



POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

20th October 2020

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER REPORT

OCTOBER 2020

In the two months since I last met with the panel our region has continued to adapt to the demands of the pandemic. Covid has continued to be a major issue, but the routine work of our emergency services has not gone away. Over this report I'll set out what I have been doing to hold the police to account on behalf of the public, and to support our communities in this difficult time.

Covid update

As the situation in the North East is developing, I will take the opportunity at the panel meeting to update members on the position in the region.

1. Fighting Crime

Getting more officers in to our force and reversing the Government's 1,100 cut to Northumbria Police officer numbers remains a priority.

So I was pleased to recently meet yet another intake, the 73 latest recruits to Northumbria Police.

They join 238 passionate new officers who have already begun their career with the force in 2020, together with an additional 11 experienced transferees from other forces.

On current projections Northumbria Police will have hired 185 more officers than the Government offered us by the end of the financial year. I'm doing that because new recruits are not enough, we need to replace departing and retiring officers as well.

Northumbria Police is very clear in its intent to recruit exceptional people from across the community and recent intakes have been attracting a significant proportion of female officers as well as increasing numbers of recruits from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

Uniformed officers out on the streets is exactly what local people tell me they want to see so that's why we are making this happen. We've now welcomed more than 300 officers to the force since lockdown, and it is great to see the continued interest in these job vacancies,

We've been overwhelmed by the level of interest from applicants - people from all walks of life are joining us bringing a welcome range of backgrounds and skills to our



workforce. I'm thankful to each and every one of them for joining in such challenging times and I look forward to watching them grow in their careers – they've chosen a brilliant force to be a part of.

Justice for heroes

The hard work our officers and staff does often mean they are in dangerous situations. Over recent months we've seen continued attacks on our emergency services, and a criminal justice system that, frankly, does not do them justice.

That's why I wrote to the Home Secretary backing a double of the sentencing options available for to the courts when dealing with those who attack emergency workers, but also clearer sentencing guidelines from the Government so magistrates and judges are better placed to impose longer sentences.

At the same time, I backed Crimestoppers with their reward for anyone offering information on those who attack our emergency workers.

Our local media have also backed our first responders, including ChronicleLive, which campaigned for tougher sentences and has proudly backed those who keep us safe.

Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

I joined with Northumbria Police and Metro staff to see how anti-social behaviour is being tackled on public transport.

Named Operation Hermes – after the Greek God of travel – the initiative saw officers team up with colleagues from Metro operators Nexus, local councils, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service and British Transport Police to target troublemakers and help ensure commuters feel safe.

A wide range of tactics were deployed across a number of locations, at times when there has been an increase in incidents being reported, including increased engagement to steer youths away from using the stations as social hubs. However, enforcement action was also used where necessary, and as well as a visible policing presence, plain-clothed officers were travelling the Metro lines keeping a watchful eye.

As part of Northumbria Police's continued commitment to tackling serious and organised crime, there were also targeted search operations at some stations.

Northumbria Police have a dedicated team which works along the Metro network, and this operation was designed to build on the activity which already takes place to keep passengers safe.



I was pleased to see that alongside our officers, youth workers were on hand to talk with those seen to be causing trouble and encourage them to consider other local opportunities and better ways to spend their time.

2. Preventing crime

Violence Reduction Unit

My Violence Reduction Unit continues to move at great pace and deliver impactful work across the region. In the months since I last updated you on their work, they have supported summer provision across all six local authorities, commissioned further funding I secured to support micro-charities, engaged over 1370 young people via our youth survey and began in-school delivery supporting the return to education.

Given the challenges faced by young people throughout this year, and the lack of engagement they have been able to have with peers, youth services and sport provision, I ensured we made all resources possible available to support the summer activity provision delivered by our local authorities. Our School Liaison Officers successfully delivered a community-based support programme to over 360 children and young people, engaging in a range of educational and community activities that saw the team deliver inputs ranging from 'knife crime' to 'communication' to 'friendships & relationships' – all very topical issues in the current climate.

Despite the short notice nature of the announcement, I welcomed a further investment of £135,162 from the Home Office to support some of the region's smaller charities recover from the impact of the pandemic, and resume their much needed youth services for vulnerable young people.

