

## **Written evidence submitted by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (COR0098)**

### **1. Introduction:**

- 1.1. This submission is made by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), on behalf of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales, regarding their views on the twelve Terms of Reference outlined by the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry 'Home Office preparations for and response to Covid-19'.
- 1.2. While this response has been developed with the input of PCCs, it does not seek to reflect the views of all APCC members; PCCs have additionally been made aware of the Inquiry and have been invited to contribute individual submissions.

### **2. Preamble:**

- 2.1. The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) is the national body put in place to support Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and a number of other policing governance bodies, such as the British Transport Police Authority. The APCC enables PCCs to develop common policy positions and influence change at a national level, whilst providing advice and /guidance about implementation at a local level.
- 2.2. Listed below, are the key points raised by PCCs in response to the twelve Terms of Reference of the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry, 'Home Office preparations for and response to Covid-19'.

### **3. How police and fire and rescue service business continuity plans are being designed to best safeguard the public and emergency service workers**

- 3.1. It is understood that Business Continuity Plans are being designed around reductions of 10%, 20%, 30% and relevant consequences. These are under constant review. Currently, forces are finding that absences are sitting at or below 10%; with isolation proving to be the biggest challenge to figures, not illness.
- 3.2. PCCs are maintaining regular engagement with their Chief Constable during this period and there is increased scrutiny of call volume and crimes/incidents linked to COVID-19 to understand the current demand on forces.
- 3.3. Technology is also providing additional challenge to business continuity as forces must have the infrastructure in place to mobilise IT and facilitate mobile working. For instance, some forces use internal systems which cannot be accessed at home; these are sometimes used for engagement with Local Resilience Forums.
- 3.4. There have been some challenges regarding the provision of appropriate PPE for police officers and staff although these have now started to be resolved. The introduction of limited testing of police officers over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend is welcomed however PCCs are clear that the frequency and volume of testing for police officers and staff must increase to enable them to continue to deliver essential services to our communities

### **4. What trade-offs will have to be made by police if a significant number of officers are unable to work at any given time, and the potential impact of those decisions**

- 4.1. To date, the police have not had to make any significant trade-off decisions with the service remaining resilient despite some officer and staff figures decreasing as a result of Covid-19. It is likely that the 20% decrease in some crime types may be reducing some demand although policing is having to deploy significant resource into additional public engagement

and reassurance activity during this challenging period which may balance this out. Nevertheless, further data is necessary to identify crime per officer rates to better understand police demand during this period. The public are also reporting increased visibility of officers.

- 4.2. As has been the consistent message from policing, the focus during this period is prevention rather than enforcement which will only be used if necessary. There are however still arrests taking place in BAU police activity and the reduced operations within courts is providing some challenge to the police as cases are not being taken forward. This delay is likely to have a significant impact on victims.
- 4.3. As an example of managing priorities, in conjunction with the National Police Chiefs Council, West Yorkshire Police have identified the below critical functions to be maintained

<b>1</b>	<b>Maintaining public order</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Handling and responding to emergency calls</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Command and control</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Managing major and critical incidents (inc. terrorism)</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Maintaining CJS processes (inc. custody)</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Recording and investigating serious crime</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Neighbourhood and consequence management</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Maintaining traffic management (roads policing)</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Handling and responding to non-emergency calls</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Maintaining back office support</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Training*</b>

throughout the operation:

- 4.4. Furthermore, evidence from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) suggests that call response performance does not appear to have been negatively impacted by Covid-19. As of the end of March 2020 the MPS responded to 85.3% of 'immediate' calls within 15mins. This is very close to performance in previous years (2017: 85.9%; 2018: 86.5%; 2019: 85.2%).
- 4.5. In Dyfed Powys, some PCC office staff members have been deployed to support the Force in certain areas such as the Force Command Centre (FCC). Like with every other force, Dyfed-Powys has seen a significant increase in the number of calls and enquiries for information in relation to COVID-19 and so a team is being set up to support the FCC to respond to such enquiries.

