

**Police and Crime Panel  
Extraordinary Report on COVID-19  
4<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the South Wales Police response to policing the COVID-19 national emergency. This report reflects part of significant ongoing activity by South Wales Police and subsequent Commissioner oversight.

**States of Policing**

South Wales Police submitted to the Commissioner's Strategic Board on 02 April 2020, a policy which sets out five states of potential impact COVID-19 may have on the workforce abstraction rate and the potential action which could be taken at each state to ensure the force continues to fulfil its strategic obligations.

Since the COVID-19 challenge began the force has remained, and continues to remain, in a steady '**Green**' state. The highest abstraction rate for officers has been 15.68%, which occurred on 31 March 2020 and the highest abstraction rate for staff has been 18.61%, which occurred on 27 March 2020. As of 1100 hours on Monday 11 May 2020, the abstraction rate was 8.04% for officers and 11.18% for staff, giving an overall force abstraction rate of 9.47%, which is not above average compared to pre-COVID.

**Officer and Staff Welfare**

The virtual Welfare Hub has been in operation for seven weeks bringing together a wide range of resources to provide a co-ordinated and enhanced level of care and support to officers and staff. The inclusion of Occupational Health, HR, Police Federation, Unison and GMB provides an opportunity to quickly highlight, discuss, respond to and problem solve issues or concerns as they arise. The Welfare Hub has responsibility for coordinating testing referrals for all four Welsh forces as well as ensuring that officers and staff who suffer bereavement, trauma or stress because of COVID-19 receive the appropriate support. The Hub also arranges accommodation for frontline officers and staff who require it, in order to shield their families from the risk posed by COVID-19, as well as the distribution of personal protective equipment.

**Testing**

Police officer and staff COVID-19 'Antigen' testing in Wales commenced on 24 March 2020. As of 11 May 2020, 690 tests had been carried out on South Wales police officers and staff and 245 results received (37 positive tests for COVID-19). The testing facility at Cardiff City Stadium continues to meet the forces' testing requirements and there is no limit on how many referrals can be made per day. Tests are, in the main, arranged for the same day that the referral is submitted and results are received within a 24-48 hour period.

On Saturday 02 May 2020, the force commenced a pilot with Public Health Wales to trial officers and staff, in frontline roles, booking their own test via an Amazon portal. The force is leading the way in Wales in regards to this pilot, with plans to roll this out across wider services shortly. Home self-testing kits are also being progressed and are likely to be ready by the end of May. Once

live, officers and staff will be able to request, through the Amazon portal, for a self-testing kit to be delivered to their home address.

All of this is enabling officers and staff, with negative test results, to return to work in a timely fashion, reducing the impact on the workforce and therefore minimising the likelihood of disruption to the service the force delivers to its communities.

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

The correct use of personal protective equipment stocks (PPE) is vital in protecting frontline officers and staff from COVID-19. As such, guidance has been developed, in line with that received from the NPCC, to provide officers and staff with a clear guide of when PPE should be used in what circumstances. South Wales Police PPE stocks remain at a steady level and are continually replenished – at the current consumption to supply rate the force is maintaining stock levels of 1 months supply. The Military have peer-reviewed the force processes in regards to the distribution and monitoring of PPE levels and subsequently assessed them as good. A review is currently underway to review PPE levels in relation to the recovery phase if, and when, restrictions and measures are relaxed and staff start to return to work.

### **Accommodation**

Temporary accommodation for officers and staff who reside with family that are required to ‘shield’ or who have significant underlying conditions has been provided by the force through student accommodation. To date 16 officers and one member of staff have been accommodated using this process, providing support to them and their families whilst also maintaining resource availability.

### **Call Demand**

The number of calls received at the Public Service Centre since 23 March 2020 remains lower than when compared with the same period in 2019, with 27% fewer 999 calls and 5% fewer 101 calls being received. This has resulted in improved call waiting times, with 999 call wait times down by more than half, to 2 seconds, and 101 call wait times down by 85% to 18 seconds.