We allocated this funding to 21 different organisations across the region and it has been heartening to see the immediate impact of this funding. I have visited and spoken with a number of those awarded funds, including Jobes Boxing Gym in Newcastle, who in particular showcased how important youth diversion and local sporting activities are for communities. Amongst the many inspiring people at the session I attended, one teenager who had previously been on suicide watch until they started attending sessions at Jobes made it very clear how vital these services are and how we must continue to support and fund local provision like this.

In my last report I mentioned that we were seeking the views of young people aged 14-25 to allow my office to support both them, and the education sector as they return to school, college and university in September. I was absolutely delighted at the response achieved, 1374 responses, but it also gave a very stark warning of the challenges ahead as young people continue to be impacted heavily by the fallout of



this pandemic – most notably with concerns raised about mental health and employment support.

Gang Violence

We are lucky in Northumbria to have so many fantastic charities providing life changing support to young people, and so it was very pleasing to see two of these referenced in a recent Westminster Hall debate on the topic of ‘Gang-associated girls’.

Edge North East, who my Violence Reduction Unit helps fund, and the Children’s Society North East were used as examples by Bambos Charalambous MP to showcase organisations doing exceptional work in this area, and I want to take this chance to highlight some of the work done by my VRU and other organisations in tackling gang violence.

Several organisations in the North East have identified girls at risk of gang-related violence. Edge North East, which mentors girls and young women involved in gangs, is doing great work here. Also making great inroads is the Children’s Society North East and its SCARPA project, which has worked with more than 30 girls who are at risk of harm and exploitation due to their association with gang members.

Between these organisations can be found a collection of modern day horror stories, detailing the lives of young women trapped in violence. We hear of young women in the North East who have reported being victims of physical and sexual violence and being forced to do drug runs, to carry and store weapons, and to drive vehicles for drug deals. They have even allowed their bank accounts to be used to stash money.

One of our young females has been a victim of domestic violence for over a year including one occasion where she had hot water poured over her. Another had her property used as a ‘trap house’ and was forced to store drugs and weapons in the property, and when she told her boyfriend she no longer wanted to store them she was subjected to a violent attack.

Girls in these environments tell the organisations working with them that it is made out to them that being a gang member’s girlfriend is glamorous and you will be well looked after and taken care off and receive the best of everything, however this is all a grooming tactic and it becomes apparent this is not the case.

The force works with these young women and the organisations that support them, and I continue to discuss these efforts with the chief constable.

But as well as using this opportunity to praise their work, there is also a need for a warning here.

Time is rapidly running out for the Home Secretary to agree third year funding for violence reduction units. As with wider policing issues, we cannot continue in a



position in which a one-year budget is agreed just a few weeks before it needs implementing. Let me be clear; the manner in which the Home Secretary hands out policing funds directly limits our ability to reduce crime. If we do not get another round of violence reduction funding in place, gang crime will continue to ruin lives.

My office continues to work with others to prevent crimes such as these. My VRU came together with Northumbria Police, Newcastle Council and Edge North East to deliver a highly praised and credited webinar on Criminal Exploitation and Serious Violence to over 200 professionals and colleagues. I have spoken in depth about this topic recently, and along with Northumbria Police, highlighted our zero tolerance approach to these insidious crimes which will be met with the maximum enforcement and punishment possible. It is extremely pleasing to see the value and impact that my team can have in this capacity, and upskill and educate colleagues on how to spot, support and prevent crimes like this from happening. Through sessions like this we will provide professionals with the skills required to improve lives to prevent crime, and for those that choose to ignore support and commit these acts of crime, we absolutely will fight crime with my full backing.

3. Improving Lives

Grants

As mentioned above, my office has issued a further £135,000 in targeted support for organisations hit by the pandemic, with the total now over £1m. These total funds are a mixture of OPCC and Government grants and are designed to ensure those most in need in our area still receive support.

With fears that the pandemic could create a 'lost generation' of young people, widen the education attainment gap and lead to an increase in vulnerability, I think it is vital we continue to support families and young people.