## 5. How the Home Office and its major contractors are working together to ensure the safe and effective operation of contracted services is maintained, particularly where these services affect vulnerable people

5.1. Ensuring that access to key support services is maintained and victims still have safe and accessible channels available to them to report crime during this pandemic is vital. PCCs are delivering consistent and proactive messaging to victims in their communities to reassure them that services are still available and have demonstrated a number of initiatives to ensure the safe and effective operations of valuable services is maintained during this period. A selection of specific examples are included below as evidence:

### 5.1.1. Online support increased

- Victim Support's new online support resource 'My Support Space' has received backing and funding from a number of PCCs. The resource helps victims of crime to manage the impact crime has had on them. It provides a free, safe and confidential space, including a 24/7 live chat facility, where people can choose how they want to be supported after crime.
- Other victim support services are delivering their usual phone-based counselling services and where appropriate, face-to-face appointments are being arranged via Skype and video-links.

### 5.1.2. Digital communications

- PCCs have developed communication strategies to deliver key messages across the country, using various digital media platforms.
- Durham's Acting PCC Steve White has been providing targeted communications around different victim services; this week the Durham OPCVC focused on the silent messaging solution and is highlighting the scam and fraud side also.

### 5.1.3. Support networks

- Lancashire PCC Clive Grunshaw has set up networks to join together local communities and support them through the coronavirus pandemic by signposting vulnerable individuals to volunteer support and encouraging groups or organisations to register to provide services.

### 5.1.4. Prompt payment of invoices

- Cumbria PCC Peter McCall has committed to paying supplier invoices quicker than the agreed terms. Quicker payments will help businesses' cashflow, reducing stress over payments.

### 5.1.5. Specialised funds for community, voluntary and civil society groups

- Working with London Funders and the City Bridge Trust, the Mayor has pledged £1m investment to an emergency fund for civil society groups affected by the coronavirus.
- Northumbria PCC, Kim McGuinness, announced she will bring forward her annual £200,000 Community Fund to help local charities and community groups continue vital work impacted by the current crisis. Her office will take applications for grants of up to £5K, particularly to help people at risk of domestic abuse and organisations helping young people experiencing abuse, neglect or the impacts of poverty, now the stability and support of schools has been taken away.
- Surrey PCC David Munro has also made emergency funds available to help ensure the continuation of key services affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

#### 5.1.6. Flexible approaches

- Leicestershire PCC, Lord Willy Bach has encouraged services and projects he commissions to divert some of their existing resources towards alternative work, which will help respond to Covid-19.

### 6. Whether Border Force is sufficiently equipped to deliver any additional functions required of it during a period of heightened vigilance, and with reduced staffing

6.1. We do not have sufficient evidence to comment on this.

### 7. How Police forces will support each other if mobilisation tactics, or other forms of mutual support, are compromised by the imperative to limit the possible spread of the virus

- 7.1. Broadly, forces are not currently at a stage where mutual aid is required as each is responding well with the crisis. However, we know that arrangements are in place through NPoCC for mutual aid to be mobilised should it be required. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the fragility of the Criminal Justice System is felt to present a current and future risk to policing, both in coping with cases currently in the system and the potential increase in new cases that are likely to come forward once lock-down arrangements are eased. Forward planning should be commenced now to consider the impact of courts currently not operating, prisons releasing offenders back into the community and police officers continuing with day-to-day arrests.
- 7.2. In Wales specifically, it is felt that the strong relationship and good track record of collaboration between the four forces would enable mutual aid to be provided, if required.

