

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR LEICESTERSHIRE ETHICS, INTEGRITY AND COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

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Report of	OFFICE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER
Subject	LEICESTERSHIRE POLICE RESPONSE TO COVID19
Date	FRIDAY 15 JUNE 2020 – 2:00 p.m.
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Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information on Leicestershire Police's operational and organisational response to the COVID19 pandemic.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the Committee discuss and note the content of the report.
3. It is recommended that the Committee recognises the significant efforts that have been made throughout these extraordinary times to adapt to the requirements of the pandemic and to maintain policing services within our communities of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

Background

4. The COVID19 pandemic is a worldwide health emergency.
5. In February 2020 it was recognised nationally and locally that the spread of the disease could have a major impact on local communities, and on our ability to provide policing services.
6. At a national level, governance arrangements were implemented through National Police Chiefs' Council under Operation Talla. This was to promote a coordinated and consistent policing response wherever possible.
7. It is worthy of note that the pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for our communities and our officers and staff. We have been required to react, at often very little notice, to significant developments. These have included the closure of schools, licensed premises and shops and the introduction of significant new legislation, whilst many of our staff have moved to working remotely from home. The challenges have been significant and varied. The ability and willingness of our staff to respond and adapt to these challenges has been most impressive.
8. It is also worthy of note that the requirement to respond to the pandemic coincided almost exactly with the launch of a new Target Operating Model that went "live" on 11 March 2020. This model in effect had returned many resources to a local neighbourhood-based footprint.

We would always expect a period of potential instability when implementing a new operating model and so this provided an additional element to consider throughout our response to COVID19.

Partnership Response – Local Resilience Forum (LRF)

9. Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Leicestershire Police are a Category 1 core responder. The Chief Constable Chairs the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). The LRF's aim is to plan and prepare for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies. They work to identify potential risks and produce emergency plans to either prevent or mitigate the impact of any incident on their local communities.
10. Within the local partnership arena, a Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Strategic Coordination Group was established, initially chaired by the Director of Public Health for Leicestershire and Rutland. It met for the first time on 13 February 2020.
11. As the pandemic developed, its impact locally was declared a major event due to the anticipated impact across a number of sectors. As is often the case under such conditions, the Police (DCC Nixon) assumed the Chair of the Strategic Coordination Group. C/Supt Ball assumed Chair of the Tactical Coordination Group that is responsible for implementation of the tactical plans.

Internal Response

12. The internal Police response to the pandemic has been governed through a Gold Group that was first established on 3 March 2020, led by T/ACC Smith.
13. A weekly police regional group was also established to provide a forum for regional Gold Commanders to discuss and agree wherever possible a consistent approach, and to escalate issues as necessary to the national Operation Talla.
14. Leicestershire Gold adopted a strategy with key strategic objectives. These are:

Strategic Aim

To preserve life and protect the public by working in partnership with Public Health and other agencies to provide a coordinated response to contain cases of infection; delay the onset of cases; mitigate the impact of cases on the communities; and plan for recovery. In order to do this, we will deliver on the following 10 objectives:

Objectives

1. *Preserve life, protect the public by assisting Public Health to contain, delay, and mitigate the spread of the virus.*
2. *Protect the health, safety and Wellbeing of Police Officers and Police Staff, including the provision of and guidance on using personal protective equipment.*
3. *Take steps to delay the onset of infection within the organisation.*
4. *Ensure Business Continuity plans prioritise the functions of the Police to ensure that critical services continue now and in the future during times of significant staff absences.*
5. *Reassure and inform the public by supporting Public Health guidance and Public Health messages through joint communications*
6. *Ensure that community tension and intelligence/information are managed through application of the national intelligence model.*
7. *Support Local Resilience partner agencies and local communities to mitigate the impacts of the virus.*
8. *To maintain the rule of law and preserve order and to support national and regional policing operations where required.*

9. *Plan for recovery from the outbreak and return the organisation and communities to a new normality as soon as practicable*
10. *To maintain public trust and confidence.*

13. The Gold group has been meeting regularly and has closely monitored the impact of the pandemic. A Silver group, led by Supt Potter, has been responsible for implementing the plan to achieve the Gold objectives.

14. The OPCC has been represented on both Gold and Silver groups throughout.

Key Issues and Challenges

15. The challenges presented by responding to the COVID19 pandemic are numerous and ongoing. Some key issues of note include:

- Managing Absence - At an early stage, we recognised that the pandemic may have a significant impact on availability of resource and therefore our ability to provide a policing service. We swiftly developed a resourcing cell to provide detailed oversight of resourcing levels across all parts of the force throughout the day. This has enabled us to recognise and respond to areas of vulnerability. We developed sophisticated service resilience plans to maintain prioritised service dependent on resourcing numbers. Where resource numbers fell, we took measures to enact contingency plans. An example is that we have temporarily closed one of our three custody suites (Beaumont Leys). The volume of detained people has been reduced over the period and, as a result, we have been capable of managing by staffing just two of our custody suites. In all areas of business, our operational resilience has been maintained throughout.
- Remote Working - Clearly, many frontline policing services require people to be physically attending the workplace. Others are capable of being delivered by people working remotely and there has been a clear direction from the Government to work from home wherever possible. Within Leicestershire, we were in a strong position to enable this due to the investment that we have previously made in our IT infrastructure. We rented additional laptops and have introduced digital methods of working wherever possible to enable this. This has included taking digital witness statements from victims and witnesses so that in appropriate cases they can be taken over the telephone. Business meetings via Skype have become the norm and have proven to be an effective and efficient solution in response to current restrictions.
- Maintaining Core Business - Our strategic objectives include the requirement to maintain critical areas of business, as well as to maintain law and order. A weekly performance meeting was introduced to manage performance in three key areas:
 1. Dealing with incoming demand (calls / emails)
 2. Responding to priority incidents
 3. Investigating criminal matters

The type of demand has varied throughout the period. Traditional crime demand has fallen with significant decreases in serious violent crime (reduced by around 50% compared with the same four week period in 2019) and as well as burglary (reduced by 48%). Domestic abuse incidents have increased slightly. We have been able to respond to these changes, and to maintain our effective operational response. Our response to 999 calls and to emergency incidents has remained excellent throughout and response times have consistently been better than pre the new Target Operating Model.

