

Public Document Pack



5 June 2020

To: Members of the Public Accountability Board

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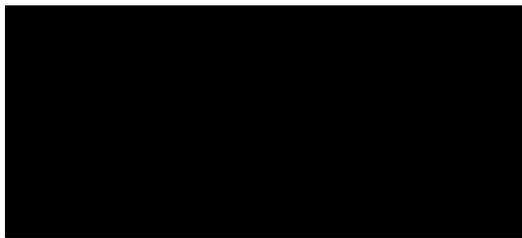


Dear Colleague

Public Accountability Board – Supplemental Agenda Pack

Please find enclosed a Supplemental Agenda Pack for the Public Accountability Board on **Thursday 11th June 2020** at **10am** via telephone conference facility.

Yours sincerely



Erika Redfearn
Head of Governance
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

Enc.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD

THURSDAY 11TH JUNE 2020 AT 10AM

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PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD

11 JUNE 2020

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND SOLICITOR

HOW DID POLICING COPE WITH COVID-19 IN THE LOCK-DOWN PHASE?

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 On 23 March 2020, the UK government announced restrictions aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19. These restrictions asked people not to leave their homes except for certain specified reasons, and the police were asked to enforce this through the passing of emergency legislation – primarily the Coronavirus Act 2020 (the Act)¹. The legislation has had profound implications for the police and crime.

2 HOW HAS POLICING COPED WITH COVID-19?

2.1 Nationally, policing has coped well. The police are used to dealing with critical incidents through a Gold, Silver and Bronze structure, and often leading partnership approaches through Local Resilience Forums – e.g. during the floods.

2.2 In South Yorkshire Police, officer and staff absence levels (abstractions) have remained low, which has allowed all services to be maintained (although some delivery has changed to enable government advice to be followed).

2.3 Generally, there has been a reduction in crime, certainly ‘normal volume crime’ such as house and commercial burglaries. There has been no night-time economy and little shoplifting. There have been some ‘boy racers’ taking advantage of empty roads, including the motorways. There has been concern for the largely invisible crimes such as modern slavery and human trafficking run by organised crime groups (OCGs). Further intelligence needs to be gathered in this area. There was concern about domestic abuse and the ability of victims to contact the police or other agencies. In response to this concern, an online reporting platform aimed at increasing the accessibility for reporting domestic abuse has been developed. Where online reporting is not an option, another more immediate support has been introduced. The ‘silent solution’ enables victims to press 55 whilst on a 999 call to allow the police to listen to a call without the need to speak. A radio advert has been used to promote this.

2.4 Non-crime demands on police have continued, but South Yorkshire Police and the police service nationally have taken the opportunity during lock-down to pursue investigations and to follow up on those wanted for arrest and on warrant; a clearing of the decks.

¹ The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal assent on 25 March 2020. The Act broadly continued and supplemented measures within the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020, and introduced emergency powers for the police.

- 2.5 In terms of policing the emergency regulations, this has been a severe test of the bedrock of British policing; policing by consent. In South Yorkshire, increased foot and vehicle patrols have been put in place across the four districts, where re-introduced neighbourhood policing had allowed officers to get to know their communities again. Overall, the public of South Yorkshire has voluntarily complied with the legislation. South Yorkshire Police has acted appropriately and proportionately to engage, explain and educate individuals in small parts of communities where breaches have occurred, only enforcing as a last resort. This has meant that fixed penalty notices have only been given in a small number of circumstances where there has been continued breaches and refusal to follow officer instructions.
- 2.6 But what happens to both policing and crime in the short, and then the longer term, as lock-down is lifted?

3 AS LOCKDOWN IS LIFTED

- 3.1 Much depends on how this is managed nationally and how much preparation, planning and support public bodies, the private and third sector will require at different stages to allow for a return to a 'new normal'. A phased return to normal will inevitably lead to disparity - freedoms and lifestyles - which will raise challenges for the police.

