



## **POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**

**16<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2021**

## **POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER REPORT**

### **MARCH 2021**

Policing continues to be impacted on by the Coronavirus pandemic, but as you will hear at panel today, Northumbria Police continues to respond well both in terms of enforcing the restrictions which slow the spread of the virus, but also in terms of proactive policing elsewhere.

The work to halt the spread of the virus continues, and while the relaxing of restrictions is in sight, we cannot afford to rush this.

I was disappointed to learn that the Government has refused to prioritise the vaccine for frontline workers, after the elderly and vulnerable. Police officers are a vital part of our frontline response to the pandemic, and they and our staff and volunteers have kept us safe in the face of great risk. That's a risk that they share with the family for as long as the Coronavirus is spreading through our communities. I have spoken personally to the policing minister, and with others, to point out this injustice. Those who protect us should be protected.

### **1) Fighting Crime**

#### **Recruitment**

Last month I launched my new Police and Crime Plan, turning the needs of people across our region in to priorities for Northumbria Police. Key to that is a proactive approach to fighting crime.

That's why I was proud last month to announce that alongside the hundreds of new front line police officers joining our ranks, the force will be creating 60 new detective posts. One key use for these officers will be the fight against organised crime, but I think it's important to stress here the "whole force" approach taken in Northumbria. Organised crime is disrupted at every level, including by our excellent neighbourhood policing teams. When we're recruiting officers across the force, we're adding to the work already done at every level.

#### **Funding your police**

It is vital that Northumbria Police have the resources they need to keep us safe, and as part of that responsibility I am today setting out the latest Medium Term Financial Strategy governing investment in our force. A presentation on this will be made to the panel, setting out how the MTFS will support delivery of the Police and Crime Plan.

It is worth remembering here that since 2010, the Government's austerity drive saw unprecedented cuts to the funding provided to policing, with Northumbria being the hardest hit of any force in England and Wales.

Central Government's formula funding for policing in Northumbria was reduced by more than 31% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2018/19, as confirmed independently by the National Audit Office. By March 2020 Northumbria had made £144.3m of cuts and efficiencies to manage the reductions imposed by government.



While recent investment has increased, it is still on a one-off basis, and we have no form idea of what the next financial settlement will look like.

Despite these challenges, I want to invest in the force. For example, in the last MTFS I made funding available to ensure that, where the chief constable thinks it is needed, every police officer in the force has access to taser training. This year, alongside other decisions, I will be ensuring funds are in place to replace all body armour worn by our police officers.

But as well as investment in new officers and equipment to support them, I also want to back our communities. As such, I have started exploring what we can do to increase investment in the fight against anti-social behaviour.

### **Reducing crime**

Overall, crime is down in Northumbria. Clearly, the impact of lockdown is the driving force here, but I think it would be wrong to overlook the work of our dedicated force.

Panel will see more localised data elsewhere in this meeting, but to add to that is the latest data from the Office of National Statistics which showed a 13% reduction in total recorded crime. These latest ONS crime figures show a continued fall over the 12 month reporting period from June 2019 to June 2020. Along with a fall in overall crime, Northumbria saw knife crime, drug offences and violence against the person all fall.

While it is understandable that certain crimes have fallen during this period, this cannot just be attributed to Covid. For example, knife crime had been on the decrease since before the lockdown measures and now, as of June 2020 has fallen by 17% – a reflection on the work we are doing to fight crime. While one knife is still too many on our streets, it is extremely pleasing to see the impact we've made and this work will continue.

One area I'm keen to focus on as a result of the new police and crime plan is anti-social behaviour. It was clear from my policing survey that residents want to see more done to tackle ASB. However, often ASB has no easy policing solution. While the force do have a role to play here, there is also work to be done by local authorities, housing associations, schools and others.

In the coming months I will be reporting back to panel on progress here, but my intention is to get these organisations back around the table together, and to be funding interventions designed to stop ASB locally.

