

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 \(Coronavirus\)](#), HC 232

Wednesday 13 January 2021

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; Dehenna Davison; Ruth Edwards; Laura Farris; Simon Fell; Adam Holloway; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald.

Questions 821-912

Witnesses

I: Chief Constable John Campbell QPM, Thames Valley Police; Chief Constable Carl Foulkes QPM, North Wales Police; and Assistant Chief Constable Owen Weatherill, Commander, Operation Talla, National Police Chiefs' Council.

II: Professor John Edmunds, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; Professor Annelies Wilder-Smith, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; and Lucy Moreton, Professional Officer, The ISU.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Chief Constable Campbell, Chief Constable Foulkes and Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill.

Chair: Welcome to this evidence session of the Home Affairs Committee. We are taking evidence first this morning on the policing response to the Covid crisis and, later, on the border measures in response to the Covid crisis. I am very grateful to our witnesses for their time this morning. We welcome to our first panel Chief Constable Carl Foulkes from the North Wales police, Chief Constable John Campbell from the Thames Valley police, and ACC Owen Weatherill from the National Police Chiefs' Council, the commander of Operation Talla.

Welcome to all of you. I pass on our thanks from the Committee and from Parliament to all your officers and staff for the work that you are doing at a very difficult time to keep the public safe, and to respond to the public health crisis that we are in. We want to begin with the impact of the latest regulations and circumstances on your forces, going first to Dehenna Davison.

Q821 **Dehenna Davison:** Thank you very much, Chair. I reiterate those comments, and pass on my thanks to yourselves and to all your officers for the incredible work that you are doing. Following the statement made by the NPCC's Martin Hewitt on 7 January that forces are feeling increasingly stretched by the regulations, I would be keen for your reflections on that and whether that is an assessment that you agree with.

Chief Constable Campbell: Thanks for your kind comments. We will make sure that that is passed on to our workforce; they appreciate the support. In terms of the regulations, are you talking generally about the impact of the new lockdown and the general attritional impact of coronavirus?

Dehenna Davison: Particularly that, but I guess, in general, in terms of policing the pandemic right from the get-go.

Chief Constable Campbell: Okay, thanks. I think this lockdown feels different from the first lockdown, in terms of the impacts on the force itself. If I talk operationally, in terms of policing, in the first lockdown society completely locked down in many ways, so that had a significant impact on our workload in terms of our core business as police officers. There were significant reductions in general crime, disorder and the incidents that we deal with.

Since society has gone back to some degree of normality in terms of different exemptions, and different rules and regulations about the restrictions, our normal workload has returned, if that makes sense. At the moment, for a force like Thames Valley police, we are down about 6% on crime generally compared with this time last year, and about 10% down



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on the core incidents that we would get. You would expect that when you still have the night-time economy in effect shut down, because an awful lot of our work is in and around that.

In terms of actual enforcement activity, we have had various regulations and rules that we have adapted to, and we work hard with the College of Policing when we get those new rules and regulations to translate them into operational advice and guidance for staff. With this particular lockdown, I think there are more people out and about. There are more reasons to be out and about, in terms of society certainly not being normal but more normal compared with the very first lockdown. Certainly, the roads are busier. We can all see that, and people are more in work, which was certainly something that did not happen.

In terms of the volumes of work, we now have the Covid activity that we are involved in, plus some degree of a return to the kind of levels of activity in terms of crime and incidents that we are dealing with. That creates a bit of an impact because the enforcement of the Covid regulations is new work, as well as having to adapt as an organisation to minimise the impact on our own staff and to make sure that we are keeping them safe and well and that when they interact with the public they are not spreading any form of coronavirus.

In terms of the regulatory response, we are in the position now, since Thames Valley police and the Thames Valley area went into Tier 4, as many areas in the south-east did, that, in terms of our activity around the four Es, we have certainly seen, over the last weekend in particular, more fixed penalty notices than we have had for some time, in terms of our assessment of whether or not people are wilfully breaching, as opposed to advice and guidance, which we would hope would ensure compliance, as the main effort.

In summary, it is quite different to how it was. Certainly, the workforce are feeling under pressure. We have our own issues around transmission and self-isolation, because of the nature of the virus, that are greater than they were at some points during the year. As you say, the workforce, in my view, have responded magnificently. We will see how the next few weeks go.

Chief Constable Foulkes: On John's comment, we are very grateful for the support of the operational colleagues who are out doing a really difficult job. I agree with what John has said. As the Covid pandemic has progressed the policing response has changed. At the start of it we had very little normal criminality and normal issues to deal with, but we are now up to a much more normal pace.

The bit that I would reinforce on top of what John said is the impact on our workforce this time. I use the terminology that it feels far more real this time. We are seeing colleagues who are going off with positive Covid tests. We are seeing a bigger impact on self-isolation, and that is very different from the first lockdown where, certainly in north Wales, the impact was



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less than it is now. That has created a challenge for us around how we manage and support our workforce.

Like those in many public sector bodies, our colleagues are tired. They have worked really hard. They continue to work really hard. Many of them have not taken leave and do not want to take leave, because they want to be here and they want to support the effort going forward. A whole series of things have come together that make this feel slightly different and more challenging than where we were before.

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: From a national perspective, I think that the views that you have already heard would be echoed by most chief constables across the country. What we see when we look at it across the national perspective is that the difference from last year is driven by a number of different factors. Clearly, we understand that the pressure on the NHS is much greater now. Hospital occupancy is much higher. The ambulance service is under pressure. That creates some consequential demand for policing, so that is something that we are working through at the moment, and working through how we can help, where we can help, and where we can best add to that collective picture.

We recognise our national position. Our role is to support the wider health effort. It is a health crisis, and we want to help in any way that we can. The challenges that I mentioned, alongside creeping-up absence rates across the country, which look slightly different in different forces, create some additional pressures for us. What we are not seeing at a national level in the same way that we did this time last year, in the first wave, is the same level of absence, which is a good thing. It is notably lower than it was in the early stages of the first tranche. That is the positive effect of good access to PPE and good understanding of how to use it. For the most part, our staff are using it. We have good stocks, so we can keep the workforce safe in a much better way, which we did not have the ability to do the first time round. Our challenge now is the rate of infection and how quickly it moves. That is very different to the first wave, and that is something we are having to adapt to. We are reflecting on and reviewing good practice, where it exists, sharing that across the country, as you would expect us to, and then trying to address those areas where we have outbreaks which are of concern. There are a few, but there is lots of good practice, which is helping us to do that effectively.

Q822 **Dehenna Davison:** Brilliant. You spoke then of the consequential demand following the NHS pressures. Can you give some tangible examples of what that looks like?

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: The Metropolitan police are already supplying drivers for ambulances—they have provided 75 so far. A number of other ambulance trusts across the country are under pressure and are either actively seeking or scoping what their mutual aid support might need to look like. There are some good cross-agency conversations already happening around that so that we can get ahead and plan for that, rather than respond to it, dynamically. We can see them under pressure, want to help them and will do that wherever we can, but we recognise



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that we also have a different role here. There is that expectation that we are there to engage with the public and enforce, in a way that is increasing in demand as well, so we have to try to square that balance across the pitch.

Q823 Dehenna Davison: Specifically, on enforcement—this is to all three of you—we heard from the chair of the NPCC yesterday, and it was great hearing about the work of the police in that really positive enforcement in breaking up boat parties in Hertfordshire and illegal raves in Bristol, which is exactly the sort of thing the public want to see. But, unfortunately, over the weekend, we have also seen reports of perhaps some perceived over-policing of the regulations. There was a video circulating on Twitter of one of the beaches in Dorset and what looked like perhaps quite heavy-handed enforcement from the police. There was also the case in Derbyshire of the women at Foremark reservoir. I would be curious for your reflections on that media reporting and whether that reflects your own, and your force's, experience. Perhaps I can go in the same order again, so Mr Campbell first.

Chief Constable Campbell: I think we should all remember that we have thousands and thousands of interactions with the public every single day across the UK. The vast majority of those are very positive, and my officers and staff are out there as we speak, engaging and talking, with no issues that then percolate to national or local media.

I am sure my force is no different. Over the nine months or so, we have had isolated examples where the enforcement by an individual officer or staff member, or the engagement, has not been what we might have wanted—well intended, but not the way we would have wanted it. We have worked hard as an organisation to make sure we quickly recovered from that.

I think it is fair to say that officers and staff are working in very unusual circumstances with the public and—it is clearer now under lockdown than it has been over time, because the rules and regulations do change for people—they have to interpret the legislation, the law and the guidance themselves. Unfortunately, these iconic examples will arise and may well continue to do so, and we will not get it right every single time. But to put it in context, there are thousands and thousands of interactions between police officers, PCSOs and members of the public every single day, and some will rise to the attention of the media, but I do not think that that reflects the general day in, day out engagement we are having with our communities.

Chief Constable Foulkes: I agree with John's comments. The law and regulations in Wales are different to England, and that is something we need to make sure we support and reinforce. If people are in Wales, they need to comply with Welsh law and understand the Welsh regulations. That is something we have worked hard on with the Welsh Government, local authorities and the NPCC all the way through this to make sure it is clearly understood.

To give you an example, from October last year to now, my officers have done 10,000 specific Covid engagements with members of the community, where we have gone through the four Es approach to make sure people do the right thing. We continue to do that and to use the four Es. All we are talking about now is that we go through the gears a little bit more quickly for those who are blatantly breaching Covid regulations.

We have issued around about 300 tickets. There have been 10,000 engagements and 300 tickets. The vast majority of our engagements and the confidence data that we have through the survey work we did at the end of last year will show that our communities in north Wales are supportive of our approach. In fact, we have started to see more enforcement, which is slightly ironic.

We will get things wrong. We all do. We are human. When we do that, we need to put up our hands, learn from it and move on. Focusing on one or two specific examples can run the risk of discouraging people to do the right thing rather than encouraging them to do the right thing.

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: I have very similar observations. It is inevitable when you are having hundreds of thousands of engagements across the country that there will be some that are less than ideal. We make mistakes; everybody makes mistakes. The important thing is that we learn from that and where we need to address that, we do.

Without commenting on individual cases, what we have seen already is that, where there is a review of the situation, action is taken to redress that. The vast majority of the incidents that we see are being dealt with in the right way, and we see that through the data that we have. That is reflected as well in the vast volume of those interactions that are not resulting in formal enforcement. Many, many people can be encouraged to do the right thing. Sometimes, that is because they are not aware of it or they just need a prompt. For the vast majority of our engagements, people are doing what we need them to do. The hard end of enforcement is the limited end, and we see far fewer of those as a consequence.

Chair: Thank you all. We have a range of different issues we want to cover in a bit more detail. You shouldn't all feel the need to answer the same question or to repeat what others have said. That means we can get through as many issues as possible.

Q824 **Adam Holloway:** Gentlemen, you have alluded to the fact that it comes down very much to the individual officer's judgment. Your officers are different, like any other people. How do you articulate the tone that you are trying to get to your officers?

Chief Constable Campbell: There is no doubt about it that within policing in general we have to rely on officers' discretion when we are dealing with members of the public, and quite rightly so. That is an informed discretion within a range of decision-making boundaries.

In respect of Covid in particular, we have a process by which the regulations and guidance will come out, interpreted by the College of



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Policing. That will then be cascaded down to forces in briefing documents. That will then be cascaded through individual briefings to all our staff via their first-line supervisors.