It is worthy of note that throughout the period we have been faced with serious and major crime investigations, including murder. We have maintained our collective ability to

mobilise regional resources through East Midlands Specialist Operations Unit and we have retained our very high standard of service delivery in these cases.

Throughout the period, as would be expected, there has been a marked drop in demand associated with the Night Time Economy, thereby releasing significant resource for alternative policing activity. This is subject to ongoing evaluation so that we might see what opportunities this presents for the future.

One of the main challenges of maintaining services has been associated with the wider Criminal Justice system. These are national issues that involve the accumulation of a backlog of cases as courts have been closed. We continue to work closely with our Criminal Justice colleagues to resolve these matters. Some proposed solutions have significant resourcing implications for policing (such as the use of Virtual Courts by default) and as such discussions remain ongoing.

- New Business and Public Expectation - It has been necessary to respond to new business associated with the implementation of COVID-related legislation. This has generated significant additional demand as the public contact us to report breaches of regulations. Peaks in reporting have been particularly pronounced where the weather has been fine. Nationally, the Single Online Home website was amended to provide specific COVID-related reporting. This is likely to have taken some burden from the non-emergency 101 telephone number. Overall we are dealing with on average over 1000 COVID-related incidents per week. This is additional demand that more than balances out the reduction in traditional crime and traffic incident demand.

In order to inform our understanding of public expectation, we undertook a survey of over 1000 existing contacts on Neighbourhood Link. We asked them whether they felt that we should deal with COVID reports as a priority over other matters. The result was a fairly even split – a third saying definitely not, just less than a third saying that we should and the rest not sure. Over 80% felt that we were doing a good or excellent job in responding. The varied public support for police action in these matters demonstrates the fine balance to be achieved in policing this new and changing legislation.

We have been very mindful of the wider community impact and community confidence associated with the new legislation and have followed the “4 E” approach – to engage, explain and educate. Enforcement has been undertaken as a last resort. The emergency legislation allows for us to issue Fixed Penalty Notices as a means to enforce where people are not complying with restrictions. To date we have issued over 400 Fixed Penalty Notices. In comparison with other forces nationally, this is around average numbers. Around two thirds of these have been issued to people in breach of the prohibition of movement. We are monitoring the allocation of Fixed Penalty Notices across the Force area to assure ourselves that we are applying the legislation in the intended way. Since the easing of some restrictions around movement that was announced on 10 May and implemented on 13 May, we have seen a significant reduction in the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued.

In the early stages of the partnership response to COVID19, our existing provision for mental health was amended in order to support the wider health response to the crisis. Mental health nurses were withdrawn from custody suites, and our operational hours for our Triage car and the partnership PAVE team were extended. We experienced a very significant increase in contact from service users whose normal access to services had been disrupted. In April, the Leicestershire Partnership Trust implemented the Central Access Point (CAP) - this provides a 24/7 point of contact for people in crisis and forms the basis for the future service modelling. Whilst mental health-related demand remains higher than average, it has started to reduce as we see more people accessing CAP.

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Testing and Staff Confidence - As the pandemic has developed, our response to the requirement for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been consistent with that recommended by the national Op Talla team, in line with Public Health England guidance. It has been important to provide officers and staff confidence that we are acting on the national advice as it develops. Unison and the Police Federation have been fully engaged with these discussions throughout. Through proactive procurement, we have ensured that we have maintained a level of PPE throughout.

Testing for key workers (or members of their households) who are displaying COVID19 symptoms became available in April. In response to this, over 100 police officers / staff have been tested, along with over 50 household members. There have been 21 positive tests. Very few individuals have required hospital treatment.

As medical knowledge around the virus is developing, issues have been raised associated with additional risk factors for individuals. These include risk factors associated with being from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, as well as other factors such as gender (male), obesity, hypertension and other underlying health conditions. Whilst none of these factors have to date been included in Public Health England guidance, we are developing a risk assessment tool to assist in assessing future deployments. We will continue to respond to emerging evidence and recommendations.

- Financial impact

At the time of writing, the force has incurred unbudgeted costs totalling **£829k**. This includes:

- a) Direct costs – for example the purchase of PPE (£287k) and IT costs (149k)
- b) Income reduction costs - including reduction in income for events and for airport policing totalling £281k.

We continue to collate these costs and to return submissions to the Home Office who have indicated that unbudgeted costs will be reimbursed to Forces, however this is still to be confirmed.

Opportunities

16. We recognise that the pandemic has driven changes in working practices that may present opportunities going forward. As we move towards Recovery, we will be seeking to maximise on those opportunities. We are keen to extend our ability to work remotely, making best use of digital technology where possible. We also want to understand how we might work with partners to maintain the reduction in demand in some areas – such as the Night Time Economy, and to ensure that a “return to normality” does not simply accept a return to the previous status quo.
17. A Recovery Cell, led by T/ACC Smith, has been established to collate all such issues and to identify opportunities for incorporating best practice learnt into ongoing business delivery.

Implications

Financial: As Above

Legal: No implications

Equality Impact Assessment: None

Risks and Impact: None connected to the report. Separate Risk Register for Gold

Link to Police and Crime Plan:

Person to Contact: ACC Julia Debenham