During the same period over 9,000 COVID-19 related incidents have been reported, of which over 8,600 were recorded as reports of COVID-19 related breaches. This has resulted in a significant increase in Grade 3 ‘Non-Priority’ incidents (those which require officer or PCSO attendance within 8 hours) as evidenced below:

Latest Grade	2019	2020	% Change
1 EMERGENCY	13,612	10,858	-20.20%
2 PRIORITY	11,616	12,776	10.00%
3 NON-PRIORITY	3,921	7,182	83.20%
4 SCHEDULED	11,051	9,092	-17.70%
5 RESOLUTION WITHOUT DEPLOYMENT	10,334	10,340	0.10%

However, it should be noted that whilst overall call volume is down, there have been significant fluctuations in the number of calls being received. For example, on the recent ‘Victory in Europe’ bank holiday (08 May 2020), 62% more 999 calls and 68% more 101 calls were received than when compared with the same date in 2019, equating to 1,216 additional calls.

## **Crime and Vulnerability Mapping**

The volume of crime recorded since 23 March 2020 has decreased by 26% overall but is gradually increasing back toward the level expected for this time of year, as can be seen in Figure 1.

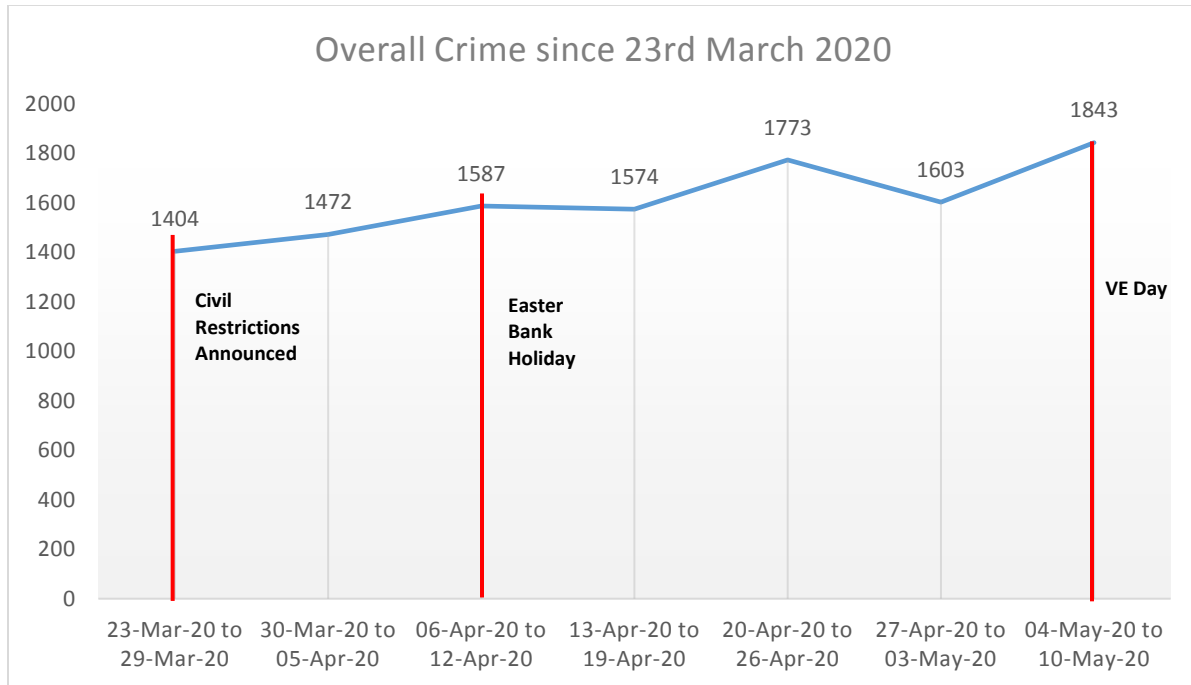


Figure 1 – Crime Levels

In the two weeks immediately prior to 23 March 2020 there was a small increase in the number of business and commercial burglaries being reported. Since that time Neighbourhood Policing Teams and BCU Command Rooms have worked closely with their local communities and businesses to target harden vulnerable premises and provide high visibility policing in areas of concern. As a result the number of business and commercial burglaries reported has steadily declined and remains at 26% less than when compared with the same period in 2019. Other notable decreases in crime types recorded include a 29% reduction in 'Violence with Injury' and 16% reduction in 'Violence without Injury'. However, officers have made over 3,900 arrests during the same period and 'business as usual' continues, with significant serious and complex crime still being reported.