I don't want to underestimate that task, because it is important that we get it right, but in most forces, there is a command structure and there are separated people looking very specifically at this area of business and at the nature of the enforcement activity that we do. In Thames Valley police, local commanders review all the enforcement activity that we do on an individual basis, when we are talking about fixed penalty notices, to make sure that we are getting it right in that regard.

We obviously encourage our own staff to ask questions. There is a huge range of briefing documents available to officers and staff, but principally it is that face-to-face engagement with first-line supervisors, which is a very day in, day out activity, co-ordinated by a command structure within the force that has various checks and balances to test learning and understanding.

Q825 Adam Holloway: What does that mean in practice? That is the procedure. But what would you say to a young police officer now about the balance between advice and enforcement?

Chief Constable Campbell: This is a constant thing that we have been dealing with throughout the year. It hasn't changed too much since we moved into the Tier 4 approach.

To start with, my estimation and the estimation of the force would be that the vast majority of people are compliant, you have a group of people who are ignorant of the law and then you have wilful disobedience around it. We saw plenty of that in the first wave and we are seeing that throughout.

In line with lots of things that you will have heard over the last few days on this particular lockdown, the simple advice is that if we believe someone is wilfully and egregiously breaching the legislation and the rules, we need to make a judgment. Does engagement satisfy the officer's individual assessment that they have learned, and they are therefore no longer going to be at risk of non-compliance? If we believe not—it is the same with all other forms of policing as well—it might be an enforcement activity.

What we are seeing now—you will have heard this in different forums—is that with this particular lockdown we are moving more quickly to enforcement, with less tolerance of ignorance around certain aspects of things, in terms of things where we have a particular responsibility. That is certainly within the public space, particularly around gatherings and people having parties within houses. That is an area that we can give strong advice on.

Q826 Adam Holloway: I think "wilful" is a very useful way of thinking about it, but, for example, let's take the two women who were going off for a walk. They were, I presume, if they had known about the rules, wilfully breaking them; however, they were not doing anything that was against



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the spirit of what the rules were for. Do you think that there is more of an argument here for personal responsibility? There are lots of things that you are allowed to do that would actually be rather stupid to do because they help to spread the virus, whereas going for a walk like that is not going to spread the virus, but it is, I guess, wilfully against the rules.

Chief Constable Campbell: There is obviously a debate. You will know that Derbyshire police have withdrawn their fixed penalty notices, which might suggest that their considered view was that it was not a breach of the rules in that regard. The number of fixed penalty notices is not the test of whether or not we have been successful around our approach to the regulations. It is about compliance. I think that everyone has an individual responsibility—

Q827 **Adam Holloway:** Sorry to come in. I get that. What I am saying really is that I totally support your officers in dealing with breaches of the regulations; I am just asking whether you think that people should be applying more personal responsibility. Where your officers see people wilfully breaking them, obviously you go in, and you go in hard, but when people are exercising a degree of personal responsibility and yet, strictly speaking, the thing is against the rules, what is the balance there?

Chief Constable Campbell: I would say that, absolutely, people need to be demonstrating a high level of personal responsibility in this. The simple thing from a policing point of view is that people should not be responding to the rules because they might get caught by the police; they should be responding to the rules because it is a personal and community responsibility to stop the spread of the virus. We are the enforcement angle that encourages, or whatever word you want to use, compliance for those who wilfully do not want to breach, but high levels of personal responsibility are required, and everybody, as we have heard, who is going out from their home address and is engaged in any form of activity should be reflecting on their motives for doing that at this particular time.

Q828 **Simon Fell:** I would like to follow up on some of Adam Holloway's points, if that is okay. Since the pandemic started, we have seen considerable amounts of new legislation underpinning the lockdown restrictions, but we have also seen a growth in the number of exceptions to the rules to accommodate people. I am interested in your views on how you balance those two often conflicting areas. Is this making your role harder, and how are you ensuring that your officers are confident in policing the law, given those tensions? Mr Foulkes, perhaps we can go to you first.

Chief Constable Foulkes: Obviously, I will be talking about the Welsh legislation and Welsh regulations, which are even now slightly different from what John is policing in the Thames Valley. The fundamentals in Wales are that you should only leave home for work or for exercise, and you should exercise from home. You should not be meeting up with anybody else when you are out and about, except for specific areas—for protection, et cetera.

In some ways, my officers have a relatively simple task, in that they ask, why is somebody out? Do they fit one of the criteria? We have focused on



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those areas where it has been the most egregious breaches, or blatant breaches, of the regulations. For example, at the weekend we saw a significant amount of people in our national parks, and we saw a significant amount of people sledging, all of which were clear breaches of what the Welsh Government were trying to achieve through the regulations that have been put in place in Wales.

What we have tried to ensure that we do—this goes back to the briefing comment—is make sure that our officers are aware of what the current legislation is, supported by the College of Policing guidance coming through, and that we reiterate that on a regular basis. Then the tone and style that we set is where we alter our approach, depending on the level and tier at that moment in time, and the level of issues that we are actually seeing.

Chief Constable Campbell: There are some variations in the regulations and law between England and Wales, but in essence a similar approach. We work hard to make sure our staff understand and then we set the tone, depending on prevailing circumstances and our assessment of the degree of level of breaches or otherwise. There has been plenty of debate over that in the last few days or so as we have moved into this particular lockdown. So it is not dissimilar to Carl in north Wales.

Q829 **Simon Fell:** I suspect that you have a slightly more challenging environment to work in because you will be not just rubbing up against the tension between legislation and the restrictions within, and the easements where people assert conditions and rules around that, but you also have different tiers as well. I am interested in how you balance that conflict where you might have an almost artificial border where the rules are very different in one place to the next, even though there is perhaps only a street between the two.

Chief Constable Campbell: We did have that in the Thames Valley in the tiering system. We had Slough, which moved early into Tier 4, followed two or three weeks later by the rest of the three counties that I police: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. It was bespoke briefings to individual officers. In most of policing we have geographical officers who are geographically located, who work a particular geographical area. Slough has its own boundaries for policing, so in that regard it does not create too much of an issue for that bespoke advice and guidance.

Of course, for consistency purposes, it would be great if it was across the whole of the Thames Valley because that is more efficient for training and so on. But the real impact is on people moving between tiers and not understanding what might be their relevant tiering regulations if they are in a Tier 4, a Tier 3 or a Tier 2. Our interpretation obviously takes into account some of the difficulties that that presents for people, and that is where we move into that assessment where you might be more encouraging and explaining rather than enforcing. It is that degree of discretion that we have asked for, and I have seen our officers using that, irrespective of the change in tiering and that inconsistency—for some very good reasons, because of Covid rates across the areas that I police.



Q830 **Simon Fell:** I am interested in knowing whether there is something more that could be done centrally to help individual forces and officers to apply the law consistently. Mr Weatherill?

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: To be fair, we are engaged at a fairly early stage when there are changes afoot. We do get an input. That does not mean that we are always able to advance the arguments that we might want to, but we are certainly engaged with that and we have an ability to influence the shape of some of the regulations and some of the actual guidance. That does not mean it is always as we would wish it to be.

We have touched to some extent on some of the travel restrictions. That is a real challenge when it comes to exercise, and we have talked about that to some extent already. That challenges some forces more than others if you happen to operate in an area that has natural beauty spots that will attract people in. But the regulations are constructed in such a way as to not be constrictive on the type of exercise an individual might want to take. There is a balance between trying to allow people to exercise some free will in the type of exercise that they do, which is why there is no physical restriction on how far you can travel to do it.

Travel itself is not outlawed. It is not illegal. The activity itself and the circumstances of it is where it gets into the realm of subjectivity. That is the bit that challenges officers across the country, and that presents differently in different areas of the country. What might be a problem in one area is not in another. That is where the challenge is for us at the moment, and we are actively engaged in a conversation as to how we can develop things further. There is at the moment an active conversation with the Home Office and the Department of Health as to how we might be able to improve things, to give greater clarity to the public and also to our officers.

Q831 **Simon Fell:** So would you be looking for greater prescription from Government in that area?

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: It is one of those areas where it is really difficult to get the right balance. I don't think there is a perfect answer for everybody, because whichever way you frame it, somebody will be disadvantaged. That is the reality of what we are dealing with here. None of us would choose to be in the environment we are in, but we have to prescribe it in some shape or form. There was a deliberate effort initially to make it flexible, so that there was a degree of freedom of choice for people and you could exercise some of the decisions you wanted to within certain ranges, but that clearly is presenting other problems. We now need to think about whether there is a better way of doing it.

Would we like better prescription? I think it would be helpful if we could be a little bit more prescriptive in some respects. It may be that we need to add some extra definition to it that would help people understand it. But this is one of those things where you benefit from the lived experience. I think what I am seeing, which is a good thing, is that there is a will to go

back and look at what we could do differently and how we could tweak, amend and adjust things to make them clearer for people to work with. And that is a positive, in my view.

Q832 **Simon Fell:** This will be the last question from me. We have touched on travel as an area that is causing some conflict at the moment. I am wondering whether there are any other areas of difference between guidance and the law that are particularly causing you issues at the moment. Mr Foulkes, can I come to you first?

Chief Constable Foulkes: Off the top of my head, no, there is nothing that I can think of.

Chief Constable Campbell: I would agree. Consistently over lockdown periods 1, 2 and 3, the reason for being outside has been the greatest challenge around that—the exemptions and, as Owen has said, some of the things particularly around exercise and how far you go. Around gatherings, it's pretty clear. Around face coverings, businesses remaining open, transport hubs, shops et cetera, failing to self-isolate and quarantine, it's consistent and fairly well understood. So I don't see any other issues in particular that we are presented with at the moment.

Q833 **Chair:** Thank you. Can I just clarify something? I am looking at the College of Policing and NPCC guidance that has been published, and on page 11 it talks about an outdoor gathering of two people being "permitted...in a public outdoor place". Is that different from the permission to go out and exercise with another person?

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: I believe it's the same issue we're talking about there.

Q834 **Chair:** So the gathering is only a gathering to exercise? Or is it possible, under the law, for two people to gather outside when they are not exercising, because it looks, from page 11, as if they can?

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: There is an explicit allowance to exercise with one other person at the moment, as you are aware. This is where the regulations versus the guidance sometimes don't wholly align and can create a gap where it can be interpreted. Similarly, if you look at and interpret that in the realms of some of the environments where people can go quite lawfully to, for example, get a takeaway coffee, takeaway food or something like that—you are going to come into contact with other people, so there has to be some degree of interpretation as to what that means, and that is one of the challenges for officers on the ground. You have to look at the circumstances and the unique environment that they are in at that particular point. There is an explicit element for exercise; that is clearly allowed. In wider environments, it might happen for a very practical reason, even though it is not explicitly allowed within the regulations.

Q835 **Chair:** But let's say I am approaching this as a police officer reading the guidance. This page says: "These regulations permit participation in outdoor gatherings of up to two people in specific places in any area."



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And those “specific places” are basically “public outdoor” places, “other than a funfair or a fairground”, so long as you do not have to pay to enter. That looks as though gatherings of two people are permitted even when they are not exercising.

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: Potentially, yes.

Q836 **Chair:** So that looks like the kind of thing that would put your officers in a difficult position if it says that on one page and it says something else about having permission only to go out and exercise and go shopping on another page.

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: I think Carl wants to come in on that one.