### **County lines**

While that planning work begins, the fight against crime continues and I was pleased to note recently a Northumbria Police operation to extinguish County Lines from Berwick had been recognised as the top investigation of the year by a national policing awards body.

The annual Tilley Awards celebrate problem-oriented projects that have achieved measurable success in resolving issues faced by the police, partners and the community.

This year, the Force's Operations Eclipse and Antumbra scooped the award in the investigation category.

The police operations were created to target drug dealers from the Liverpool area who had embedded themselves in the community in order to supply Class A drugs such as heroin and crack cocaine.



They exploited members of the community, including those with mental health concerns or addiction problems, into aiding the supply of drugs by taking control of their mobile phones and contact lists.

The suspects were also identified as using Berwick homes as bases or even forcing locals into dealing to pay-off escalating drug debts – this form of supply, exploitation and control is commonly referred to as County Lines.

The arrival of County Lines saw a 25 per cent increase in reports of crime and a 75 per cent increase in reports of shoplifting.

The operations saw Northumbria Police join forces with colleagues at the North East Regional Special Operations Unit and Merseyside Police and work closely with Northumberland County Council, Northumberland Recovery Partnership and the Berwick Trust who run the local food bank.

In January 2020, a series of warrants were executed across Berwick and Liverpool and arrests secured, ultimately leading to 15 suspects being charged with a variety of offences. At the time of writing, several more remain under investigation.

To date, those sentenced have accrued more than 20 years of custodial sentences.

## **2) Preventing Crime**

### **Violence Reduction Unit**

Since the last meeting of the panel it has been confirmed that my Violence Reduction Unit will go in to its third year with £1.6m of funding support.

Keeping young people away from crime and intervening in violent lives will remain a priority in the region and the Violence Reduction Unit will be continuing its preventative work, including supporting those on the edge of criminality and working with those individuals and their families.

The third year of the programme will see extra support for the likes of our YOLO programme, delivered alongside Newcastle United Foundation and Sunderland's Foundation of Light. The successful community hub and link worker approach will also be expanded over the next 12 months – re-investing in neighbourhoods hit by ten years of austerity.

However, the current Government policy of only providing funding for one year at a time risks undoing the impactful results delivered to date. Tackling serious violence requires a long term approach and funding – the life changing work being delivered is not a quick fix or solution.

Year on year short term funding doesn't provide the commitment, clarity or confidence to allow our projects to deliver at the high standards they are known for. To properly tackle serious violence and deliver substantial results, we need a long term settlement and support from the Government.

### **Community support and education**

We see the benefits of the VRU in knife crime education work. Despite lockdown the team have continued to deliver knife crime and domestic abuse sessions in January and February.



Six sessions were given in January to 73 young people, and we have requests in from the scouts and Newcastle and Gateshead colleges to bring the education work to them. A knife crime awareness package has been developed for practitioners and is being piloted now.

Elsewhere the three Link Workers in Ashington, North Tyneside and Gateshead are working well and now all have active caseloads.

The Gateshead Community Link Worker has had over 50 people referred from various partnership organisations including housing, Northumbria Police, Gateshead Community Hubs, Job Centre Plus. In Ashington the primary focus of this work is to support young people, finding out what matters to them and helping them to achieve their goals. The council are keen to hear the views of the young people and if there are issues, or where services don't exist, they want to address those and really recognise the voice of the young people in future commissioning.

### **Operation Payback**

I'm pleased to confirm that the first awards from Operation Payback have been made. This is a new fund in which money recovered from drug dealers and other criminals is used to fund youth services, residents associations and other local services.

Many local projects and community groups that strive to improve lives in their area are set to receive a support to help keep making a positive difference in their neighbourhood often repairing the harm caused by crime. A total of 23 groups are set to benefit from the £350,000 pot, including South Shields FC, Dunston Community Centre and YMCA Northumberland.

There are some terrific groups who've taken it upon themselves to really turn things around in the area where they live. They've taken responsibility and they're making a huge difference. I absolutely want to support them in doing this so we're turning bad money into good. I want Payback to empower them further and bring their bright ideas to life.