### 8. The preparedness of forces to support Local Resilience Forums during a possible civil contingencies emergency

- 8.1. PCCs have a key role to play in Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) however there are indications that the representation of PCCs and OPCCs at LRF meetings and the nature of their involvement varies considerably. PCCs want and need to have an active presence on LRFs, often represented through their Chief Executive, and where this is the case, it ensures that PCCs are able to be closely involved in key strategic planning and co-ordination arrangements taking place across emergency services and local authorities in response to Covid-19. However, there are examples of where there has been resistance to PCC engagement which is causing concerns. The APCC is currently undertaking further work to map out PCC engagement with LRFs and other local COVID-19 forums, which we will be pleased to share with the HASC. We welcome further debate about role, effectiveness and membership of LRFs going forward.
- 8.2. A particularly positive case is that of Nottinghamshire PCC where the force operates a Gold structure which enables the OPCC to feed into the LRF on various issues; recently these have included issues around tagging of early release offenders, and concerns from specific faith groups around burial/cremation of COVID-19 victims. Also, the OPCC receives demand/absence data from the LRFs which has proved useful for continuity planning during the crisis.
- 8.3. PCCs also play a significant role in engaging with the voluntary sector and key community services such as victim support, offender management and substance misuse support. The PCC and their office can help mobilise these services to ensure the best is being got out of them.

## 9. The effectiveness of Home Office communications to its partners, responders and the wider public about its preparations

9.1. A number of concerns have been raised by PCCs regarding the consistency of government advice during this crisis:

- APCC Hate Crime Lead Hardyal Dhindsa has recently submitted a letter to the Policing Minister regarding consistent communication of intolerance of hate crime during this period. It included a request for a public statement that targeting individuals for abuse in relation to coronavirus because of their race, religion or any other protected characteristic is unacceptable; that victims who have been targeted for abuse should report to the police and that the police will continue to investigate hate crimes and incidents thoroughly during this time.
- Guidance on PPE has varied, with differences between that released by HSE and PHE. For instance, the advice around whether both officers in double crewing cars are required to wear masks is not consistent across both these documents. This is causing anxiety amongst officers.
- Possible remediation of additional costs incurred during the crisis is currently undetermined. APCC Finance Leads are in conversation with the Home Office about increased costs, and work is underway with the Home Office to produce a bid for funding from the Treasury (which takes into account these extra costs). This work is in the early stages and PCCs are feeding in.
- A weekly phone call with the Policing Minister has provided a useful arena for PCCs to raise concerns and seek clarity on issues.

***And specifically, in relation to issues of domestic abuse and risks of harm within the home:***

## 10. The prevalence of these issues since the Government issued 'stay at home' guidance on 23 March

10.1. As reported by the National Police Chiefs' Council, the current Coronavirus situation has led to a significant reduction of recorded crime across the country. Whilst the level of reported domestic incidents is anticipated to have only increased by approximately 3% to date, PCCs are mindful that this artificial picture is masked by the current unprecedented situation. Evidence from other countries experiencing lockdown shows that one of the impacts of confining people to their homes is an increase in DA and VAWG. Domestic abuse charity Refuge has seen online traffic to its National Domestic Abuse Helpline website rise by 700%. Whilst official police figures are yet to increase, action should be taken ahead of the inevitable rise, as any delay to do would could mean a lost opportunity to protect people. Preparations to deal with this increase should be stepped up now.

## 11. Measures or proposals to help support victims of domestic abuse and child abuse at this time

11.1. Whilst the recent Home Office announcement of an additional £2m funding for a new domestic abuse support campaign is welcome, PCCs have also been working closely with their Chief Constables and commissioning partners to keep victims safe and adapting the ways in which support is offered. PCCs are responsible for commissioning the majority of local support services for victims of crime and there are numerous positive examples of pragmatic and flexible work continuing during this time to help the public. Some examples include:

