

**POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**

**9<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

**POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER REPORT**

**JUNE 2020**

A lot has changed since the last time the panel met, but I want to set out in this report how my office's commitment to fighting and preventing crime has not lessened. We have faced short to medium term challenges of an unprecedented nature, as well as the longer term risk now facing our region. I will go over those in this report, but first I want to put on record my thanks to the police officers and staff who demonstrate on a daily basis their dedication to keeping us safe. They have worked with the public to help reduce the spread of this deadline virus, and my thanks go out to them.

**1) Coronavirus Response Plan**

The Coronavirus pandemic created an unprecedented challenge to the way we live and work, and brought with it new expectations of our police force.

As a result, I produced a public document setting out how my office has adapted and the changes put in place to ensure Northumbria Police are able to meet local priorities and the force is held to account.

Crime is changing as a result of the outbreak, while at the same time our relationship with the police faces a new test in an era of Government-ordered lockdown. Alongside that, the public rightly want to be assured that the force is prepared for any changes as this crisis progresses through to a recovery. There is the potential for new social distancing rules after the current lockdown, changes to the crimes we see on our streets and a need for our police to respond alongside our communities. We have to get this right.

The changes introduced as a result of the response plan include:

- Regular reporting from the force to the commissioner on the number of enforcement notices issued and assurance of standards and legitimacy around these.
- Ensuring plans are in place to support people trapped at home with a violent partner during the lockdown.
- A renewed focus supporting the local services that help turn young adults away from a life of violent crime as a vital part of the region's recovery planning.
- Co-ordinating the work of the police and local criminal justice system to ensure there are plans in place for any post-lockdown rise in crime.
- Ensuring the force continues with plans to recruit hundreds of new and replacement police officers and staff.

## **2) Coronavirus finance monitoring**

Responding to the pandemic obviously brings with it a financial cost. I have instigated weekly meetings with the finance director to monitor this situation, and I am confident the force is well placed to adjust to these new challenges.

The provisional outturn shows a movement of just over £500,000 to the position reported to this panel in February of which £400,000 is due to additional costs arising from the immediate policing response to COVID-19.

At this time there is no formal confirmation from the Home Office that the additional costs attributable to COVID-19 will be reimbursed. If no additional funding is provided, the impact from provisional outturn will need to be met through the use of the General Reserve.

For 2020/21, the current estimate of COVID-19 attributable cost is a further £2.4m with the main areas of financial impact being:-

- Additional resource cost including overtime
- PPE
- Loss of income/non-governmental funding

The COVID-19 position is now subject to internal analysis and reporting on a weekly basis and also new monthly reporting through the Home Office which is being aligned with similar monthly reporting on costs arising from the Uplift programme to increase police officer numbers.

Reports to future meetings of the panel will give more detailed updates on the 2020/21 position including the impact of COVID-19 and I will hopefully be in a position to provide confirmation that the emergent financial pressures will be supported by additional Home Office funding.

## **3) Coronavirus interventions**

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact across Northumbria especially on some of our most vulnerable people, whether that's as a victim of crime, young person on the cusp of offending or someone who fears crime in their local area.

My office has closely worked with groups and organisations to address some of the challenges we face, including:

- Difficulty reaching and connecting with victims remotely to effectively offer cope and recovery support.
- Financial stability of organisations having to respond to unplanned spend around improvements to ICT or through loss of money where planned fundraising can't go ahead.
- Young people not engaged through normal structures such as schools, colleges and proactive outreach.
- Reduced workforce capacity due to self-isolation, social distancing guidance and caring responsibilities.

At the start of the outbreak I worked with others to put in place measures to mitigate these risks.

These steps included:

- **Coronavirus Response Fund** – I launched the fund to help support voluntary and community sector organisations who are struggling to retain their offer of support to victims and communities in light of the Coronavirus pandemic. Almost £320,000 of awards were made across Northumbria to a wide range of projects and services including those who support hate crime victims, work with disadvantaged young people and support those in rural communities - a full list of the 83 successful organisations is available on the PCC website <http://www.northumbria-pcc.gov.uk/police-crime-plan/commissioning-services-grants/coronavirus-response-fund-launched/>
- **Domestic abuse ‘dial-ins’** – it has been well documented throughout the pandemic that domestic abuse victims are some of the most vulnerable, unable to escape to safety during the lockdown. A series of ‘dial-ins’ have taken place with key experts across the sector so we can best understand the challenges locally and respond collectively with our partners.
- **Information sharing** – each week we check in with the victim services to help us understand the support offer still available and also monitor any trends in demand. I have been very impressed with how our local services have adapted their offer to meet the needs of victims. A full list of the services and how they have adapted is available on the PCC website <http://www.northumbria-pcc.gov.uk/police-crime-plan/commissioning-services-grants/>
- **Governance and accountability** – every week I meet virtually with the Assistant Chief Constable responsible for vulnerability to discuss any local challenges and trends and to help provide reassurance that Northumbria Police are responding to the needs of the most vulnerable, including victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence and modern slavery.
- **Additional funding for children affected by domestic abuse** – the Home Office agreed to provide £120,000 of funding to my office to support those organisations working with children and young people affected by domestic abuse. Children and young people affected by domestic abuse are some of the most vulnerable in society and are in need of a trauma based approach to recovery. We were asked to make this an open opportunity and are currently in receipt of applications. We hope to make a handful of awards to the projects likely to have the greatest impact.
- **Covid-19 victims funding** – I am awarding up to £494,000 of additional funding in Northumbria, as a result of a Ministry of Justice grant, to help support those organisations supporting domestic abuse and sexual violence victims. The aim of the fund is to provide vital resources to those voluntary and community sector organisations who find that they are having to adapt their offer to provide support in different ways, to those who have seen an increase in demand and to those that have

#### 4) Recovery planning

While the immediate policing response focused on helping reduce the spread of the outbreak, the wider response must now reflect the challenges ahead.

