

From: Matthew Scott, Kent Police and Crime Commissioner
To: Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel
Subject: Police response to Covid-19
Date: 8 December 2020



Introduction:

1. Due to the unprecedented nature of Covid-19, this has been a particularly difficult and challenging year. Public services though have had to adapt at pace in order to not only protect their workforce, but to continue delivering critical services that support and protect local communities.
2. This paper provides an overview of how Covid-19 has been policed in the county and some of the ways in which it has impacted Kent Police in terms of demand.
3. The Commissioner is grateful to Kent Police for its assistance with this paper.

Covid-19 policing:

4. The Force's approach has been to 'police through' the pandemic and not to 'police the pandemic'. In light of the changing circumstances and associated government policy, it has taken a pragmatic approach to enforcing the legislation and maintained the expectation on officers and staff to:
 - put victims and witnesses at the heart of everything;
 - provide a quality service; and
 - 'do the right thing'.
5. The focus has remained on maintaining a visible presence and delivering core policing services that prevent crime and protect local communities. The message to communities has been to follow national advice.
6. Like all forces, Kent Police has adopted the College of Policing's four phase approach to engagement – otherwise known as the four 'E's. Officers and staff will continue to maintain this approach.
7. The four 'E's are based on evidence that people are more likely to comply after a police encounter if they feel they have been treated fairly, have received an explanation, and have been given the opportunity to give their view. The 'E's are:
 1. Engage – officers speak to people and try to establish their awareness and understanding of the situation. They may ask people about their circumstances if they are out in public. Officers give people the opportunity to express their views. They listen and take people's responses into account.
 2. Explain – officers try to educate people about any personal risks they are taking, they will explain the social distancing regulations and highlight the responsibilities all share. Officers treat people with dignity and respect. They highlight their trustworthy motives by explaining wider social factors, such as the risks to public health and the NHS by not sticking to the rules.
 3. Encourage – officers may need to guide individuals, suggesting they return home. Officers can encourage people to act reasonably, emphasising that staying alert and safe (social distancing) saves lives. They demonstrate consistency in their approach and are willing to explain why they are requesting a certain course of action.

If an officer has been explicit in their request for someone to take action, has explained the risk and encouraged them to be reasonable to save lives and they refuse, then it may become necessary to:
 4. Enforce – officers may, as a last resort, remove a person to the place where they live, using reasonable force only if it is a necessary and proportionate means of ensuring compliance. They may also fine individual(s) for breaching the Regulations.
8. Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) are a form of out of court criminal justice outcome that offers those accused of breaching the Regulations the chance to avoid criminal proceedings by paying a fine. Those issued with FPNs under the Regulations have 28 days to pay the fine otherwise court proceedings may follow.

9. Recognising that some may still be in the system, from 27 March to 19 October, the Force issued 127-130 Fixed Penalty Notices, equivalent to 7 per 100,000 population.
10. As a result of the lockdowns, there has been less people on the roads and therefore a natural reduction in emergency calls. As a result, the Roads Policing Unit (RPU) has deployed with different tactics and provided additional capacity to help manage other demand, seeing a 40% increase in call attendance and 76% increase in arrests. The Unit also supported the National Police Chiefs Council speed campaign where Kent came 2nd in terms of people dealt with for speeding and not wearing a seatbelt (450 offences).
11. Despite the risks associated with Covid-19, a small minority of people have continued to assault emergency workers. From March to 13 September, 346 offences of spitting and coughing were recorded against all emergency workers; of which 260 were against police officers and staff. The Force always deals with such incidents robustly, with offenders being arrested, charged and remanded into custody.
12. In terms of monitoring performance and service delivery, a report is produced which forms part of the Deputy Chief Constable's Weekly Performance Report, as well as a separate Covid-19 Weekly Summary Report which is distributed to key people in the Force, including the Community Impact Cell and Op Iowa (the Force's Covid-19 command structure). Returns are also required to be sent by the Force on a weekly basis to the Home Office for national comparison.
13. The key problem solving measures implemented most frequently in Community Safety Units include implementing the 4 E's approach, high visibility patrolling in risk areas and the issuing of Covid-19 fines as part of the enforcement. Other tactics such as Section 34 Dispersal Orders, offender intervention programmes and engagement such as Community Street Surgeries have also been used where required.
14. In addition to managing operational demands, the Force has introduced a flexible approach to working and endeavoured to protect all officers and staff from infection. This has required the provision of appropriate personal protective equipment; rapid deployment of hardware and development of products to support remote working; temporary revisions to numerous policies and protocols; completion of Covid-19 risk assessments for teams as well as work activities; and physical changes to working environments across the county. Whilst the exact costs of Covid-19 are still to be determined, the Force expects the net cost to be circa £1.7m – although it is anticipated that much of this will be reimbursed.
15. Importantly, the flexible approach to working has had a positive impact on absences with the Force averaging 2.5-3.0% compared to 5.5% nationally. For a force of equal size to Kent, this equates to having 260 more officers on the ground on a daily basis.
16. The Force has, and continues to also work closely with partners to keep the county safe, provide reassurance, and protect the most vulnerable in local communities – as per the examples below.