Chief Constable Foulkes: I do not want to confuse the issue any further, but, just to be very clear, that is now what you can do in Wales. In Wales, you cannot meet somebody else outdoors unless they are part of your bubble and you can only exercise outdoors with a member of your family or a support individual. I know I keep saying it is different in Wales, but I am making sure that that is very clear.

Chair: This is the England regulations that we are referring to.

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: The important point here—this is a really important point—is that we have to look first and foremost: does the person have a lawful reason to be outside? Can they avail themselves of one of the exemptions? If they cannot, that fails straightaway and we are back into the realms of trying to encourage them to do the right thing, with potentially enforcement at the other end. If there is a lawful reason for them to be out of the house, then they have an exemption.

Q837 **Ms Abbott:** Is it realistic to expect police officers to enforce mask wearing in supermarkets?

Chief Constable Campbell: Is it realistic? In Thames Valley, we have a number of calls every single day around members of the public reporting breaches of some of the regulations, and some of those are quite historical. Someone might report to us that someone was breaching in a particular supermarket or a particular location, and of course we will make a judgment assessment of whether it is proportionate for us to attend that, given the fact that the person might have moved on and gone elsewhere.

What I would say is that any breach of the regulations is a responsibility for the police. There are some local authority leads in respect of business premises and whatnot—whether businesses are open—that we would expect the local authorities to take a lead on. But where there is consistent breaching of people within shops, we have had calls from the public and we have responded.

What I would say, and we have seen some movement over the last few days or so, is that we have now seen some of the larger organisations saying, in effect, that it is almost a condition of entry. Certainly from our



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point of view that is helpful, because that will reduce the amount of times we might get called to such premises, because in effect the actual people wanting to go shopping are complying unless they have got an exemption.

In terms of sheer volumes, we will take an appropriate and proportionate response to the calls themselves to see whether or not we can actually add value. But it is part of the regulations and we will enforce it where we need to.

Q838 **Ms Abbott:** Do any of your colleagues want to respond to that?

Chief Constable Foulkes: We are working really hard here with our supermarkets around them supporting us with the conditions of entry, making sure that they do the right thing at the front for supermarket entries. But we also recognise that if people are abusive to staff and violent towards those working in our retail outlets, we have a fundamental responsibility and a core role that we will support them if they need us. But, from my point of view, I do not think a wholesale policing response around enforcement of face masks in shops is a fundamental role and, with the demand that we are seeing at the moment, I think we would really struggle to do that. But absolutely we would want to be there supporting those people who are really hard in the retail sector and doing a fantastic job.

Q839 **Ms Abbott:** Thank you. Owen Weatherill?

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: I would not add a great deal to that. The only thing I would say is that we are doing a number of different things on that general stretch I touched on earlier. There is the collective responsibility of everybody, whether that is an employer, an entity that runs a business or an individual, to try to do whatever they can to encourage compliance; it should not all fall to policing. Clearly, if we can nudge people into the right behaviours in the first place, that actually is what we need. What we want at the end of this is compliance. I think we all have a role in that—it is not just about policing.

Q840 **Ms Abbott:** Thank you very much. I must say that the supermarkets that I visit, when I do go to the supermarket, have somebody at the entrance and wearing a mask is a condition of entry.

I wanted to ask Carl Foulkes of the North Wales police about something. There have been reports of out-of-area visitors to parts of north Wales. One of you made the point earlier that where you have a beauty spot, you are going to get more people coming into your area. I understand that under Welsh regulations, people should start and finish exercise at their home, and coming from out of area like that is not permitted. What is the North Wales police doing to discourage people coming in from outside to your beauty spots?

Chief Constable Foulkes: It has been a challenge for us from the very start of the pandemic. We live in a lovely part of the world and we welcome visitors in normal times, but now is not a time when we want to welcome those visitors. We saw this at the very start, with people visiting holiday parks, beauty spots and so on.

We have worked very closely with National Park wardens and our local authority area. We are all playing our part in discouraging the people who are coming, with clear messages around why it is not appropriate and, at the moment, is illegal under Welsh regulations to be doing so, and then we are enforcing in those areas.

For example, last weekend when we saw the snow, we did have people coming to Snowdonia. We had people over Moel Famau and our other areas. My officers were out in force with local authority staff, enforcement officers and park wardens, to use the four Es, but also to enforce. Our level of enforcement over the weekend was significantly higher than recently, because we had people from both in Wales and outside Wales travelling into those areas.

What we have also had to do is to make sure that we magnify our message. We worked with GMP and Cheshire Constabulary and other forces to make sure that the message around Welsh regulations and understanding those laws are very clear to those that consider travelling here, to make sure people realise that if you are coming to Wales or live in Wales, you need to comply with Welsh law.

Q841 Ms Abbott: Do you find that the people travelling to beauty spots, Snowdonia and so on are younger people? Or are they more mature?

Chief Constable Foulkes: We get a range, but if you look at our enforcement data, what it would show is that the vast majority of that is the younger age groups. Up to 30 is our greatest level of enforcement. So I think the answer to the question is that the vast majority are in younger age groups rather than older age groups.

Q842 Ms Abbott: Finally, are you able to tell us how many fixed penalty notices you have issued from people coming into your area from outside during the pandemic?

Chief Constable Foulkes: I don't have the latest data on that, but if I go back to the first lockdown, we were one of the forces with the highest number of fixed penalties issued for those travelling in. Out of 43 forces, we were third. More than 80% were for those travelling into the area rather than breaching Covid regulations within Wales.

Q843 Laura Farris: Thank you to all our witnesses this morning. I just wanted to pick up on similar themes that others have been asking you about.

One of the striking features of your evidence is that you are being asked to move more quickly to enforcement against a background where some of the rules involve almost impossible judgment calls—is it right to say that? In an environment where people are allowed to exercise outside with someone else, they are allowed to be part of a support bubble and they are allowed to leave the house for more than one hour—in other words, because it is looser than it was in the first lockdown—does that create inherent problems in policing? If someone says to you, “I’m just exercising outside” or, “I am in a support bubble”, do you have any mechanism to verify that or do you just have to accept it on trust?



Chief Constable Campbell: To the final point around accepting on trust, the officers themselves will do what they would normally do, in terms of verifying it, to see whether or not they have got the evidence to go to enforcement, if they don't believe the individual. That will then become an evidential matter. A member of the public who is issued with a fixed penalty notice, as with any ticket, can opt to challenge the assessment of that officer in a court, ultimately, if they wish to. We would have to make sure that the evidence is supported by the officer at the scene. That doesn't change for any fixed penalty notice.

In terms of the activities generally, with the examples that are given around exercise and people moving around, I think that generally my officers are engaging members of the public, talking to people, listening to what they have got to say and making individual judgments. Most of the tickets that are issued within Thames Valley police are around, if you like, gatherings. That is the issue of people either having parties in people's houses or being stopped and having no excuse to be out.

In the first wave, the vast majority of people who we issued enforcement against were young groups of, as it happens, men, travelling around together in cars, when there was no lawful reason to do so. Our focus, from a policing point of view, tends to be on those areas—the gatherings and the public space activity.

On a day-to-day basis, the challenge of assessing whether or not someone is lawfully outside for exercise tends to be a small part of our work. It lives large in some of the reporting that we are getting at the moment, but for most of our work it is straightforward, but that isn't quite the right word. If someone is having a house party or someone hasn't got a lawful reason to have six or seven people in their garden, when they shouldn't have, that is fairly straightforward to enforce.

Q844 **Laura Farris:** Thank you. Carl Foulkes, assuming that your experience is broadly similar to John Campbell's, in the domestic environment, do you rely on people reporting neighbours? What kind of a shape have you seen in that type of mechanism? How have you seen that change between the two lockdowns?

Chief Constable Foulkes: Yes, we do still get a lot of calls coming in. We see spikes every time the regulations change. We see that through our one-on-one system and our contacts system. People are reporting what they perceive to be breaches; some of those are breaches and some are not. Some are perceptions around what people can and can't do. We try to respond to them in a proportionate way and we risk assess all of them.

Slightly differently to John, over the last few weeks we have had a lot of travel. When we talk about exercise here, we have people driving to exercise. Within our regulations here, that is not allowed, unless it is a particular circumstance around mental or physical health. Our focus has definitely been on that, because when you get potentially 200 to 300 cars in one of our beauty spots, it is so obvious and egregious, and it has an



impact on the local community there. Our community want us to deal with those issues as well.

Q845 **Laura Farris:** Owen, I am not going to leave you out, but I am not going to ask the same question of everyone. If there is one change to the Government guidance—something that would streamline your ability to police or that would be a more effective tool in your policing armoury—what would that be? That could be anything, such as the rules being too complicated, or that you should have more teeth to do certain things. Owen, let me begin with you.

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: I think the bit that the public found the most difficult to police, and probably officers did too, to some extent, was when had different tiers. If you happen to be in a force that straddles a number of different tiers, there are lots of reasons why someone would quite legitimately need to move from one area to the next, such as work, shopping or whatever. They could be quite oblivious to the fact that they are in a different tier area; we have had examples of that.

That is one of those difficult challenges that you have got to try and square away with the fact that we are trying, as a country, not to be too restrictive on communities where we don't need to be, but, at the same time, there are other areas where we need to be more restrictive to try and control the virus. That brought with it some inherent challenges.

Moving to where we are now, which is one set of regulations for everybody, it is clearly easier for people to understand and for us to navigate, but I see both sides of that equation. This is not an easy one to fix, because ultimately there are good reasons for doing what was done before and there are good reasons for doing what we are doing now.

The nature of this is a really complex challenge. It is one of those wicked challenges where, as I said earlier, there are no easy solutions to much of it and there are some imperfect solutions. Quite often, we have to move quickly and, quite often, that means that we come up with a solution is not perhaps as rounded and refined as we would like. Ordinarily, we would take months, if not years to design laws and regulations, but we are not in that kind of environment, and we do not have that time on our side. It is really easy with hindsight to say, "If only we had done that," but I think that the pace at which we are having to move makes that incredibly difficult sometimes.

Is there one thing that would make things easier? I don't think it is quite that simple, because the other big challenge we have at the moment is that we are talking about really challenging issues for a whole host of different sectors here. Let's not forget that we are trying to keep the economy alive as well and keep people in their jobs. That is a really difficult issue to try to manage in the round against the restrictions we might want to make as a country around health.

I don't envy some of the decision making that has to be done at times, and it would be quite simplistic for me to say, "If only we could do that." I



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don't think it is that simple, if I am honest. The best we can try to do at a national level is to respond to that as quickly as we can and give the best clarity that we can, which is what we have tried to do for our officers.

Q846 Laura Farris: Thank you. Mr Campbell, Mr Foulkes, do you have anything to add to that? Is there one thing that you have discussed with your teams?

Chief Constable Campbell: I echo Owen's observations about consistency, but we recognise that that is not in anybody's gift, given the change in the virus itself. Consistency helps with both the public understanding and officers' enforcement understanding, but we do have to release restrictions as quickly as we can, so you will get some ebb and flow depending on the virus. I say we will roll with that, but you heard from Owen some of the challenges around it.

I don't know whether any of the questions will cover this, but as we move into vaccination, if I think about something that would assist policing, we do not expect to be higher than a number of the other tiers that are already identified—the four groups in particular—but if you think about our response officers, who are at the front end of this pandemic in terms of operational engagement, they are the officers who do the 24/7 response to calls and deal with the most chaotic of circumstances and the most unprecise calls from the public. They are right at the sharp end of this. They are quite a young workforce, in truth, so if we are relying just on vaccination in terms of the age group protocol, you might say they were going to be towards the end.