Although crime rates have fallen drastically overall during the stay at home period, these rates may well increase in the coming months. Plans for this must reflect the potential impact

of any longterm unemployment in the North East as it faces up to an uncertain economic outlook.

I have raised with the Chief Constable the need to be prepared for this, and have also made the case for this nationally.

At a regional level, it is clear now that organisations in the Northumbria force area need to come together as part of a Recovery Co-ordination Group. In discussions with local authority chief executives and leaders I have made clear that Covid-19 and the restrictions following in its wake could have profound longterm implications for our young people.

While many families and young people in our region have healthy support networks, others do not. With the risk of recession growing, so do we see an increased risk of deprivation and crime. It is a story the North East has seen over and over again, and it is vital we learn the lessons.

Our plan for recovery from the Coronavirus cannot simply be about supporting businesses, vital though that work is. We also need to support families and communities, and in the coming weeks and months I will be advocate for this agenda.

## **5) Violence Reduction Unit**

The current stay at home and social distancing measures put in place as a result of COVID-19 have presented the VRU with some specific challenges. On a practical level this includes the loss of an operational base, hindering formal and casual communication within the VRU and across the OPCC. This has also removed any opportunities to facilitate or attend meetings with partners and stakeholders, in the traditional sense.

As these measure were implemented in mid March 2020 they also interrupted the completion of VRU funded violence reduction interventions due to be completed that month, and delayed the a new round of interventions. Despite these challenges, however, we are continuing to support local organisations and work with those at risk of violent offending and the VRU team has adapted and found new ways of carrying out their vital work.

The first phase of the VRU saw funding provided to enable 32 organisations to directly impact more than 3,700 young people and adults through intervention work with the aim of improving lives to prevent crime. As set out in the thematic report to this panel, the VRU has already played a role in targeting knife and violent crime, with some great early successes.

Now, I have moved the VRU in to the second phase, focusing efforts on key priorities, with a particular focus on helping young people improve their lives and avoid crime.

A new Response Strategy outlining this has been developed and presented to the strategic board which brings together key local officials to work on a public health approach to tackling violence.

As my Response Strategy sets out, the Violence Reduction Unit will work towards four key themes.

These are youth diversion, reducing offending, supporting families and connecting communities. We are doing this because neighbourhoods blighted by austerity need services rebuilding, and this is essential if we are to steer young people away from crime.

I want the VRU to provide opportunities for young people to access activities and services that enrich their daily lives, provide new experiences and promote the importance of positive

role models. We saw that in the first wave of the VRU in projects such as those delivered by the Newcastle United Foundation, and now we need to build on that work.

It is clear already that despite early progress, we will not make lasting change overnight. The second phase of the VRU has to be judged as a five year plan to reverse the worse of austerity in key areas.

However, it is far from clear that the Government will match this longterm ambition. Funding for the VRU has been awarded annually, on the whim of ministers. We urgently need longterm funding for this unit, and others like it across the country.

In future panel meetings I will be setting out progress towards these VRU priorities while continuing to lobby for funding needed to keep households safe across our region.

## **6) Northumbria Local Criminal Justice Board**

Since lockdown was announced, the LCJB has held monthly extraordinary meetings to ensure effective communication between criminal justice partners and business continuity in very challenging circumstances.

This purpose has been further supported by additional partnership meetings focusing on the front end of the system, i.e. getting cases into court, and the interdependencies between partner organisations across the system, from the reporting of a crime and offer of support to victims through to the delivery of court sentences and management of offenders in the community. We are fortunate to have a tradition of strong partnership working in Northumbria which is standing us in good stead.

The rapid implementation of new Coronavirus working practises has meant significant changes, some of which we want to develop further post the pandemic as we rebuild delivery of criminal justice locally and consider implementing longer term changes to the way agencies and the criminal justice system operate. Most agencies now report a steady state of delivery, albeit under unusual circumstances, and discussion is now about the next stage of response, i.e recovery and bringing the criminal justice system back up to full speed and recovering from the backlogs.

The genuine need to pause and re-engineer approaches as a result of COVID-19 has created a significant build-up of prosecutions. This is the biggest challenge in recovery and therefore our current focus at local, regional and national levels. There is understandable pressure to increase both the number and type of cases being heard at courts. Additionally the physical limitations of court buildings in terms of meeting the requirements of social distancing is a real challenge, for example to the recommencement of jury trials. Work is underway to both fully understand the detail of the backlog and to establish the capacity of the end to end system to meet this additional demand. This will be overseen by a newly established LCJB Recovery Group.

## **7) Key issues in the next quarter**

- Northumbria Police Recovery Planning
- Local Criminal Justice Board Recovery Planning
- OPCC Recovery and Forward Planning – including the VRU
- Financial Monitoring of the financial impact of the pandemic and the delivery of the medium term financial strategy

- Victim and Witnesses Review and supporting the delivery of our commissioned services that provide cope and recovery services to all victims of crime.
- Annual Report for 19/20
- Development of a new Police and Crime Plan

**Keeping in contact:**

I have committed to keeping partners and constituents updated about my work by producing a monthly newsletter. This will be emailed to people and uploaded on my website. It is always good to hear your thoughts at panel meetings, if you would like to contact me between panel meetings, I can be contacted the following ways –

Email – [kim.mcguinness@northumbria-pcc.gov.uk](mailto:kim.mcguinness@northumbria-pcc.gov.uk)

Twitter - @northumbriapcc

Facebook – KiMcGuinness

Telephone – 0191 221 9800.