Changes in Youth Justice

17. Due to the government and public health guidelines on lockdown and social distancing and the risks involved with young people attending police stations, a review of the Youth Caution clinics was completed.
18. The clinics are now being completed virtually, ensuring that all appropriate adults and details of the offence and cautions are explained in full and clearly understood. This has avoided unnecessary delays to both the young person and victim. This has received some very positive feedback from officers and young people and their families involved.
19. The Force is looking to continue the virtual process on MS Teams in the medium term. Equally for those subject of Youth Justice Panel decision making, over 150 cases so far have been discussed at a virtual panel which is held weekly and has enabled more engagement from partners owing to the cessation of travel required for attendance.

Community Safety

20. District and Central Community Safety Units have continued to work in partnership throughout the pandemic. A full Community Impact Cell has been in place from the outset to ensure the Force is capturing community concerns and tensions, directing resources and working in partnership to address emerging threats, breaches or risks.
21. Licensing has been key to this and the Force response in respect of close working partnerships with both local authorities and trading standards to manage the high demand ensuring the right agency is in place to enforce, educate and utilise the legislation as it develops. The sharing of intelligence and communication have been key.
22. The Kent Community Safety Partnership and Kent Resilience Forum collaborated this year to deliver an online seminar to replace the annual community safety conference. The theme of the conference was resilience and there were inputs from academics and leading professionals in a number of areas such as mental health and suicide. The event also looked at the work the Partnerships Cell established to support vulnerable communities including links to the Kent Resilience Forum.
23. The Force has sat on a number of cells set up to support the partnership response to the pandemic, including the Recovery Co-ordination Group and Vulnerable Communities Cell. The Kent Community Safety Partnership has produced monthly bulletins to ensure good work and best practice is highlighted.
24. Mental health police and partners have continued to work in partnership to ensure a consistent service is delivered throughout the pandemic. Where some face-to-face services have been lost (e.g. Safe Havens), some community cover has been enhanced with 24 hour provision. A Section 136 improvement group has been established which has met regularly throughout the pandemic, where challenges and improvements are discussed in a partnership forum. Different technology and working methods have been invested in to allow criminal investigations to continue in mental health establishments.
25. The first Problem Solving Task Force has now been launched on the East which is made up of PCSOs as part of the precept uplift. The team are dedicated to problem solving in communities where issues have become entrenched and this has led to empowering communities to take ownership as part of a long-term sustainable solution.

Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse

26. Kent Police has continued to work with partners through the pandemic, particularly to identify any hidden harm exacerbated by lockdown and Covid-19 restrictions. With partners from social care, health, education and beyond, the Force continues to consider those families and potential victims who were previously known due to domestic abuse or safeguarding concerns.
27. To date the Force has ensured that there has been appropriate contact with a number of vulnerable individuals across the county to ensure their continued safety, whilst being mindful of the wider impact of the pandemic such as child neglect and poverty.
28. In keeping with the priority to protect the public from harm and ensure an effective response to those who are most vulnerable in our communities, the Force has continued to consider innovative ways of reaching victims. It remains of paramount importance that victims of domestic abuse understand how they can access advice, support and assistance. During the first national lockdown, Kent Police collaborated with partners and local authorities to consider a variety of platforms to share this message. This included social media platforms, communication displayed in doctors' surgeries, pharmacy bags printed with messages and bespoke graphics displayed on refuse collection vehicles.
29. The second national lockdown has different restrictions from the first. Schools have remained open and the public have the opportunity to travel to work, providing professionals the additional natural surveillance of some of the most vulnerable in our communities. The Force has remained vigilant to the immediate risk of harm but has also focused on the deeper meaning of Hidden Harm by being more aware of the voice of

the vulnerable adult and the voice of the child, considering the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the signs of potential exploitation.