We are talking with the Home Office about this and we continue to talk about it, and I have had plenty of support on this, but certainly where we would be able to see opportunities for vaccination of police officers and frontline officers, I would suggest we have some capability within the service itself to do that and not to take it away from members of the public. That would be something that would benefit us operationally in terms of consistency and resilience.

Q847 Laura Farris: Carl Foulkes?

Chief Constable Foulkes: One from me, and I have mentioned it already: sometimes we can talk about national regulations when actually the home nations are different. It is just making sure that we are clear around what we are talking about—what occurs in England and what occurs in Wales—and that communication nationally is important.

Fundamentally, enforcement is almost the last resort. We need people to do the right thing for the right reasons, and if that message and that language work, then we will not rely on police staff to enforce regulations because people are doing the right thing to stop people dying. Ultimately, the more we can get that message across, the more powerful it is, because actually our staff do not want to be enforcing Covid regulations. It is that last piece, if you are relying on us to do it.

Q848 Ruth Edwards: My thanks to all our witnesses today and the UK's



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policing family for everything you are doing to keep people safe at this difficult time.

I want to ask some questions about domestic abuse and what you are seeing in that area. We all saw a big increase in people contacting helplines, either on the phone or online, over the first lockdown. I was wondering whether you saw that increase translate into an increase in reports to yourselves in the first lockdown, and also what patterns you have seen over the second lockdown throughout November and so far this month. Perhaps I could go to Chief Constable Campbell first?

Chief Constable Campbell: Interestingly, in the first lockdown my force didn't see an increase at all; it actually saw a reduction. We were concerned about that, because all the salient factors of people being in each other's company with perpetrators were a concern.

Two things emerged from that. An assessment was that a proportion of domestic abuse would be conducted by people who live apart from the victim—they might be estranged partners—so there was an inability for those offences to be committed, certainly in terms of that physical abuse. Certainly, in the first lockdown, we had some strategies in place to proactively contact victims of historical abuse and make sure they were okay—that kind of call in whatever format—because the ability for people to leave their home address was extremely limited. That goes back to the difference between the two lockdowns. Interestingly enough, we didn't really have anything of concern presented back. Lots of people said, "Thanks very much for getting in touch, but it is not an issue for us."

Since that time, we have seen an increase in domestic abuse generally, but we would expect an increase because we are very encouraging of people to report. What we are collectively seeing is that all those constituent parts that lead people, without any excuse and without mitigating blame, to commit domestic violence are emerging in society—the issues that challenge families at this time and lead people to react and abuse, so we would expect an increase.

As it happens, we have seen more criminal justice outcomes over the last year, in terms of victims, and we are getting more justice for them. Interestingly enough, because some of the volume work that is coming our way, in terms of policing, has been reduced during lockdown, that has given our investigators time to concentrate more on getting justice for victims, and hopefully preventing further harm.

We do an awful lot of messaging around that. On our social media accounts, we are encouraging people. There are various things that we will be doing over this lockdown as well. There are obviously more opportunities for people to get out of the house to report to us. That is something that makes it easier for us to assess—people can get in touch if they need to.

Child protection links into domestic abuse. We rely heavily on schools for those referrals when we get them. With the schools going back, that first contact obviously increases. We didn't see a significant increase in child

referrals, with children going back and disclosing stuff in the home, but that does not mean that we are not always making sure we are a little bit suspicious. We always err on the side of concern around such areas, rather than be complacent.

Q849 **Ruth Edwards:** Thank you. Chief Constable Foulkes, what has your experience been in Wales?

Chief Constable Foulkes: Very similar to John. We saw a worrying—and I do mean worrying—drop of reports coming in through the first lockdown. Actually, we have gone back to normality. I know that that sounds like horrible terminology, but actually I am more comfortable that we are getting the reports coming through.

We had to try really innovative solutions around how we make sure we contact people we think are at risk. We are reviewing all our repeat victims of domestic abuse weekly. We did work with supermarkets to get leaflets out to those people we thought could report through different ways. We went through the food banks with our police volunteers. We were leafletting and contacting families—women and men—through those means. We were working with the support agencies as well to increase our voice to let people know that policing is still here for them. We ask people to report in different ways, so we put it on web chat and other communication methods. We are trying to be as innovative and creative as we can to make sure our most vulnerable people realise that we are there and supportive and want to hear those reports in a very unique set of circumstances.

We have seen a significant rise in stalking and harassment, and we have seen a movement of behaviour online from the physical. There are definitely some changes in behaviour and criminality, both around vulnerability and more generally.

Q850 **Ruth Edwards:** Thank you. That is very interesting, and the increase in online stalking and harassment is quite alarming. Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill, obviously it must have been, as Chief Constable Foulkes was saying, quite difficult for officers to spot some of those risks around domestic abuse with the lockdown. Did the NPCC work with any national stakeholders or support groups to try to come up with new ways to make it easier for officers to identify potential risks and victims of abuse?

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: You will have heard at the last session that we did that Louisa Rolfe, who is the national lead for this, gave quite a comprehensive update. She has been front and centre on this throughout. DA is her portfolio nationally, and she has been very active around this. She has engaged with lots of third-sector agencies, and looked at how we can develop, evolve and do things differently in a changing landscape. That has been very much part of her work. It is not something that I am an expert on, but certainly I am very aware of it, and I know forces have benefited from it.

Q851 **Ruth Edwards:** Thank you. Chief Constable Campbell, from your



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experience, would you say that the Government's message that being able to leave home if you are at risk of domestic abuse or at risk of harm has got through to the survivors and the people who your officers have spoken to?

Chief Constable Campbell: I have no reason to believe that it has not. We have not done particular research into that, but we have seen increases throughout the year around domestic abuse in line with lots of other forces, so our assessment would be that certainly any confusion about being able to get out of the house has gone. Obviously, as Carl has mentioned, there are lots of other strategies that we have put in place, such as with supermarkets. We have also had an education programme with taxi drivers. If they were to spot signs of domestic abuse, that would be something that they should report if they possibly could and share those kinds of issues. The simple answer is that I have seen nothing to suggest that it has been an issue. As I say, our reporting has increased.

Ruth Edwards: Thank you very much. No further questions.

Q852 **Tim Loughton:** Can I empathise with all police officers? I am sure that other colleagues, like me, have been inundated with constituents complaining, "Why are the police not turning up when there are lots of people out for their walks on Worthing beach?" and then there are lots of people complaining, "Why are the police turning up when all we're trying to do is have a walk on Worthing beach?". You are damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Anyway, can I turn to international travel rather than just outdoor travel? I want to understand the role of the police alongside border and immigration forces in monitoring people who have come into the UK from countries requiring restrictions on their travel. How much of your work is being taken up with that? Exactly what is expected of you and how difficult is it to get the information for what is required of certain people quarantining and things like that?

Chief Constable Campbell: Since the regulations came in, we have received 621 notifications from the border agency regarding potential breaches of quarantine. Of course, the system is such that you have to fill in a particular form when you enter the UK and designate your home address, then obviously there is a track and trace format in effect. If you are unavailable three times or so, on the contact numbers that you have given, we get notified.

That has certainly increased since November. It was 621 since June, I think—since the regulations came in—and we have had 521 since November, so we are seeing an increase in demand. Of that, we have issued only 15 tickets in terms of our officers' assessment that there was no lawful reason for non-quarantining, if that makes sense, such as medical assessments and so on. From that point of view, that is the level of the workload. It is not insignificant, and it has been increasing.

We will continue to work hard with the border agency, because obviously in terms of the tickets versus people who might challenge them, we need



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to work hard to make sure that we have the evidence that sits behind the notifications. We are working hard with the border agency on those processes should they become a matter for the courts. We continue to look at that, because obviously these are new regulations for us. That probably gives you a sense of the workload that we have and the engagement with the public. Of 621, we issued 15 tickets.

Q853 Tim Loughton: Are you happy that that information flow is pretty thorough from Border Force, so you are being notified about all those who you need to be notified about and that there are not a lot of people going under the net? From my experience, which was some months ago when one of my daughters came back from Italy with a group of people, none of them was stopped at the airport and required to hand in their notification forms. That was not an uncommon occurrence, it would appear. Not that she has flouted any of the regulations, I hasten to add. Are you convinced that it is being properly enforced at the ports of entry for you to get the relevant information that you need?

Chief Constable Campbell: I am afraid that I could not really give a view on that, because I do not know what the numbers coming through the ports are. Thames Valley police covers a population of 2.5 million people. A number of those will be in and out of the country, I am sure, but much reduced given Covid, so I do not know what we would reasonably expect for people coming back into the UK who are resident within the Thames Valley police area. I am afraid that I could not give an informed comment on that.

Q854 Tim Loughton: Fair enough. Chief Constable Foulkes, what is the experience in Wales?

Chief Constable Foulkes: Similar to John, but much smaller numbers in Wales, partly because of the nature of where the airports are. The reporting, and our population size, is much smaller. But when we get notifications, they come into our contact centre and on to our control room. We will deploy resources to those. If we do not get a positive result, we will report back to the border agencies for further work, if it is required. As to numbers coming through and whether that it is an accurate representation of our population—again, like John, I don't know. That would be something we would have to discuss with the border agency.

Q855 Tim Loughton: You've no complaints about the way the system appears to be working at the moment. It is not disproportionately encroaching on your time, and you think you are on top of it.

Chief Constable Foulkes: Not in Wales it isn't, no.

Q856 Tim Loughton: While I am with you, can I look at the cross-border issue, Chief Constable Foulkes? Obviously, in earlier lockdowns and when Wales was in the so-called circuit-breaker lockdown, which seemed to take an awfully long time and did not prove to be terribly effective, there were lots of stories about your Welsh colleagues nipping across the English border for a sneaky pint at the pubs or whatever. Is that really a thing? Have you seen much cross-border travel on account of different



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regulations between England and Wales?

Chief Constable Foulkes: It is a very porous border. I would argue that it is much more porous than the Scottish border, certainly in north Wales. Our communities sit side by side. The ability to cross roads, streets and relatively short distances to go across into England, and from England into Wales, is the reality of where we live and work. Did we see some travel, both from England into Wales and from Wales into England? Yes, we absolutely did. We did not have hard border checks in place, although some outlets thought that we may have done. That was not the case across Wales. But it was very clear, both within Wales and supported by our colleagues in England—the messaging around what was allowed and what was not allowed. We did not get, though, huge amounts of issues being raised with us. But it is the nature of the border as we see it.

Q857 **Tim Loughton:** Have you worked much more closely with your English counterparts across the border as a result? Are there particularly difficult problems that have arisen because of different regimes and different regulations either side of the border, or has it been manageable?

Chief Constable Foulkes: I think it has been manageable, in all honesty. We have a really strong working relationship with Cheshire, which is obviously our closest neighbour in north Wales. Actually, we have an alliance around a lot of our operational work. Although we sit in a separate home nation, we work together. Our firearms team, dog section and so on are joint units, so we have a strong relationship anyway. Being able to magnify messages on both sides of the border has been really helpful.

Q858 **Tim Loughton:** But you haven't had people you have stopped in Wales from England citing English rules to justify what they are doing, or vice versa on the other side.

