

Policing in the pandemic: The police response to the coronavirus pandemic during 2020

This HMICFRS thematic inspection report gathered evidence from all 43 police forces in England and Wales and from national policing organisations, carrying out more detailed inspections of 19 forces, including Devon and Cornwall Police.

The report was published on 20th April 2021 and a response is due by 15th June 2021.

Key findings

Forces did well in demonstrating:

- Considerable dedication and commitment from officers, staff, special constables and volunteers
- Capacity to respond in difficult circumstances
- Flexibility, innovation, adaptability; being able to protect staff and continue providing services
- Better use of technology and remote working, reducing travel time and improving meeting attendance
- An ability to maintain public support and consent, despite short notice communications from Home Office

Forces faced challenges around:

- Assessing risk and planning; a flu pandemic was identified as the highest national risk but it was seen primarily as a risk for health services, however forces were able to adapt assessments and planning
- Enforcement activity; forces had some difficulty in correctly enforcing coronavirus regulations, but were generally effective in their public engagement around enforcement
- Test, track and trace; officers and staff in some forces did not appear to follow the national requirement for self-isolating
- Long term impact of reduced service, i.e. increased number of crimes not investigated, and reduced in-person visits to registered sex offenders
- Exacerbation of existing Criminal Justice System problems such as court delays and backlogs

Recommendation

The report makes a number of recommendations, five of which are directed at police forces.

Managing registered sex offenders

Forces must immediately make sure that officers understand and correctly implement the guidance for managing registered sex offenders during the pandemic.

Legislation and guidance

Forces must immediately make sure they can manage their responses to changes in coronavirus-related legislation. They must ensure frontline officers and staff are clear about the difference between legislation and guidance.

Test, track and trace

Forces must immediately put in place a policy to make sure that they follow the guidance and self-isolation directions when members of the workforce come into contact with someone with coronavirus symptoms.

Custody records

Forces must immediately make sure that they clearly and consistently record on custody records information about how/when/if detainees are informed of the temporary changes to how they can exercise their rights to legal advice and representation. The record must make clear how any consents are obtained about the way in which legal advice and representation are provided.

Overall scale and impact of changes

Within six months, forces must assess the sustainability of any temporary measures introduced during the pandemic that change the way they work. They must understand positive, negative and unintended consequences of the scale and impact of the changes before determining if any of these new ways of working should continue.

Learning points

The report also highlights six key learning points for forces. These are briefly summarised below:

- *Demand and Pressures* - Forces should make sure that they are aware of potential pressures building up following the pandemic and this should be reflected in the force management statement
- *Technology* - Forces should make sure that IT systems are compatible with other forces and partner organisations
- *Training* - To be bolstered in: vulnerability awareness for contact centre staff, managing teams remotely, MAGIC-trained senior officers, training records for emergency response and recovery scenarios
- *Workforce wellbeing* – a range of workforce wellbeing issues to be addressed including ensuring resilient staffing levels, annual leave planning, maintaining PPE stocks and meaningful consultation with workforce
- *Data* - Forces should ensure that they have the right amount of data and detail about the continuing impact of the pandemic and that duty management systems provide the data needed to effectively manage the workforce
- *Learning* - Forces should make sure they have effective ways to establish lessons learned to help inform their future practices and ways of working

The full report can be viewed here:

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/the-police-response-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic-during-2020/>

Chief Constable's comments

I am very grateful for the HMICFRS report "Policing in the Pandemic".

The Covid-19 pandemic throughout 2020/2021 has been described as 'unprecedented' on a number of platforms, and this is no exception for the Police Service. I am proud of the way officers, staff and volunteers within Devon and Cornwall Police have responded to challenges this has presented, adapting working practices, processes and relationships to ensure the ongoing protection of, and service to, the public.

The report identifies a number of recommendations for Police Forces and I am pleased to report progress against them is already well underway.

Recommendation 1 refers to the ability of police forces to manage registered sex offenders during the pandemic. Devon and Cornwall Police recognise the significance of effectively managing sex offenders and are content that our practices reflect current guidance.