Demand and performance:

Recorded crime

30. In April 2019 it became clear that the Force required a new approach to improve Effectiveness as measured by HMICFRS. Therefore, a systematic review of the 'requirement' was undertaken and six pillars of activity identified:

- 1) Investigations
- 2) Catching Criminals
- 3) Preventing Crime and anti-social behaviour
- 4) Protecting Vulnerable People
- 5) Tackling Serious Organised Crime
- 6) Specialist Capabilities

31. At the commencement of the programme, the six Tactical Delivery Plans started with a total of 344 actions and they have now all been discharged. This is outstanding progress and has led to significant improvement in Force performance across a range of outcomes and the improvements are being sustained. The plans have led to significant changes, for example to crime policy, the development of a new Victims and Witnesses Strategy and has created consistency across the Force in terms of its approach to criminal investigation.

32. The following performance improvements have been made in the last 12 months; however it must be noted that this includes the Covid-19 lockdown period where a number of offence types saw a substantial fall in volumes. All data is based on the 12 months to October 2020 compared to the previous 12 months:

- All crime decreased by 7.0% (13,431 less offences)
- Victim based crime decreased by 8.3% (13,711 less offences)
- Sexual Offences decreased by 11% (735 less offences)
- Robbery decreased by 23.7% (468 less offences)
- Burglary (residential and commercial) decreased by 28.3% (3,269 less offences)
- Vehicle Crime decreased by 23.3% (2,721 less offences)
- Theft and Handling offences decreased by 18.9% (6,244 less offences)

33. Improvements were also seen in crimes against the public; these are generally offences where the victim is classed as the public and they are typically discovered by police following stop searches and planned operations:

- Drug offences increased by 31.8% (1,076 more offences)
- Possession of weapon offences increased by 2.1% (32 more offences)

Outcomes

34. Compared to last year, the Force has made more arrests during the pandemic and as a result reports with a positive disposal have also improved.

35. Whilst offences may have fallen, the Force has seen a higher number of solved outcomes being administered to suspects, with substantial improvements in the 12 months to October 2020 compared to the previous 12 months:

- 12,824 charges, up 33.1% (3,188 more charges); charge rate has increased from 5.0% to 7.2%
- Solved rate has increased by 3.2 percentage points from 7.5% to 10.7% (4,734 more solved outcomes)
- 2,564 cautions, up 16.7% (366 more cautions)
- 2,393 Community Resolutions, up 57.6% (875 more Community Resolutions)

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

36. Covid-19 related ASB has been closely tracked since the start of March by using data extracted from the incident recording system and use of a specific call-type and incident tag. The Force determine the fluctuations of various ASB call types and understands what volume and percentage of each are Covid-19 related.

37. Figures from the first Lockdown:

Month	All ASB	COVID Tagged	% COVID related
March	2962	270	9.1%
April	7069	3954	55.9%
May	7161	3466	48.4%
June	4937	815	16.5%
July	4805	320	6.7%

38. More recent figures:

Month	All ASB	COVID Tagged	% COVID related
August	4898	238	4.9%
September	3744	485	13.0%
October	3728	498	13.4%

39. Between April and August the Force recorded some of the highest volumes of ASB seen in 7 years with the following categories accounting for a significant proportion, and potentially all Covid-19 related:

- rowdy or nuisance gathering in public place
- neighbour disputes
- motor vehicle nuisance on roads
- noisy parties, organised events and raves

Force Control Room (FCR)

40. Whilst calls reduced, much of the demand moved into the digital space as the public were encouraged to report potential Covid-19 breaches online. The following data is for the period April to August:

- 999 calls: circa 140,000 (11,000 fewer than last year)
- 101 calls: circa 130,000 (40,000 fewer than last year)
- Live Chats: circa 25,000 (179% increase, or 16,000 more than last year)
- Online reporting: circa 13,500 (45% increase, or 4,500 more than last year)

41. Further to the investment in channel shift, the FCR has a robust triage service and is able to break-down any breach reporting to 19 different types; this information is reported on a daily basis. Should a breakdown be required by partners, this can also be provided under current data sharing protocols.

