

POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**19th November 2020****REPORT OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR DERBYSHIRE****Panel update on Covid-19****1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide an update to the Police and Crime Panel on the response to the global Covid-19 Pandemic.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Police & Crime Panel (PCP) have been previously been provided with updates on the response to the Covid-19 Pandemic which have outlined the process by which this situation is being managed.
- 2.2 Whilst not wishing to repeat previous briefings, the Panel are reminded that the Force have adopted a 'Gold, Silver, Bronze' command structure to deal with the response. The PCC's office is represented at both the Gold and Silver levels (the bronze level would be too tactical for the OPCC (Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner) to add value).
- 2.3 The issue of the response to the Covid Pandemic is a standing agenda item for the PCC/Chief Constable 1-2-1s that take place every week. The PCC also received ad hoc briefings as the regulations/approach changes, including the responsibilities of law enforcement.

3. INCIDENTS AND RECORDS OF CONTACT (RoCs)

- 3.1 Since the 9th March 2020, in Derbyshire, we have seen 135,736 incidents requiring an immediate or priority police response; there have also been 39,934 RoCs.
- 3.2 Incidents are up by 8% when compared to the same period last year, and 16% when compared to the two months immediately prior to the 9th March 2020 (i.e. pre-Coronavirus benchmark).
- 3.3 Domestic abuse and incidents relating to breaches of Coronavirus legislation (or which have been flagged as having some connection with the Coronavirus) represent approximately 20% of the Force's entire demand (each being approximately 10%) with vulnerability and mental health accounting for another 10% of our demand.
- 3.4 The Force saw a very large increase in incident and RoCs during the initial "lockdown" period, which dropped to very low levels over the school holiday.

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After the schools returned, and the introduction of “the rule of six” saw a steady increase in demand, but we are still not at the first “lockdown” levels.

- 3.5 Looking at the areas which have caused most “Coronavirus” demand since March (ignoring individual houses and businesses), these appear to be recreation grounds and beauty spots in and around the Peak District and north of the county.
- 3.6 The panel will no doubt have seen information in the press about enforcement activity in these places (e.g. Matlock Bath and The Blue Lagoon), although Coronavirus demand in these areas is now all but non-existent, possibly due to the inclement weather/daylight savings and changes in legislation.

4. **CRIME**

- 4.1 Since the 9th March 2020, in Derbyshire, the Force have recorded 49,952 crimes; this is approximately 6% down on the pre-Coronavirus period and comparable to the same period last year. Sadly, domestic abuse represents approximately 20% of recorded crime; it is worth noting here that any crimes relating to breaches of the Coronavirus legislation (i.e. those that would attract a fixed penalty notice) do not appear in recorded crime statistics.
- 4.2 Whilst the Force saw a small reduction in recorded crime during the lockdown period, this quickly returned to normal (or slightly higher than normal) levels in Summer, and is now tracking at the same level as the same period last year. In essence, whilst we saw a small, temporary reduction in recorded crime, this has now disappeared and we are back to normal.

5. **FUNDING & WORKPLACE**

- 5.1 Recent increases in government funding to support enforcement, as we head towards winter and a second spike in infection rates, are welcome but may create a challenge.
- 5.2 Derbyshire will see an additional £424k of funding which will be used to provide dedicated visible Coronavirus enforcement resources in North and South Division for the next four months.
- 5.3 However, we have the same number of officers to provide this response, meaning that spending will predominately be through overtime. We have a tired workforce, one that has dealt with significant demand since March, and that is as susceptible to the Coronavirus as the general public (if not more so). As such, overtime is extremely hard to fill; the Force already use overtime to provide cover for general policing duties.
- 5.4 Resilience is always a challenge in policing, and we have had to adapt our approach to review how we best utilise the resources that we have available.
- 5.5 With the recent tiered approach to lockdowns, we worked work closely with our colleagues in Public Health and the Local Authorities so we could understand in greater detail our higher risk locations to achieve a more targeted approach to policing. The recently announced second national lockdown means that this

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work will be especially important in the coming weeks due to the fact that policing demand has all but returned to pre-Coronavirus levels.