Chief Constable Foulkes: That is slightly different. Yes, we have. We do get people, when we stop them, who have travelled from England and will say, "Well, I thought I could." I am not sure that when you have travelled from Leicester all the way to north Wales that that is actually a reasonable argument—we had that at the weekend. But definitely people have, either rightly or wrongly—either through personal confusion or deliberately—tried to use: "I live in another area, and I thought I was allowed."

Q859 **Tim Loughton:** Leicester is, of course, very convenient for north Wales. ACC Weatherill, is there anything you want to add on either of those points?

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: Just to articulate the travel regulations. We're the back end of that process, really. This is a Border Force-owned process, and it goes through several stages before it gets to us. Border Force obviously deal with the gate—the arrival point. They capture the data and the information. They will assess that. They pass it through to the IAS, which then does the phone calls. Only if it has gone through those checks and balances and they feel there is a concern will it come to us. I think you have a session later, and they can probably unpack some of that in more detail for you.



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Q860 **Chair:** I want to quickly follow up on that. John Campbell, you have referred to having 621 cases since the start, and 521 since November. Do you know what the reason is for that big increase at a time when travel seemed to be slightly declining again?

Chief Constable Campbell: No particular reason for that—I have no particular knowledge of a reason. Obviously, it probably takes time for processes to kick in, I would suggest.

Q861 **Chair:** In terms of the 521 that you have had since November, have the police contacted every single one of those cases?

Chief Constable Campbell: Every single one? Well, we will attend those addresses—that is where the resource implications come in—and, although we have no power of entry under the legislation, as you might expect, we will then make inquiries and feed back to the UK border agency with our findings. When our officers have interacted with members of the public—as per the 15 tickets—have seen there is a breach and are happy evidentially that it is appropriate, that is when the enforcement will come in. But in effect, they report back.

Q862 **Chair:** In 15 cases you could tell there was a breach happening and issued a ticket. With the remainder, do you know in how many of those there was just nobody in at all?

Chief Constable Campbell: I don't have that detail now. For some of that, we would also be looking at the salient circumstances for why there might have been non-compliance with the tracing, if you like—not answering a phone, withheld numbers, all that kind of stuff we go into—but I do not have that particular information.

Q863 **Chair:** If nobody was in at all, in those circumstances, would you pursue further enforcement action, or just refer it back to the Border Force? If the Border Force decided, "We have someone who doesn't seem to be in, doesn't seem to be complying, and so on", would they get back in touch with you?

Chief Constable Campbell: As far as I know, yes. We will do a limited assessment, because obviously although we will attend, we will not keep going back over days and weeks. We will refer that back to the border agency for further work and consideration.

Chair: But do they then get back in touch with you?

Chief Constable Campbell: I imagine so. I would have to check on the actual processes, but I cannot imagine that they would not if we believe there is a breach. We would want to chase that breach down.

Q864 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Thank you, Chair, and I thank the witnesses. I have a couple of quick questions. First, this Committee has previously condemned the unacceptable level of assaults against and abuse of police officers in relation to Covid, including things like spitting and coughing on officers. Given that we are now in a second wave and have tight restrictions again, are we seeing an increased level of that sort of



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behaviour? Where are we with that? Secondly, what more can we do to protect or support officers who face that sort of behaviour, and do you have the necessary powers to prosecute people who are committing such offences? Let us start with Carl Foulkes.

Chief Constable Foulkes: Thank you for the question, and for the support on assaults on emergency service staff, which is very welcome. If I look at this past year, the overall level of assaults on my PCSOs and my police officers remained stable between 2020 and 2019. What we have seen, however, is 84 incidents in which they were spat at or coughed at, in the line of duty. While being coughed or spat at in 2019 was really horrible and very unpleasant, being coughed and spat at in 2020 during the Covid pandemic ratchets everything up significantly on that behaviour. We have received support from the CPS and the courts service to make sure that those individuals, when they exhibit that kind of behaviour, are given a much harsher sentence. I am supportive of that, and we have supported our officers through the process.

We have the relevant protective equipment, as Owen talked about, but policing is a dynamic environment. Our officers and PCSOs are dealing with things that are very different—you cannot put restrictions and control measures in place for everything, but the more that we can do to protect them, absolutely. The more we can make sure, if they are subject to that behaviour, that the wellbeing and wraparound support of the organisation is there—as well as the support of the criminal justice service, to make sure that those behaviours are challenged—that is absolutely where we need to be.

Q865 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Thanks. Is there anything that John Campbell or Owen Weatherill wants to add to that?

Chief Constable Campbell: Thanks. We have had about 1,000 officers assaulted this year and, of those, a big chunk—231—were Covid-related. Certainly, coughing and spitting is a particular issue, aggravating the individual arrest. Like Carl, I have been very pleased with the support that we have had from the criminal justice process. All the understanding that I have is that when officers have been assaulted, particularly around Covid, those members of the public have received custodial sentences for their police assaults. It is definitely an issue for our staff—PPE is as good as it can be, but we have seen an increase in Covid-related, certainly.

Q866 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Can I also ask a second question of you both, just briefly? We are obviously rolling out vaccines now as fast as we can to vulnerable people, and people over certain ages, and so on. Obviously, some police officers, if they are vulnerable or fall into the necessary age groups, will get that vaccine. Is there a case for some sort of prioritisation more generally of police officers because they are on the frontline, or are you content with the way the vaccine is being rolled out?

Chief Constable Foulkes: I don't think policing would want to prioritise ourselves over the highly vulnerable groups that we see in our society. Nobody wants to see relatives or family friends pass away for that purpose. But I have talked about the uncontrolled nature of policing and



the role that we are asking our officers and police staff on the frontline to do. We are asking them to enforce Covid regulations, we are asking them to go into addresses and we are asking them to stop vehicles, all of which brings them into contact with individuals. That, as an environment, should, I believe, be considered as a separate group and vaccinations should be considered at the right time based on the threat risk and harm against other vulnerable groups.

Q867 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Owen Weatherill, do you want to come in?

Assistant Chief Constable Weatherill: This is something that, as you would expect, we have done some thinking about at a national level. As Carl says, we certainly don't want to get in the way of the most vulnerable and those that critically need it first, but we do recognise our unique nature because we are going into people's houses day in, day out, so we could act as a vector. We clearly need to protect not just our staff, but the public we come into contact with.

What we have done is drawn up a list of prioritised roles where we feel it would be necessary, as and when there is sufficient vaccine and we can be prioritised appropriately. That is really to protect the frontline and to make sure that they can then protect the public they come into contact with. That is advanced work, and we have discussed it with Government. There is a clear understanding of why that would be beneficial. Just to add to that, where we are now stepping into some of those more health-focused roles—like ambulance drivers, for example—the staff that are doing that are receiving the vaccine. I hope you can see that there is some logic there around why and where we would prioritise it, and for who.

Chair: Thank you very much. Huge thanks to our witnesses, Carl Foulkes, John Campbell and Owen Weatherill. We very much appreciate your time, and pass on our thanks to all of your staff and officers as well.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor John Edmunds, Professor Annelies Wilder-Smith and Lucy Moreton.

Q868 **Chair:** We can move on to our second panel now. I welcome Lucy Moreton from the ISU, and Professor John Edmunds and Professor Annelies Wilder-Smith from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. We want to focus now on some of the border arrangements that are operating. Can I ask the first questions to Lucy Moreton? Welcome to you, and thanks to your members for the work that I know they are doing to deal with the Covid crisis at the borders. Could you possibly describe to us what your members currently do, or the checks that they currently report making on the passenger locator forms, and how frequent and detailed those checks are?

Lucy Moreton: Thank you. Let me just start by apologising. My internet connection is a little unstable, so I am hoping that I can manage to hang



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on. At the moment, passengers are obliged to complete a locator form before they arrive at the primary arrivals control, but there is no penalty to the carrier for not trying to tell them this or trying to enforce that. Border Force officers are asked to check that the form has been completed. It is completed electronically, so ideally it would just be displayed on a mobile phone or some other tablet-type device that the traveller has with them. The check is very basic. It is simply: has the form been completed, and is the information contained in it vaguely plausible? Unless it is manifestly unreliable, we accept the data that is put there at face value. We have no way of knowing—*[Interruption.]*

Chair: We seem to have lost you, Lucy. I don't know if it is helpful to switch just to audio. We will hope that Lucy can reconnect, and in the meantime—oh, Lucy, is that you back?

Lucy Moreton: Yes; I have turned my camera off, as you suggest.

Chair: We can hear you now, so do carry on. Unless manifestly inaccurate, there are only minimum checks done.

Lucy Moreton: We do not check every arriving passenger. We aim, where there is a high level of compliance with that carrier, to check about 10% of arrivals—*[Interruption.]*

Q869 **Chair:** I think we have lost you again. Checking 10% of arrivals does not sound like very much. Do you check any of the content of the form? For example, if people have submitted a phone number, do your members ring the phone number to check that it is the actual one that people have? *[Interruption.]* Okay. We hope that Lucy's connection will re-stabilise. I will shift to Professor John Edmunds and Professor Annelies Wilder-Smith. In the brief information that we have had from Lucy so far, it seems very limited checks are being done. First, in terms of the passenger locator form, only 10% are being checked. A lot of those people then go on the tube or the train across the country to get back home. How effective do you think those passenger locator forms are at controlling the spread of Covid?

Lucy Moreton: They are very limited, unfortunately. There is simply is not the facility in the border to make any checks on the veracity of what is there. I was quite concerned to hear from your earlier panel that the police believe that they refer matters back to Border Force. Border Force has no in-country—*[Interruption.]*

Q870 **Chair:** Professor Wilder-Smith, can I ask your thoughts on what Lucy Moreton has just said?

Professor Wilder-Smith: If you do quarantine and isolation, you have to do it right. That really means that you have to increase those numbers from 10% to at least 50%. You either do it right or you don't do it at all.

Q871 **Chair:** Professor Edmunds.

Professor Edmunds: Your question was: what is the effect of these checks on transmission of Covid in the UK? The answer to that is almost



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zero, because we have over 1 million infectious individuals in the UK at the moment. If we had no checks at all, at the moment, we probably would be importing a few hundred—in the low hundreds—infections into the UK every day. That is in comparison with the 1.1 million infectious individuals in the UK, and somewhere in the region of 150,000 to 200,000 new infections every day generated in the UK. What is the effect of border screening of any type? It is very close to zero at the moment. If we want to reduce Covid—I hope that we do—in the UK, we have to concentrate on measures within the UK.

Professor Wilder-Smith: I agree with John, obviously, but I would still argue for quarantining and testing at border control. Studies from March and April, when we were still at the height of the pandemic, showed that about 5% of all travellers were positive. It would be even higher now. It all depends what your denominator is—how many people travel in? Then you calculate how many will come in and be positive.

Q872 **Chair:** How far does the arrival of new variants change that? We have a report of the South Africa variant. We have a report of the Brazil variant being identified in Japan. How far does that change the requirements?

Professor Edmunds: That does change things. What you have to think about is this. If the variants are roughly equally infectious to the ones we have here in the UK, and if there is cross-immunity—so if you were immune against the old strain, you would be immune against the new strain—then there is nothing to worry about with new strains coming in, because we have plenty of cases to worry about right here, right now, and that is by far the bigger problem. Importing a few dozen or a few hundred cases when you have 1 million or so makes no difference. It does change if the variants are more transmissible or can evade the existing immune response, whether that is due to a vaccine or natural immunity.