42. Throughout the changes in government policy regarding social distancing and the use of face masks, there was an increase in the public reporting breaches. The FCR proactively engaged with the national Single Online Home team (providers of Kent Police website platform) to ensure a product was available online to allow the public to report breaches rapidly, efficiently and accurately, providing an effective service to the public whilst allowing the FCR to manage its demand efficiently.

43. At the start of the pandemic the FCR initially moved to 4 sites; it remains split across several sites and the Investigation Management Unit split more widely across the county. The following measures are in place to ensure a Covid secure working environment:

- Covid-19 risk assessments have enabled a lot of staff who were higher risk due to pre-existing health conditions and therefore were initially working from home, to return to the workplace in their contracted role, in a Covid secure environment.
- The introduction of a one-way system in and out of the FCR has enhanced the Covid secure environment and the safety of staff when at work.
- FCR staff sit at every other desk to maintain clear social distancing

- Screening has been put in place around the reception area
- Face masks are utilised where social distancing cannot be achieved.

Mental Health

44. Kent Police's use of Section 136 of the Mental Health Act (1983) to detain individuals who appear to be suffering from a mental health crisis has stabilised since December 2019 and the Force has started to see a sustained reduction in the number of detentions compared to last year. The table below shows its usage:

Month	2018	2019	2020
January	117	152	146
February	101	148	155
March	152	155	138
April	147	161	113
May	141	205	160
June	146	149	150
July	159	200	189
August	166	194	165
September	146	196	157
October	156	200	
November	139	170	
December	127	136	

45. Covid-19 lockdown restrictions have clearly had an effect on these numbers, but the easing of lockdown has not had an impact on the number of people presenting in crisis that require detention.
46. Of note, whilst the Force is seeing a reduction in the number of Section 136 detentions, this is not the case for many other forces where demand has returned to pre Covid-19 levels. This calendar year is likely to be the first year Kent Police will see a reduction in Section 136 detentions since recording started in 2014.

Holding to account:

47. One of the principle ways the Commissioner holds the Chief Constable to account is through the quarterly Performance and Delivery Board.
48. Open to Panel Members and the public, on a non-participating basis, the meeting is chaired by the Commissioner and papers are submitted by the Force in advance and published [here](#). The Chief Constable is required to attend the meeting in order to present and discuss the papers, as well as answer questions about delivery of the [Safer in Kent Plan](#) and policing generally in the county.¹
49. The Commissioner has, and will continue to also hold the Chief Constable to account via their regular 1:1 briefings which allow discussion of a wide variety of subjects.²
50. Supplementing the above, the Chief Executive attends the Op Iowa Gold weekly meeting and the monthly Force Performance Management Committee where the Deputy Chief Constable challenges performance.²
51. In holding the Force to account the PCC also considers other feedback, such as reports from HMICFRS whose priority in 2020 has been to support policing and fire & rescue services as they continue to respond to the pandemic. As such, Kent was one of the forces selected for a Covid-19 inspection looking at:
- How well the police prepared for the pandemic?
 - How are they responding to it?
 - How are they learning, adapting and improving?

¹ Due to Covid-19 the meetings are currently being held virtually and instead of papers the Chief Constable provides a verbal briefing. Unfortunately, due to technological constraints the public were unable to view the June and September meetings, but the Meeting Notes are available on the PCC's website (as per normal).

² Due to Covid-19, currently being held virtually.

52. The fieldwork was conducted at the end of October, involving a paper feed, virtual focus groups and one-to-one virtual interviews; a national report is due to be published in early 2021.

Recommendation:

53. The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel is asked to note this report.