These people were telling us that they need some extra support this summer, and through my VRU we allocated a further £135,000 to organisations to tackle the financial challenges arising from Covid-19 in order to help and support vulnerable children. A total of 21 organisations will be funded by the OPCC, with the grants supporting micro-charities who are working with vulnerable young people at risk of being involved in serious violence.

One such organisation was the Longbenton Youth Project. The grant allowed them to bring back workers from furlough on a part time basis and continue the fantastic work that has achieved since opening in May 1994. I was told that without the grant they may well have never re-opened again and that would be a huge tragedy for those young people they serve.



Monitoring the impact of victim services during the pandemic

As part of our commissioning process my office monitors the impact of our victim services on a quarterly basis, we do this by reviewing written qualitative and quantitative information as well as holding 'grant surgeries' which provide a means to check-in with our services, track delivery and ascertain the impact of Covid-19 and how services are responding to the challenges. Despite the restrictions and working from home, my office was still able to successfully connect with all of our commissioned services via online methods.

Our findings from the quarter one surgeries were very positive, the main achievement being how services have adapted and responded to the sudden changes to their way of working, ensuring that victims continue to have access to their services and support; predominantly using online face-to-face delivery, and where this was not feasible, telephone contact. They are working with partners and other agencies remotely and are reaching their target communities using social media and other online methods to offer guidance, advice, and pathways to access support.

Overall, referrals into the services have remained consistent, some of our domestic abuse and sexual violence services reported that new referrals decreased during the initial lockdown period, but this trend has reversed, referrals have increased again to the levels seen pre Covid-19. The majority of services are reporting that staffing levels are adequate to meet this increase in demand. There is a view that there is an increase in complex cases with mental health being recognised as one of the main identified needs during the pandemic.

We work closely with our services to monitor the challenges they face and provide support and flexibility to services to enable them to meet the emerging demands of victims. We are pleased to have secured additional funding from the Ministry of Justice to support domestic abuse and sexual violence services, details of which was reported at the last panel meeting.

Support in the workplace for victims and survivors of domestic abuse

In June 2020 the Government announced their plans to review how further help can be given to victims and survivors of domestic abuse in the workplace. The review aims to give employers the confidence and knowledge to support workers affected by domestic abuse. Since 2014, alongside our local authority partners, we have been recruiting organisations across Northumbria to our Workplace Domestic Violence Champions Scheme and now have over 1100 champions who are currently supporting victims of domestic abuse in over 250 workplaces.



Our response to the Government's consultation reflects our good practice here in Northumbria and highly recommends that the Government include a mandatory requirement for workplaces to have a domestic abuse policy, which we ask employers to implement as part of their commitment to the scheme. We have suggested, to the government, that this should be included within the statutory guidance framework that will accompany the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Act and should apply to all public sector organisations, and other private organisations over a certain size. Alternatively, if that can't be achieved within current legislative frameworks, then for new legislation to require all employers have a stand-alone Domestic Abuse policy.

Independent Custody Visiting

As reported to the panel in August, due to Covid-19 Independent Custody Visiting was suspended in March 2020. To ensure that oversight of those detained in police custody could continue, Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) made 'virtual' checks on the custody records of those detained in custody as an interim measure. This allowed for any issues identified to be addressed and ensured that those detained were treated correctly and their rights and entitlements were upheld.

As custody visiting relies on physical visits where detainees are spoken to in person, work was undertaken to bring about a safe return to in person custody visits. I want to ensure that the appropriate level of external scrutiny takes place and that the Covid 19 outbreak does not impact on this. In response to concern a Covid Secure Policy and approach, together with a Covid Briefing and provision of PPE will ensure the safety of both visitors and those in custody whilst Covid is prevalent.

My approach was that ICVs welfare and wellbeing, and that of their families, is always our main consideration therefore a decision about whether to take part in physical visits is based on this criteria and a small number of OCVS who have now recommenced physical visits to the three main custody suites of Forth Banks, Middle Engine Lane and Southwick, this allows us to fulfil our oversight duty in a safe and effective way.

Upcoming issues

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, I have launched my Fighting Crime, Preventing Crime consultation on the priorities the public would like to see enforced as part of the Police and Crime Plan. I look forward to updating the panel on this at future meetings.