Now, with the South African variant, and potentially with one of the Brazilian variants, there is the potential at least for the variant to evade the existing immune response, so of course we do not want that variant heading into this country. Travel restrictions therefore become more important under those circumstances.

Q873 **Chair:** Faced with those potential variants or the emergence of another new variant and so on, particularly if we had any evidence of a variant that was likely to undermine the success of the vaccine programme, should we be treating that in the same way that we should have treated the first arrival of Covid right back at the very beginning?

Professor Edmunds: The travel restrictions, quarantining and so on—those sorts of restrictions—if they are effective, would slow the arrival of those cases into the country. However, as Annelies quite rightly said, unless your quarantining is much more effective than it has been in the past, it will not slow it by very much.

Yes, it would be better to have more effective quarantining. I mean, we don't really know, because we don't really follow up people who are quarantined at all. They are asked to go and stay at home for two weeks,



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but nobody follows them up and sees whether they really do so. It is almost a voluntary thing—I know it is not voluntary, but you are leaving it to people’s good will to comply with it, because nobody checks.

Professor Wilder-Smith: We will have virus evolution and, now that we look more carefully, every other week we will see another virus strain. The problem is the lag time between the detection of the new strain and really knowing whether it is associated with an increased risk of transmission or an increased risk of more severe disease. So there is a scientific lag time where we need to answer those questions, but the policy makers, like you, have to react before you have those answers. We need travel restrictions, and then lift them again when we know that the new strain is maybe not as bad as we thought. The problem is that we do not want to go strict and then loose, stricter and loose again, so we must have an approach that is a little more systematic. That is why I still believe in the border measures.

Q874 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I thank our witnesses. Professor Edmunds, you have basically said that the current border rules have almost zero impact. I am guessing that you are not saying that we should just give up. Are you advocating for tougher restrictions? What would you do instead?

Professor Edmunds: I am saying that they have zero impact on transmission in the UK, because we have got so much infection in the UK that stopping a few coming in doesn’t make any difference. That is what you need to understand. Of course, if we want to stop new strains coming in, then we would have to improve our restrictions.

I will give you an illustration, just to make that point. We have imported cases of the South African strain into the UK. The first couple that we picked up were picked up in early December, through our routine sequencing surveillance. These were not picked up at the border in any shape or form; they were picked up because the people with them had symptoms and had a test, and we happened to sequence it. Now, we sequence about 5% of the cases that we get, but of course not every case gets reported. We probably report about a third of all our cases—they get tested in the first place and about 5% of them are sequenced. Consequently, if you find a positive case through that routine surveillance, then you have probably got about 30 cases already in the country.

We found two positive cases in early December, which meant we probably had in the region of 60 or 70 cases already in the country that we hadn’t picked up. Although we then put in additional border restrictions later in December, to try to prevent the South African strain from arriving, we probably already had many dozens, if not low hundreds, of cases of that strain imported from South Africa. What is the additional effect of closing the stable door after the horse has bolted?

Q875 **Stuart C. McDonald:** What are the implications for us then? Are you saying that we do not need to worry about it, or rather that it should not be a focus until transmission levels in the UK are brought down to a much lower level?

Professor Edmunds: Once—or if—we get infections down to a much lower level, border restrictions become much more important. If you think about our epidemiology in the UK, the only time when border restrictions really started to play a significant role was probably in the summer when we brought cases down. The fraction of cases that we were importing then was a relatively high fraction of the total number of cases that we were having in the UK at the time.

The other thing that you have to remember is what sort of epidemiological regime you are bringing cases into. If the reproduction number in the population as a whole is above 1, an imported case can obviously spread. If the reproduction number is below 1, an imported case is unlikely to spread, unless it is significantly more transmissible. That is the same as for indigenous cases.

Again, if you think about the epidemiology in the UK over the last year, during the period over the summer, when we had brought cases down and significantly relaxed restrictions domestically, so the reproduction number in the UK was above 1, allowing cases in and having quite lax border control at that point probably did play a significant role in the epidemiology. That is probably the only time that it really did. Since then, we have had so many cases that the imported cases play less of a role.

Q876 **Chair:** Just to clarify, was that in the summer and autumn that it played a significant role?

Professor Edmunds: In the summer.

Chair: Are you saying that it did not play a significant role in February and March?

Professor Edmunds: In seeding it right at the beginning, yes, of course.

Q877 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Let us be optimistic and say that we do get levels of transmission down to similar levels again, what should we do differently at that stage? What should we have done differently last summer? What countries can we learn from?

Professor Edmunds: As Annelies rightly said, if you are going to have quarantine restrictions, I think you should take them seriously. Frankly, we do not know the level of compliance with the quarantine restrictions. I think it also needs to be made easier, so I really welcome the idea of testing and shortening the quarantine period. If you do a test before a flight, which has now been introduced, and a shorter quarantine period with a test at the end of it, that is as effective as keeping people in quarantine for 14 days. That is likely to improve compliance. It is those sorts of regimes that we need to put in place.

The places that have had very effective quarantine measures do not ask people to quarantine in their homes. They remove them from their homes and put them into, say, hotels for two weeks so they really cannot spread—they are locked in hotels. If you look at most of the east Asian countries, Australia, New Zealand and so on, as well as many other island



countries, that is how they have done it. That is effective. The way that we do it, where we are really just relying on people to take it seriously and to abide by the rules, does not look like it is terribly effective. We do not even know how effective it is, because we do not really know how well people comply with it.

Q878 Stuart C. McDonald: Professor Wilder-Smith, it is not just us who are not following the examples from east Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Is it fair to say that most of western Europe has taken a different approach, more similar to the UK approach?

Professor Wilder-Smith: I can explain for Germany, where you have to register before you enter the country; you are not allowed to enter unless you have registered. You have to quarantine for 10 days or you test at the airport, you are then negative, and then you are released at five days—but you still have five days. Italy requires a PCR before you come in and again another rapid test on arrival at the airport, and then it still requires 14 days of quarantine. That is an extreme, but this is for the UK.

Maybe I will share with you a modelling study that we did, where we compare it against doing nothing, so the comparison is against no control. If you do a 14-day quarantine, as we did in the past, without testing, you reduce the number of importations by about 84%. If you screen at the time of airport arrival and then you keep them still for 14 days—obviously, those who are positive are totally isolated and those others are quarantined—you actually reduce it by 92%. That is what you are doing in the UK as well.

The other option is to screen all passengers on arrival and then do another test at seven days. That still gives you a 90% reduction. I think we can all support moving from 14 to 10 days, as we have had without testing. We can also support going from 10 days to seven if you do testing, assuming the test comes on the same day. I understand the UK does testing on day five, but it takes a few days to get the result. We also need to discuss which test to use, what is easier and, if you do self-testing, whether it needs to be done under observation.

Q879 Stuart C. McDonald: A final question on a slightly different matter: vaccines are now being rolled out across different countries as fast as they can be. How will that interplay with decisions about when Governments can start to relax travel restrictions, and will rules around travel take into account whether or not a person has had a vaccine? I am thinking about our experience of using yellow fever vaccine certificates, for example. I will start with you, Professor Wilder-Smith.

Professor Wilder-Smith: Yes, this is a hot topic currently being discussed—in fact, I am having a meeting at WHO on exactly that topic later this afternoon. At the present moment, without equal access for everyone to the vaccine, we obviously cannot ask for a vaccine requirement in the moment. As the vaccine coverage increases and there is access for everyone to the vaccine, which we currently do not have, in future I think it will play a role. Whether it will become a requirement is a



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legal issue that we have not yet decided, but there is a lot of thinking towards a requirement in the future—I am talking literally 2022 or later, because until then we will not have equitable access to the vaccine.

I know that Israel, which is very successful—it has already covered 70% of its vulnerable population with vaccination, and in total 20% of the population—gives cards and is using these cards now to allow people to go to the cinema or on an aeroplane. That is different from a global WHO recommendation, which would say you cannot do this until you have equitable access. There is one component of knowledge that it is still missing: we still do not fully understand—or we lack data on, let's put it like that—whether the vaccine that we currently have really also reduces transmission. Until we have those data, we should not talk about asking for vaccines prior to boarding.

Q880 Stuart C. McDonald: Professor Edmunds, do you have anything to add on that? If people are looking forward to being able to travel again, the logic of what you were saying earlier is that, as transmission levels in the UK go down, folk might begin to think, “Well, maybe international travel is going to be possible,” but in fact that is probably a time when you are going to be pretty tight and restrictive on international travel, because that is where the greatest risk happens.

Professor Edmunds: Yes. I would love it if we could get the infection levels here in the UK down to such a level where importations from abroad become a problem, but we are such a long way away from that. Yes, you are absolutely right; people will think, “Great, I can go on holiday to Greece, Croatia and so on.” That is exactly when we should tighten up the restrictions, not relax them.

Stuart C. McDonald: Okay. That is bad news, but thank you.

Q881 Ms Abbott: I want to go back to the question of pre-travel tests. I listened to Professor Edmunds carefully, and I just want to confirm that what he is saying is that he does welcome the Government's decision to introduce pre-travel tests for people coming to the UK, partly because it will lessen the quarantine time, and that in itself will increase compliance.

Professor Edmunds: Yes. I think it is a good thing. If we want to reduce our risk of getting infections into the UK, one of the most effective things is to make sure people who are symptomatic do not get on flights. That is just making sure people who have symptoms don't get on a flight. Add to that a pre-flight test, and those two things on their own can be really quite effective at reducing the risk of importation. Together, just those two things would reduce the risk by perhaps about 50%. They would cut out about 50% of infections coming in—roughly, ballpark. Add, then, a quarantine period afterwards, and you can really reduce the risk significantly.

It doesn't have to be a means of reducing the quarantine period, but I think it can be used to help reduce the quarantine period, as long as you have a test at the end of it. That combination of stopping people who are ill getting on aeroplanes, testing them before they get on an aeroplane,



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and then quarantining for five, six or seven days with a test at the end, could be very effective. I personally think that should help adherence to quarantine, which, from the little bits and piece of evidence we have, appears to be quite low. I think that is based on a 14-day quarantine period, which is very difficult to do.

Q882 Ms Abbott: Why did it take the UK Government so long to get around to instituting pre-travel tests? People have been calling for it—the airlines and so on—for some time.

Professor Edmunds: I guess you should ask them.

Q883 Ms Abbott: Have you any thoughts on that?

Professor Wilder-Smith: It was access to tests. As you know, we always did not have sufficient testing. Now, with increasing access to tests, we can require pre-arrival testing. Even then it is a problem. Some countries do not have easy access. I have looked at your website, and there is a provision for those countries that do not have easy access, but most countries now have access to PCR testing. The problem is that it still takes most countries two days, if not three days, to come back, so you have to do it 72 hours before the flight. There is still a lag time in which you still become positive, are still incubating or you become newly infected, but I think it is an additional step that we should increasingly take. Countries are increasingly doing that.

Professor Edmunds: It was mainly the testing capabilities. I actually think that the lateral flow test can be quite effective. It is not as effective as PCR, but it is quite effective and could be used for this purpose.

Professor Wilder-Smith: I agree. The rapid test is cheaper and is fast, but it must be done under observation. Someone has to do it for you, or it needs to be done under observation, because you can trick the system by not going deep enough.

