures to control infection, gradual openings have been seen in recent weeks in step with the national lockdown roadmap. Demand data continues to be assessed but the anecdotal feedback from operations is of good levels of attendance and a return to some of the traditional demand challenges associated with alcohol-fuelled violence and drunkenness. Whilst pre-Covid levels are not yet reached due to limited operating times and procedures, participation in night-time economies has been buoyant.

5.7 **Officer and Staff – Health and Wellbeing**

5.7.1 General Workplace Absence, Capacity and Capability

The Constabulary has seen low levels of workplace absence throughout the pandemic, with some of the lowest levels in recent recording. Increased workplace hygiene may be attributable

to the reduction in some absence causes, as may be the extended period of reduced workplace presence amongst those able to comply with guidance to work from home. The pandemic to date has seen limited impact on organisational capacity and capability.

5.7.2 Workplace Infection Rates

The Constabulary has seen a range of between 0 and 20 members of staff out of the workplace throughout the pandemic period due directly to Covid causes, both infection and self-isolation requirements. A peak of 140 officers and staff were self-isolating between Christmas Day and New Year's Day /at the commencement of national 2nd wave was seen. This level was spread across Departments and during a period of lower demand thus the impact was not demonstrable on service delivery. The Constabulary established a small internal Outbreak Management Team in conjunction with local Public Health to assess and advice on any workforce infection, to seek to minimise wider transmission and address any staffing impacts. Expertise and effective procedures have been maintained and shared across Departments as part of adapting to a "new normal" and extensive measures and mitigations are in place to prevent work place outbreaks.

5.7.3 Impact on Mental Health:

The true impact of the pandemic on societal mental health will require a long-view. The asks of front-line services, including police, have been great in delivering core responsibilities. Whilst there inevitably have been cases of mental health challenge during the pandemic within the Constabulary no patterns or trends impacting of service delivery has been seen to date. Early indications show more complex mental health and vulnerability may be emerging.

5.7.4 Personal Protective Equipment / Lateral Flow Testing

The Constabulary has a well-established Personal Protective Equipment supply chain, allowing appropriate levels of protection for all officers and staff in accordance with roles. Lateral Flow Tests (LFT) have been provided for several weeks to all officers and staff, with twice a week home testing encouraged. As time has passed, initial specific LFT stock for policing is being replaced by widely available universal home testing kits accessible from a range of community services.

5.7.5 "Agile Working" / Future Estate Planning:

At the commencement of the national direction to "stay at home" the Constabulary moved to a short-term workforce footing where roughly two thirds of the workforce worked at least in part at home during each working week. Analysis of the impact of greater "agile working" has been conducted over several months, working with the University of East Anglia in particular, to determine future opportunity. It has been determined that roughly a third of the workforce has an opportunity to work in part away from the fixed Constabulary estate whilst maintaining service provision. This is the current trajectory of the organisation's future workplace feel. A project is underway to look at how to make the best use of estate both operationally and in terms of possible efficiencies being secured whilst focusing on staff effectiveness and well-being.

5.8 Countywide Partnership Arrangements

5.8.1 Internal Governance:

The Constabulary maintains an internal governance structure overseeing Covid with Assistant Chief Constable as Gold (Strategic Lead) and a Superintendent as Silver (Tactical Lead). Initially the Constabulary had a bespoke meeting structure however, overtime for greater efficiency, managing the impact of the pandemic has been managed as part of "business as usual" governance, rather than specific meetings drawing on additional resource capacity.

5.8.2 Two sums of money have been provided by central Government to aid the response to the pandemic: initially £309k for an immediate response in 2020, with a further sum looking to future impact regarding demand and notably violent crime of £588k.

5.8.3 Local Resilience Forum - Strategic Co-ordinating Group

The Constabulary remain active partners in the county's Covid Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) in accordance with civil contingencies doctrine. This meets at least weekly at the current time.

5.8.4 Local Resilience Forum (LRF) - Tactical Co-ordinating Group

The Constabulary remains in a chair-ship role of the county's Covid Tactical Co-ordinating Group (TCG). This meets weekly at the current time.

5.9 Recovery and Organisational Learning

5.9.1 In May 2020, alongside the continuing "Response" phase to the pandemic, the Constabulary began to develop a "Recovery" phase considering future steps to move to a post-pandemic "new normality".

5.9.2 Risks and Issues

42 immediate issues and 82 risks were identified early on in the recovery work. These have been successfully mitigated through the months.

5.9.3 Opportunities

Alongside the above, the Constabulary identified 61 opportunities for new ways of working or enhancements to practice. The majority have been implemented / sustained, with a small number of longer-term projects still to be developed. The most notable is the agile working project as per 5.7.5 above.

5.9.4 Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Engagement

The Constabulary was the first police force to hold a Recovery and Learning event with HMICFRS, the College of Policing and others. This event was successful and drew acclaim from those participating. The key themes presented and discussed were: Safeguarding the Vulnerable through and beyond Covid, Officer and Staff Health and Wellbeing during and beyond Covid, and the future of agile working in Cambridgeshire. A national summary of the policing response to Covid has been published (see link below). The Constabulary is focused on content and those national recommendations made which all police forces will pursue.

6. **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

'Policing in the pandemic - The police response to the coronavirus pandemic during 2020', HMICFRS, April 2021

'Custody services in a COVID-19 environment', HMICFRS, April 2021

'Review of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic – 2021', HMICFRS, June 2021

[Publications - HMICFRS \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/)

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