In the years to come the fund will be topped up with some of the money seized from criminal activity under the Proceeds of Crime Act, with some recovered funds also going to Northumbria Police to help them target more criminals.

For more information about Operation Payback and to view the full list of beneficiaries visit [www.northumbria-pcc.gov.uk](http://www.northumbria-pcc.gov.uk).

### **Domestic abuse perpetrators**

I'm pleased that recent campaigning for a perpetrator strategy has paid off and the Home Office is starting to take this seriously by promising it will form part of the new Domestic Abuse strategy. We need long term solutions to prevent the crime that is domestic abuse and hopefully a step in the right direction is coming.

This is a huge achievement and credit to the work that many people have done to raise the profile and importance of this issue. I know so many have been active on social media about this as well as putting in lots of behind-the-scenes work.

One key feature of this success has been the Drive partnership, which advocates for systems change around work with perpetrators. To end domestic abuse, we must address those causing the problem, and that means changing the narrative and ensuring perpetrators are held to account.



In 2020, the Drive partnership led a 'call for action', lobbying government to create a national perpetrator strategy. This case for change was created with input from 125 statutory and voluntary service providers, academics and commissioners across the country. The OPCC was one of these 125 organisations who has been calling for this change. The call for action document outlines principles that support a more coherent and joined up approach to perpetrators wherever they live.

We need to keep to pressure on government to ensure this meets the requirements in the call for action and is ambitious in ending domestic abuse”

### **3) Improving lives**

#### **Domestic abuse workplace champions**

I'm pleased to say that many local organisations are training up Domestic Abuse Workplace Champions ahead of the region's return to the office thanks to a virtual roll-out of this key awareness scheme.

During the pandemic, many frontline and specialist domestic abuse services experienced a rise in demand as stay at home orders trapped survivors in the house, with their abuser.

As of February the scheme, which raises awareness of domestic abuse and guides people towards specialist services, has switched to digital delivery. So far, 140 people have signed up and the course is now fully subscribed until the end of May, with further dates to be scheduled.

Previously the scheme has engaged with more than 300 businesses from throughout the North East, and trained up more than 1,500 champions.

To ensure the training reaches as many people as possible, my office has partnered with the Better Health at Work Award, coordinated by the Northern TUC, to offer the specialist training to the hundreds of employers who are committed to the health and wellbeing of their workforce, including making domestic abuse their business. Companies who have had representatives take part in the online training so far come from a range of sectors including childcare, engineering and across the public sector.

#### **Victim services funding**

Since my last report to panel a new one-off pot of money totalling £354,000 has been introduced to back services who support survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Organisations which may be eligible for this Ministry of Justice funding are those which provide support services which have the purpose of helping victims (adults and/or children) of sexual violence or domestic abuse cope with the impacts of crime, and, as far as possible, recover from the harm they have experienced.

#### **Helping victims in court**

I'm proud to say that my office has funded new state-of-the-art technology is set to make it easier for vulnerable victims and witnesses to give evidence in court.

A number of new mobile screens have been introduced at Newcastle Crown Court to respond to the needs of some victims or witnesses who can be anxious when giving



evidence remotely knowing their image will be beamed into the court room – and will be seen by the defendant and those sat in the public gallery.

For victims or witnesses revisiting extremely stressful experiences, such as domestic abuse or sexual violence, this could act as a barrier from them ever completing the criminal justice process.

In response, local criminal justice partners including the police, Crown Prosecution Service and Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunal Service teamed together and agreed to introduce smaller, movable screens for appropriate cases at Newcastle Crown Court.

Crucially, these new screens will only be seen by the Judge, jury and counsel when an intimidated victim or witness is giving evidence via TV link or from a remote evidence suite.

Everyone else in the court room, including the defendant and the public, will be able to hear the individual giving evidence but not see them.

Giving evidence can be intimidating, it can be daunting and so wherever possible we want to be making things that bit easier. These mobile court screens are designed to make victims and witnesses feel more comfortable as they go through the process of seeking justice.