Recommendation 2 refers to the ability of police forces to manage their responses to changes in coronavirus-related legislation. Devon and Cornwall Police are satisfied that our approach to ensuring officers, staff and volunteers understand the difference between legislation and guidance has been effective. The differences have been laid out within relevant Covid related policies and briefings to officers and staff. Changes to legislation and National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) guidance have quickly been disseminated to staff using a combination of internal communication methods, Bronze and Silver networks and force tasking processes. Our Legal Services Department has been instrumental in clarifying aspects of the legislation and in producing easy to read guidance, particularly in relation to tiering. As soon as notifications have been received, our Central Ticket Office has been updated to ensure processes for reporting breaches are amended in a timely fashion.

Recommendation 3 advises police forces to immediately establish a policy to ensure compliance with guidance and self-isolation directions when members of the workforce come into contact with someone who has coronavirus symptoms. National guidance has been built into an easy to read flowchart for staff and managers to follow which has been shared across the organisation and is readily accessible as a reference document.

Recommendation 4 advises forces to ensure they clearly and consistently record the informing of individuals detained in custody of the temporary changes to exercising their rights to legal advice and representation. This has been undertaken during the pandemic as part of the process when detainees arrive at custody. Further work will be undertaken to ensure this is included as part of the forthcoming change to our IT systems.

Recommendation 5 refers to forces assessing (within six months) the sustainability of temporary measures introduced during the pandemic that change the way they work. This is

already under consideration within Devon and Cornwall Police, with the appointment of a 'Recovery' lead who will consider the impact, need and sustainability of changes that have been made, taking into account the elements within this recommendation. Already it has been identified that staff wellbeing, alongside operational delivery, is a key factor.

I welcome the report which highlights ongoing need to ensure our service to the public and our workforce continues to be delivered to a high standard.

Police and Crime Commissioner's response

I welcome this report which highlights the resilience and adaptability of police forces nationally in their response to the pandemic, as well as providing recommendations and learning points for forces and national bodies. Leading in partnership has been a strength of Devon and Cornwall throughout the pandemic and I am proud of the way in which Devon and Cornwall Police officers, staff and volunteers have stepped up to meet the wide range of challenges brought about by the pandemic, lockdown restrictions and coronavirus legislation. I am particularly pleased to see that the report highlights good practice from Devon and Cornwall Police in several areas, including the continued use of joint response vehicles to attend people experiencing mental health crisis, and the force's use of a desk-top resolution team to support remote deployment.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic I have held regular discussions with the Chief Constable to ensure that an efficient and effective police service continues to be delivered safely and professionally to the public, in line with coronavirus guidance and legislation and provided a line of sight to local MPs on the impact that COVID enforcement has had in their constituencies.

The Chief Constable has laid out in his comments how he has ensured, through clear and well communicated policy and guidance, that the force is correctly implementing the guidance for the management of registered sex offenders, responding appropriately to changes in coronavirus-related legislation, ensuring officer and staff compliance with self-isolation directions and maintaining clear and consistent records on how temporary changes to how custody detainees can exercise their rights to legal advice and representation are communicated. I am satisfied that the correct structures are in place to safeguard the force's adherence to these policies and guidance, and I will continue to monitor the impact of this on service delivery and outcomes.

I undertook my own scrutiny of COVID enforcement during 2020 to satisfy myself that the policing approach in Devon and Cornwall was appropriate and proportionate. The report from this review is here.

<https://devonandcornwall.s3.amazonaws.com/Documents/About%20Us/Scrutiny/Final%20reflection%20report%20Covid-19%20Powers%20v0.6.pdf>

The pandemic has required the force to adapt to a continually changing landscape and I welcome the HMICFRS recommendation to reflect on and assess temporary changes to the way that the force is currently working. I support the Chief Constable's appointment of a recovery lead, who will be intrinsic in taking this work forward, and I am especially pleased that the wellbeing of officers and staff, who have shown such commitment and resilience over the last twelve months plus, has already been identified as a key factor in this process. I will again continue to monitor progress in this area.