The Economy

- 3.2 The total economic impact is currently unclear, but we are heading for a recession, its magnitude unknown. There are predictions of increased levels of unemployment especially amongst particular groups including the young, less well-educated males and female workers, unless this can be offset by further government funding support.
- 3.3 There may be consequences of housing many of the homeless during lock-down and releasing them back to the streets (or finding alternatives) at a time when local authority budgets have been stretched to deal with the emergency. It may be difficult for the voluntary sector to help local authorities take up the slack depending on their own financial positions.
- 3.4 Further, socio-economic and health inequalities have been compounded by the COVID-19 situation, including the well-publicised differences in health outcomes between BAME and white communities.
- 3.5 Some of the negative impacts of the above could be limited dependent on the Government's ability and appetite to continue the support to business and employees that have been put in place during the early stages of lock-down.

Crime

- 3.6 There are opposing views by commentators as to whether economic downturns lead to increases in crime.

- 3.7 In the year ending December 2019, crime overall in South Yorkshire increased slightly by 2%, but this was half the national figure of 4%². Even before the recent relaxation of the lockdown measures we have seen crime and crime trends return to more usual levels. It remains to be seen as we come out of lockdown completely whether new opportunities have presented themselves.
- 3.8 Nationally, certain planning assumptions are being made. These assumptions, added to local thinking in South Yorkshire Police, with a series of predictions about what will happen to crime.

Policing

- 3.7 The government's restrictions on people's liberty through lock-down have been unprecedented, as have police powers to enforce them. It is imperative that the service retains public confidence through continuing to enforce emergency powers appropriately and proportionately, and through their response to the changing nature and levels of crime predicted over the coming months.
- 3.8 It is understood that Government funding will be made available to PCCs to cover the policing response to COVID-19, and this will minimise the direct impact on South Yorkshire's council tax payers.
- 3.9 South Yorkshire Police plans to increase police officer numbers over the medium-term as part of the national Operation Uplift³. The PCC meets regularly with the Chief Constable and his chief officer team to consider the impact of COVID-19 on Operation Uplift, and on the Medium Term Resourcing Strategy, more generally.
- 3.10 The pandemic could present opportunities for policing. For example, to take advantage of new ways of working that have been opened up through homeworking and changes to internal processes, making things more efficient and environmentally sustainable. One case in point is the call centre: does every call handler need to be in the centre.
- 3.11 The PCC's commissioning team has been busy pursuing external funding opportunities to maximise the funding available for policing and crime services in South Yorkshire. They have also worked with commissioned service providers (including victims' services) and those organisations provided with grant funding, to ensure their resilience and sustainability now and in the medium term.
- 3.12 Through the support of the Violence Reduction Unit the PCC has submitted a bid for grant funding to the Covid-19 Youth Endowment Fund.

The wider criminal justice system

- 3.13 Since the COVID-19 restrictions came into effect the criminal courts have focussed on priority work e.g. remand hearings resulting in growing backlogs of work.

² Office for National Statistics

³ The Government's announced national uplift of police officers beginning in 2019/20.

- 3.14 Listing work in courts is regarded as a judicial function, and senior judiciary within England and Wales are directing the prioritisation of work that can go ahead, and are also co-ordinating plans for restoring courts and planning for recovery.
- 3.15 There has been a rapid expansion in the use of technology to support the administration of justice. For example, remand prisoner hearings are starting to take place by video link – with detainees remaining at police custody suites and linking into the court for consideration of those cases. The courts have rolled out further video-enabled technology using Cloud Video Platform. Sheffield Crown Court has been an early adopter of this technology, and the magistrates' courts across South Yorkshire are looking to make use of it in the next week or so.
- 3.16 As far as the criminal justice system is concerned in South Yorkshire, some tentative steps have been taken in the last week or so to broaden the range of work being undertaken at courts.
- 3.17 The backlog of work arising at courts, trials in particular, is unlikely to be resolved quickly. This is likely to create and lead to further pressures in the system.
- 3.18 Pressures in the criminal justice system may adversely affect confidence of all those involved in the process including; victims and witnesses, sentencers, defendants and offenders.
- 3.19 Prisons have had to adapt to adhere to government guidelines and prevent contamination throughout their estate, which has seen a slight fall in prisoner numbers. However, once the courts start to recover, this is likely to see a rise in prisoner numbers once again.
- 3.20 Criminal justice partners come together at the Local Criminal Justice Board which the PCC chairs. The PCC, along with other PCCs nationally, also has regular telephone conversations with Ministry of Justice and Home Office ministers.

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