- 5.6 In total we have had approximately 80 confirmed cases of Coronavirus since March within the workforce, with almost four-fifths of our confirmed cases having occurred since the beginning of October; the weekly rate of increase throughout October has been accelerating despite the use of PPE, and us having a "Covid Secure" workplace.
- 5.7 As of Tuesday 3rd November, we currently have in excess of 7% of the entire workforce of approximately 3,800 persons either sick (through Coronavirus or other reasons) or self-isolating. In March this was approximately 20% (primarily due to colleagues shielding) but this dropped to approximately 3% over the Summer; it has doubled in the past month. We expect this to continue to increase with further cases of Coronavirus, self-isolation, and a return to shielding our most vulnerable colleagues through the second lockdown period.
- 5.8 20% absence was only manageable in March because the country was in complete lockdown; the impact of the second lockdown remains to be seen but we are planning accordingly to ensure that we are able to maintain core policing services.

6. **CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

- 6.1 In the early stages of the pandemic the Force commenced planning as to how our work would integrate with court processes if face-to-face contact was reduced, or completely stopped.
- 6.2 Unfortunately, one of the biggest challenges faced was the lack of substantial planning within the court system for incidents such as these, which resulted in the sudden cancellation of all courts.
- 6.3 De-warning a significant number of victims, whilst ensuring they remained supported without being able to tell them when their case would be heard, was problematic. Witness Care have seen an increase of approximately 47% in their work, with victims who were due to attend trials in March now having no idea when their cases will be heard.
- 6.4 In an attempt to fill court space, we are now seeing victims and witnesses being warned and then de-warned multiple times. This is at the detriment of victims and witnesses, and my biggest concern now is that victims will feel that they no longer want to pursue cases and will lose confidence in the Criminal Justice system.
- 6.5 Our main challenge now is to ensure that we can support victims and witnesses as best as we can, reassuring them that they are being taken seriously. This is not easy, as we can only foresee a lack of court space moving forward into what was an already overloaded court system prior to the pandemic; the news that the courts will remain open during the second lockdown period is welcome.
- 6.6 My concern is not limited to victims and witnesses. Let us not forget that people are presumed innocent until proven guilty and there will be those who are

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innocent who will have to potentially wait years in order to clear their name due to the backlogs. The effective delivery of a justice system affects us all.

- 6.7 Within the custody environment the Force have been challenged by the creation of Virtual Remand Hearings (VRH); in theory this should have been an efficient process but they have had to overcome some significant challenges due to the delays in the courts.
- 6.8 VRH has created the additional pressure of backlogs for everyday policing due to congested custody cell blocks. The pressure to manage additional risks due to VRH was placed at the feet of the police at very short notice, creating multiple issues around safeguarding and maintaining a safe working environment for our colleagues.
- 6.9 Another important consideration was the additional (unfunded) cost of administering this approach – circa £30k per month. Whereas many forces have said they will simply pull out of VRHs completely, Derbyshire proposed a compromise system with HMCTS that allows some VRHs to still take place.
- 6.9 As policing has returned to normal the pressure on the court system, victims and witnesses, and the processing of fixed-penalty notices (which is also conducted by Criminal Justice) has not subsided.
- 6.10 As PCC, and the Chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board I have continued to apply pressure at the Ministerial level to address these challenges and have tried, to date unsuccessfully, to support the development of a 'Nightingale Court' solution within the East Midlands, ideally within Derbyshire, by working with partners to identify potentially suitable locations for HMCTS to consider. The act of coterminosity between policing and this arms of the Criminal Justice System presents significant challenges for us working together.

7. **RECOVERY**

- 7.1 The Force continue to both plan for the current, ever changing, situation as well as planning for a return to a new post-Covid normal.
- 7.2 As this report is being written there are stories flying around about a potential vaccine, and associated mass vaccination programmes, and the Force and other partners are working to ensure that any such programme is rolled out as smoothly and quickly as possible.

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