Q884 Ms Abbott: Professor Wilder-Smith, thank you for your helpful reply about why the Government took so long to bring in pre-travel tests. You have helped the Committee greatly. Can I ask—you touched on this—what is the best kind of test?

Professor Wilder-Smith: This deserves discussion. We know that the so-called rapid test, the lateral flow test, is not as sensitive, but has the advantage of immediate results, or very quick results. I think we should now move towards more liberal use of the so-called rapid tests. I personally think they should even replace the PCR test that you do 72 hours before you travel, where you have a lag time where you can get infected. We should move to a rapid test at the airport, done under observation, where you get the result within, I think, 10 minutes. I think you should have another test when you arrive and then one at day 7 or day 5—that can also be discussed—and then you test and release. The only danger is: don't do it on your own and pretend you have a result. It has to be done under supervision.

Q885 Ms Abbott: Thank you for that. Do you think that if the UK had moved



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earlier to pre-travel tests, we would have had lower levels of transmission in the UK?

Professor Wilder-Smith: No, I agree with Professor Edmunds. Currently it is freely driven by community transmission, which is very high within the country, so I don't think so. We should have done it in February, but we had no test availability to do it then. We now have to think ahead as to how we can have a good trade-off between reducing importation without really inconveniencing personal freedom and liberty and our desire to travel and our need to travel. This is where we now have to fine-tune. We have moved from 40 to 10 and now from 10 to seven days. Can we even move down to five days if you do another test on arrival and a pre-test? The more tests we do, the better we get in our trade-offs. In fact, with the antigen test, why not even test every day? They are not that expensive. The problem is that people can trick the system. You should not do the test on your own and you have to do it under supervision.

Q886 **Ms Abbott:** That is an important point. Finally—this is more generally about levels of transmission within the UK rather than the border issues—what is the single most important thing that the authorities could do, or are doing, to bring down levels of transmission?

Professor Wilder-Smith: John Edmunds has a definite answer to this one. Lockdown is the single most effective thing. Then you have to discuss all the variations of lockdown that you want to do and the trade-offs with the economy and personal liberties. I will pass that question to John.

Professor Edmunds: Yes, Annelies is right. Unfortunately, there is nothing else we can do but a very stringent lockdown right now. There is nothing else we can do. We have no room for manoeuvre. The NHS is at very high levels of stress, so we have to have a very stringent lockdown, with schools closed, unfortunately. That is the only thing that we have available to us at the moment.

Q887 **Ms Abbott:** As well as closing schools, should we be closing nurseries and early years facilities?

Professor Edmunds: Well, the evidence for transmission in those settings is pretty weak. We would expect some, but the younger children do seem to be less likely to transmit. It's a balance, isn't it?

Q888 **Ms Abbott:** So you don't think that nurseries and early years are vectors of transmission?

Professor Edmunds: Much less so than older children.

Q889 **Tim Loughton:** Professors, it has been a very informative session, although a thoroughly depressing one from the information that you have given us. Can I come back to Professor Edmunds on the South African variant? I want to understand exactly what you said in terms of how it is detected. My understanding of what you said is that when you have a test when you arrive, that basic test will just show whether you have got the infection or not, not what sort of infection. Then, on further analysis of those test results, only a very small proportion—you said 5%—go for



sequencing investigation that shows which variation it is.

Professor Edmunds: That is not what I said. We do not currently test people on arrival—well, I think we have just started to—but essentially at that time we were not testing people on arrival. What I said was that we picked this up; these were people who were just in the community and had symptoms of Covid. They went to a local testing centre and got themselves tested for Covid. Now, it turns out that they had both come from South Africa—I think so, I am not quite sure of the details—so they had imported it.

Of the routine tests that we do, a fraction of them—about 5%—are sequenced: you sequence the whole viral genome and you can tell exactly what strain that is. The fraction we sequence here in the UK is probably the highest fraction of anywhere in the world. If you look at the total amount of sequences available in the world, we have done about half of them. So that fraction of 5% is actually very high in comparison with everywhere else. But still, if we pick up two cases, that means that there are quite a lot of other cases we likely have not picked up.

Q890 **Tim Loughton:** I think I was understanding you. I was not referring just to those who are tested when they come in, but, of all those people who are tested, it is only that fraction who have further analysis that shows it happened to be the South African strain, and we are able to do that because in the UK we happen to have more of the technology and capability than other countries. That actually goes to show that the “Kent strain”, or whatever technical term it has been given, may have been prevalent in many other countries, or even more prevalent in them; it was just that we picked it up quicker than anybody else because we had the technology to do it. It may be lurking in other countries with people who have got Covid, but they have not been able to analyse it to show that it is a Kent strain, a South African strain or whatever other strain is waiting to come down the tracks. Is that correct?

Professor Edmunds: Yes, absolutely correct. We know for sure that there are cases around the world of the “Kent strain”, if we want to call it that, but there are probably far, far more just because the sequencing is done so infrequently in most other countries.

Q891 **Tim Loughton:** Just explain why you think that, apparently, subject to an only 5% hit rate of those getting tested, we have not seen more cases of the South African variant.

Professor Edmunds: We have started to see cases of the South African variant. That has happened.

Q892 **Tim Loughton:** But still in very small numbers compared with everything else.

Professor Edmunds: Again, because we only sequence 5%.

Q893 **Tim Loughton:** But proportionately within that 5% there is going to be a higher hit rate, even if it is a small amount. If the South African strain is more prevalent, then, albeit at a very low level, that percentage within



the 5% that are properly analysed will show an increase. Is that happening? If so, to what extent?

Professor Edmunds: Not as far as I am aware. But what you have also got to remember and think about is the epidemiological regime under which the new strain is operating. We are under a very severe lockdown at the moment, and parts of the country have been under tier 3 and tier 4 from December onwards, so most of the country has been under pretty severe restrictions from December. Although we have imported these cases, the opportunity to spread is much reduced at the moment, and it is not clear whether the South African strain is more transmissible than the “wild type”—the strains that were spreading around in the UK before. It may be, but it may not be. The advantage that the South African strain may have is that it evades the immune response. Here in the UK, we have far fewer people immune than in South Africa, because we have had far fewer cases in the UK. That is rapidly changing, of course. It had an advantage in South Africa; it could be that it doesn't have such a great advantage in the UK, because levels of immunity are lower.

Q894 **Tim Loughton:** This is really interesting. It is really important for non-scientists to understand how seriously we have to take these new strains and what could be done to counter them, or not.

The major issues around new strains being detected are, first, is a particular strain much more virulent and much more likely to contaminate somebody if they come into contact with it? Secondly, is it more lethal and does it do you far more damage? Thirdly, is it immune to the vaccines that we are currently using? Those are the three main reasons for having a better understanding and analysis of how widespread these new strains are or may be, or new ones coming along. Those are the three main considerations for wanting that information.

Professor Edmunds: Those are always the main three considerations; you are absolutely right. Is this thing more transmissible or not? Is it more pathogenic or not? Can it evade the immune response, given our existing levels of immunity, or not? Those levels are mostly, at the moment, not due to levels of immunity from vaccines but due to natural infection with the pre-existing strains—the previous strains. That is where most of the immunity in the population comes from.

Rapidly, as we expand the vaccination, it will be reliant more and more on the level of vaccine coverage that we have. Those are absolutely the three questions. Those are the sorts of things that you would like to know, because these new variants occur all the time. Viruses make mistakes when they replicate all the time. New variants arise all the time. It is only if one or other of those three things is true that we really need to care about it.

Unfortunately, it takes some time to work those things out, so we don't know. Even with the South African strain, we don't know why it has had an advantage in South Africa. Is it because it can evade the immune response better or is it more transmissible? That isn't clear. It is probably one or



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other of those two. It may be a combination of them, but we don't know that for sure. It is going to take some time to work that out.

- Q895 **Tim Loughton:** Ironically, what you are saying is that because other countries are less well prepared to detect strains that may evolve within their own borders, we are unlikely to be able to identify those strains until they have got into our country and we are testing people who happen to be the UK. We are not going to be able to prevent it, because we don't know about it until it is here. Is that fair?

Professor Edmunds: I think that is fair. That is why I brought up the example of the South African strain. Although we picked up two cases in early December, we probably had dozens and dozens more already by that time. That is why I think the targeted strategy of, "Oh, there's a problem. Let's put additional measures in place for that country," probably isn't that effective, because by the time you have noticed it and you have picked it up here, it is probably quite widespread here.

Of course, people can go indirectly from one country to another. You don't have to go on a direct flight from South Africa to the UK. You may go to Spain and be there for a few days, and then fly from Spain to the UK, and then nobody is going to stop you. So, the targeted approach is certainly less effective.

Tim Loughton: And the whole issue about people taking circuitous flights to get here has been relevant in recent days. That is really helpful for my understanding. Thank you.

- Q896 **Chair:** Our questions and interests are effectively about how we avoid a further wave—we are looking at the border issues, as opposed to the measures that we need to deal with the current wave—either because we get this wave back down and under control and then get further reinfections from abroad, or because, as seems to be the greater unknown but is of alarm at the moment, we have new variants and mutations that we may not have anticipated from anywhere else, and that either prevent the vaccine working effectively or mean that we get a further wave. Other countries took a much more precautionary approach right back at the very beginning, when we did not know that much about Covid. Look at east Asia, Australia and New Zealand. They took a much more precautionary approach. If we do not know much about what is happening around South Africa or Brazil, is there a case for us to take a much more precautionary approach right now, when everything is so vulnerable to the risks from these strains? Should we have a much stronger testing or quarantine regime in place while we do not know, rather than the targeted approach that John Edmunds just said was not that effective when it comes to South Africa?

Professor Wilder-Smith: For the reasons that Professor Edmunds outlined, a total travel ban does not make sense. Travel restrictions still make sense—we just want to reduce travel and mobility, because it is part of these lockdown measures. I believe we need to do more pre-arrival testing—we should stop people from coming in with a positive PCR, and



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we already have a certain reduction. If we now combine it with a relatively shortened quarantine that is more acceptable and can maybe be better monitored by the police, we would be in a better way for the near future. Maybe we would also be better prepared for the day when cases in the UK are at a lower level, and when the relative proportion or contribution of importation will be higher again. We need to have all the logistics in place to do this.

Q897 **Chair:** Professor Edmunds?

Professor Edmunds: I agree. I would like to add that in terms of quarantine and monitoring quarantine, you have to remember that almost everybody who is coming into the UK does not have Covid. They are not all infected. The vast majority will not have Covid—they are just travellers coming into the UK.

We use quarantine for two groups of people. The first is travellers coming into the UK, the vast majority of whom will not have Covid. The second group is people who have been in direct contact with a Covid case—we use quarantine with them. We don't follow up on any of them. If I were to follow up on one group and try to make sure that they stay in quarantine, it would be the latter—those who have been in direct contact with a Covid case. That's endemic transmission. Obviously, if we can do them both, that would be great, but it is really the endemic disease where the problem is at the moment. Our quarantine measures are pretty lax across the board, frankly.

Q898 **Chair:** What if we had our time again and we were back in January 2020, looking at the number of cases starting to come in and at restrictions on Wuhan and so on, and at the measures that other countries were taking—New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea? At that time, the UK authorities were thinking, "Well, all that is terribly disproportionate, isn't it? Most of the travellers coming in are not going to be affected by anything," so we did not take measures that we perhaps could have done. If we had our time again, with hindsight—given the huge damage we have seen wreaked on our NHS and economy and on people's lives across the country—should we have done what Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and South Korea did?