- Avon and Somerset PCC Sue Mountstevens, Devon and Cornwall PCC Alison Hernandez, and Dorset PCC Martyn Underhill, for example, have launched campaigns on digital/social media to raise awareness that domestic abuse may increase during lockdown, but help is still available.
  - The Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Sophie Linden, is working with charity partners and others to ensure suitable accommodation for women fleeing violence, those at risk of violence and perpetrators.
  - North Yorkshire PFCC Julia Mulligan is working with her commissioned domestic abuse service, IDAS, to offer more innovative ways for victims to access support and advice at home, including extending the Live Chat service to get discrete help and advice when they may not be able to make a private phone call. The Live Chat service is also offering online video calls, messaging services, telephone and email support.
  - Greater Manchester Combined Authority Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Beverley Hughes has circulated guidance for domestic abuse to all GPs and domestic violence coordinators. Also, a weekly victims' services reassurance and resilience forum has been established to enable organisations to flag any concerns and issues. This has representations from domestic abuse organisations.
- 11.2. Support services across the country have moved from face to face support to telephone and online only.
- 11.3. Sussex PCC Katy Bourne OBE has reported that this has not been an easy transition with several services operating on a very tight budget and having enough technology to provide all staff with mobile work has been a challenge. Furthermore, there is a concern over the increased complexity of domestic abuse cases that are being worked via helplines. The average call prior to stay at home measures would take around 20 minutes however these are now taking an hour or more.
- 11.4. Additionally, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference, a meeting where agencies talk about the risk of future harm to people experiencing domestic abuse and draw up an action plan, has seen a significant increase in the number of repeat cases than is usual, even though the same number of cases are being heard. This suggests that stay at home measures may be escalating domestic abuse more quickly.

## 12. Measures or proposals to reduce or avert domestic abuse and child abuse at this time

- 12.1. As noted above, PCCs are implementing new and innovative measures to communicate the increased risk of domestic abuse and child abuse during lockdown and supporting services to move towards virtual engagement.
- 12.2. In terms of specific prevention or reduction measures, this centres around increased information and messages of zero-tolerance of this type of offence. Also, some forces are looking into increasing provision of temporary accommodation for perpetrators for longer periods in order to provide respite for victims and their families.
- 12.3. In Gwent, PCC Jeff Cuthbert reports that Gwent Police are looking at various systems including MARAC, Operation Encompass and offender profiles to try and identify vulnerable victims that are not currently making contact or reporting but could reasonably be at risk. For those victims local policing teams are trying to undertake observations of their homes while on targeted patrols. Moreover, Gwent OPCC is working with its regional Safeguarding Board and Welsh Government to consider how it can further support children at this time.
- 12.4. Some local services have fed back that the national communications on domestic abuse and signposting to national helplines is counterproductive. There is some concern that local figures may have dropped as people are instead accessing the national helpline. Whilst any

support is better than none, this is of concern as these national helplines only provide one off support and do not refer into local longer-term provision.

### 13. Preparedness of responders and service providers to address the needs of victims during the pandemic

13.1. On the whole services have been able to adapt, making rapid and appropriate adjustments to address the needs of victims. However, there are still some areas of challenge which need to be addressed:

- Refuge provision is outstripped by demand meaning hundreds of women and children are unable to access it.
- Some services do not have sufficient technology for staff to meet the increased demand.
- The most vulnerable are likely to need longer support than under normal circumstances as a result of the additional anxiety and pressure created by the stay at home measures.
- There is an increased risk of children being open to more exploitation online as they are likely to have access to online devices more frequently during this period.
- Safeguarding is compromised during this time for a few reasons:
  - o Safeguarding meetings are being held virtually and whilst the professionals may have access to the right technology to support discussions the parents/carers may not which will inhibit their ability to engage.
  - o The important role of schools in safeguarding children through surveillance and referrals is currently reduced; there is a risk that children may be falling through the net.
  - o The closure of schools may lead to an increase in child neglect cases. Schools can be the only provider of food and nourishment for some children and can provide key access to safeguarding such as school officers and teachers. In addition, there is concern that although children who are being supported through statutory social care have been allocated school places during lockdown, not all parents/carers are ensuring that their children attend, raising questions about increased vulnerability at home.

### 14. The effectiveness of Government advice, co-ordination and support for responders and service providers

14.1. At times, communications and guidance in this area is felt to have been slow and uncoordinated. A cross-government approach with a centralised team to address concerns and provide targeted advice would be welcome. Currently, different departments are responsible for different elements of the domestic and child abuse response, and it is felt that individual forces at local level must determine who they should be engaging with.

14.2. Also, more specifically, the threshold for key worker status set by the Government has resulted in specialist third sector practitioners working in fields such as child sexual exploitation no longer being able to provide 1:1 face-to-face support. This comes at a time when the online and familial risk to young people is unprecedented.