Professor Wilder-Smith: It is a philosophical question. Is it really worthwhile thinking back? We have to think forward. Obviously, in hindsight, we should have introduced much more travel restrictions and much better quarantine.

Please allow me to add something to what Professor Edmunds said. The true quarantine of contacts of true cases must be implemented with police enforcement. In addition to that—I have a Singapore background, so—I think that we are far too lax with known positive cases, letting them isolate voluntarily at home, when we know that household transmission is extremely high in the UK and everywhere else. In Singapore, in no single case would a person with a confirmed infection or illness stay at home; they would all be isolated in special places. If we had to push the money,



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it would be on better contact tracing, with better enforcement of all the contacts—fully quarantining for up to 10 days—and testing in between, so we pull them out. Those who are truly positive, we should truly isolate; we should not just let them go home, staying there and doing whatever they like with their family members who also go out again and transmit the disease. That is where our focus should be.

Q899 Chair: Just some practical questions, as we have the PCR testing coming in on Friday. Clearly, this time last year, we did not have the resources or the tests in place to introduce testing. However, a lot of other countries seem to have introduced the pre-travel testing several months ago—France, I think, did it back in August, and Spain, Greece and other countries started doing it in November. Are we behind the curve in not introducing that pre-travel testing until Friday?

Professor Wilder-Smith: John?

Professor Edmunds: It is always better to introduce these measures earlier.

Q900 Chair: In terms of the additional layers, your greatest concern is about the 72-hour potential gap, that it would be better to have additional tests—even if they were supervised lateral flow tests—at the airport on departure and at the airport again on arrival. Is that right?

Professor Edmunds: That is the only one I disagree with Annelies about. I do not think that there is any need for another test on arrival. If—

Q901 Chair: With a 72-hour gap, what if you were concerned? Let us suppose we became more alarmed about the South African variant or the Brazil variant and so on, are you not concerned about that 72-hour gap?

Professor Edmunds: Not particularly. I think it is better to do a test closer to departure—all the modelling studies show that it is better to do that test as close as you can to departure. That is why the supervised lateral flow in the airport, as Annelies was suggesting, would be a good way to do it. What you do with people who are positive would be difficult to manage at the airport of course—they have their ticket and all their stuff there, they are hoping to get on the plane, and you tell them no. Personally, yes, the closer to departure the better, and therefore I think there is a role for lateral flow in that. I do not see any advantage in an additional test when you get to the other end, when you arrive here in the UK. I think then a test at five days—or at six or seven days, and ideally with PCR but you could use lateral flow—and release would be a very effective strategy.

Professor Wilder-Smith: We cannot move away from the 72 hours, because we need to give people a chance not to have to pack and go to the airport. Therefore, I argue for the arrival screening test. Also, there is not only a modelling reason for this, or an epidemiological reason; it is a behavioural reason. When I know that I am positive, I behave differently, and I may then not travel on a busy bus or train. I think it will sharpen



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and enhance your self-isolation if you know that you are positive. Why wait until five days, when you can do it at the airport?

Professor Edmunds: That is the exact reason why I disagree with it. If I know that I am negative, or I think that I am negative because I have had a lateral flow test on arrival, will I comply with the seven days of quarantine and the test at the end? Maybe not.

Professor Wilder-Smith: Then that has to be enforced—the seven days have to be enforced, and the final test must be enforced as well, so people can go out.

Q902 **Chair:** Lucy Moreton, are you able to join us again?

Lucy Moreton: Yes, I am here.

Chair: I just want to ask about what happens in practice at the moment. People arrive. There is no testing; there will be some pre-testing by Friday. Then—particularly in relation to Heathrow but also other arrival centres—are people very often going on to public transport without any test in place?

Lucy Moreton: That is not something we collect direct statistics on, but yes, the only way out of Heathrow is going to be being collected by a member of your family, getting in a taxi or getting on public transport. There just isn't another option in order to leave, so they are going to leave Heathrow, or any other airport, in company with others, to a greater or lesser extent.

Q903 **Chair:** The fact of so many people arriving and then going on to public transport—again, if we are thinking about a South African variant or another one, other countries would take a much stronger approach to that. Does that argue for having either arrivals testing or some other measures at the airport—quarantine hotels or whatever else that other countries do? Professor Wilder-Smith?

Professor Wilder-Smith: I may not have totally followed what was said. Another reason to be tested on arrival is this. When you are positive, I would not send on to mass transport—a train. You have to be escorted to a place where you are quarantined. If you are negative, you can use your normal ways and go home. You may still become positive in the next few days, but at least you are not positive on the day when you are travelling. So there is another argument for arrivals testing. And I can only say that the more strictly you follow your quarantine, the better your outcome. If the quarantine or isolation is not strict, just don't bother. It is a drop in the ocean then.

Q904 **Chair:** Lucy Moreton, while we have you again, what are your members' concerns about the current passenger locator form process?

Lucy Moreton: The majority of their concerns centre on the fact that it appears to be unenforceable. We don't check the addresses. You have already heard from police colleagues this morning about the difficulty in actually going and checking to see whether individuals are where they say



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they are and are supposed to be. Inherently, if they have not gone to the place that they told us they were going to go, we have lost them. We are not going to find them—the UK is a very big place. Individuals can put whatever they want on the passenger locator form; we don't query that. If they get on to mass transport in order to enter into the UK, they can move around, with very little enforcement.

The byplay to this is that we know that the reported rates of verbal abuse of our staff, of Border Force staff, have gone through the roof since this came in. Passengers are not being told by carriers that they need to do it. They are discovering, at the back of the airport hall, that they need to do it. They are understandably angry about this, and the first person that they see in a uniform happens to be one of our members. And there's no trade-off; there's no benefit to this. The evidence that you have just heard, in the last couple of hours, has been so clear that actually this is of very little benefit to the UK. I am really saddened that our members are being subject to excessive abuse and placed at risk, of course, from each other and from travellers who might be spreading the virus, for no particular gain to UK viral security. That is a matter that really saddens us.

Q905 Chair: I am really sorry that your members are facing abuse. That is completely unacceptable. Are your members told to provide to people, when they arrive, public health advice and information about quarantine, about the risks and about the different things they are supposed to do?

Lucy Moreton: Very early on, before the passenger locator forms came into force, we were asked to hand out leaflets on behalf of the public health authorities, but beyond that, no, we don't have any information that we can give people, and Border Force are not trained public health staff.

Q906 Chair: Are those leaflets still being handed out?

Lucy Moreton: Where there are still stocks, they are available for passengers to collect, but they are not handed out routinely. The information that was contained in them is contained in the front page of the passenger locator form app when you go to fill it in, but how many people read the front page of a form that they know they have to fill in—that is one for the behavioural scientists, I think.

Q907 Chair: Some of the things that we hear reported by travellers, when they compare their experience in other countries with their experience in the UK, are that in other countries, they were given far more information and they were told what they had to do, whereas in the UK, they feel like they were given very little or sometimes no information. They say that in other countries, they have had their forms or details checked, but that in the UK, they have not been, and that in other countries, they have had tests and been in quarantine until they have had test results, but that again, in the UK, they have just gone straight on to the tube, train or whatever. Does that sound accurate to you, based on your members' experience?

Lucy Moreton: Yes, absolutely. That is completely reflective.



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Q908 Chair: Will the introduction of the pre-travel testing on Friday make any difference that you are aware of for your members?

Lucy Moreton: The only difference that it will make is if there is a carrier penalty. If the carriers are penalised if they bring somebody in without a test, that will make a huge difference. Where we are at the moment with the locator forms, there is no penalty on the carriers, so there is no incentive for them to tell people about them. If the carriers do not board anyone who has not had a recent negative test, that will make a significant difference. It is safer in terms of virus transmissions, although I hear the experts' reservations about the 72-hour period and the test only being as good as the moment that you actually take it. It will also further reduce passenger traffic. I think that is probably inevitable.

Q909 Chair: Are your members expecting to have to check when someone arrives whether they have had a negative test within the last 72 hours?

Lucy Moreton: That instruction has not come out yet. Clearly, someone will have to check; there is no point having a rule if you do not check. We are hoping that the carriers will check on boarding and that there will be some form of evidence, certificate or proof that they can show the Border Force officer on arrival. Ideally, we want both checks. There is no point discovering that they did not comply and that they have not had a test when they arrive in the UK. That is too late. That needs to have been weeded out before they get on the aircraft in the first place.

Exactly what those forms look like, what those certificates look like, what that proof or evidence is, and how easy it is to falsify, we are not going to know by Friday what every single country's certificate of a negative test looks like. We are going to have to take a fairly large chunk of that on trust. If it looks vaguely plausible, we are probably going to have to accept it.

Q910 Chair: So the system comes in at 4 am on Friday morning, and as of noon on Wednesday, you have not seen any details of how it will be checked and enforced.

Lucy Moreton: Not yet, no. That is a worry.

Professor Wilder-Smith: May I share a personal story? My daughter had to fly from Switzerland to Edinburgh on KLM and she did not have a PCR test and they did not let her board. So it was checked. That was not because of the UK, but because the KLM airline requested it.

Lucy Moreton: It must be in a carrier's interest, or in some carriers' interest perhaps, to enforce it. Nobody wants to be stuck in a metal tube with an element of recycled air with somebody who is positive and potentially contagious. There are carriers, however, that will not do that.

It is inherently far more difficult when you are talking about the short straits crossing, so individuals in the Channel tunnel or on short ferry crossings. Of course, to get into France, you have to have had a negative PCR test now, but coming the other way back into the UK, that is much harder to enforce, simply because you have very short notice and you can



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turn up and go literally with just a holdall. How those carriers are going to deal with this, we have no idea.

Q911 **Chair:** You would expect those checks to be done by the carriers in Calais rather than by Border Force at the juxtaposed controls.

Lucy Moreton: It would certainly be possible for Border Force at the juxtaposed controls to do it, because it is achieving the same purpose—we are checking that they have a negative test before they arrive in the UK. Of course, however, the juxtaposed locations have officers physically present only in three ports, so for everyone who goes through Le Havre or Saint-Malo—anywhere that is not Calais, Coquelles, Dunkirk—there will not be someone there to make that check.

Q912 **Chair:** A final question to Lucy Moreton: are there any other reforms that your members would like to see?

Lucy Moreton: As many other specialists have reflected already, it is not so much about changing the rules that we have, but enforcing the rules that we have. There is no sense in bringing in any restriction that cannot then be adequately policed.

I know it has been a massive disappointment to Border Force staff, who are key workers and have been in work throughout—you cannot remotely handle a border control; they have had to be there—that they are being asked to do something that they know is not practically enforceable. If someone is going to vanish into the UK, they are going to vanish into the UK. The idea of testing before and testing after, and the idea that the experts have just mooted, which is potentially very positive, about isolating people in a more secured manner as other countries do, will go a long way to reassure Border Force staff that the role that they play in protecting UK national security is valued. They are clearly not there as virus police particularly—they are there for other national security concerns—but they take their job very seriously and they want to do a good job. It is saddening when the job that they do is, to all intents and purposes, impracticable.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence and for your patience that the session has slightly overrun. We are very grateful for your time. Thank you Lucy Moreton, Professor Wilder-Smith and Professor Edmunds. We are grateful for the work that all of you are doing in the hugely challenging fight against Covid at the moment. Thank you very much for your time. That ends our evidence session today.