## **Domestic Abuse**

Despite Welsh Women's Aid quoting a 49% increase in the volume of calls to their helplines during April 2020, the overall number of domestic abuse incidents reported to South Wales Police since the pandemic occurred remains 3.7% lower than in the same period in 2019 and domestic abuse crime is also down by 13.5%. However, whilst reporting remains down, figures have been steadily increasing, as is evidenced in Figure 2:

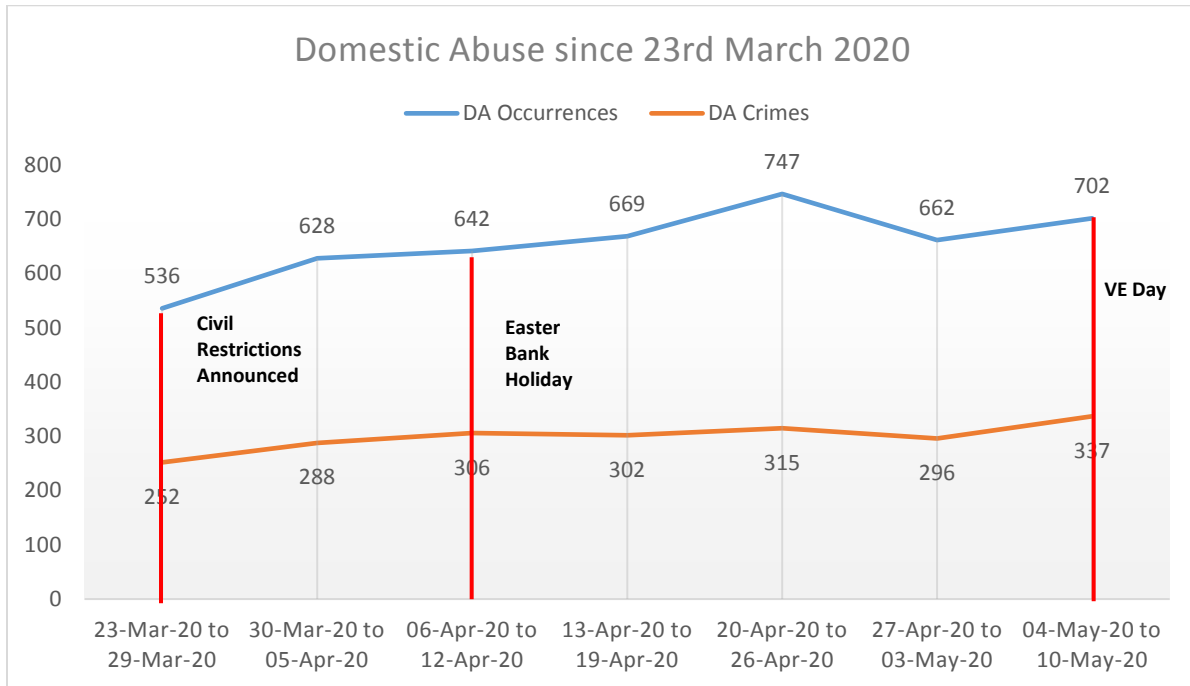


Figure 2: Levels of Domestic Abuse Occurrences and Crimes.

Police and Crime Commissioner Strategic Lead for Victims and Vulnerability Paula Hardy, Detective Superintendent Lewis (Head of Public Protection) and the Silver Command Room continue to monitor domestic abuse incidents on a daily basis, identifying any emerging themes or opportunities to tackle suspected under reporting. Specific consideration has been given to ensuring reassurance-messaging finds those hard-to-reach victims and those in oppressive circumstances at home. Printed media is being distributed by local officers for prominent display in areas of greatest risk, such as supermarkets and pharmacies, and other opportunities to spread the corporate message including social media, leaflet drops and advertising on local authorities' refuse vehicles, continue to be exploited, as is the silent '55' solution.

Where matters are reported normal investigative processes are continuing, as are Clare's Law disclosures and MARAC processes. Her Majesty's Court Services are continuing to hear serious and urgent cases such as remand applications or urgent Domestic Violence Protection Notice applications and the Commissioner is working with the service to explore options to hold remote or 'virtual' hearings. In the absence of a fully functioning court process, key members of the Commissioner's team and the force have begun collaboration with the National Probation Service to respond to managing the caseload of domestic abuse offenders in the community. Both agencies are assessing the risk posed by these individuals and this is being used operationally to review and influence offender management and victim safeguarding strategies, and to raise awareness of high-harm domestic abuse perpetrators. The DRIVE scheme is also continuing, in a modified form, to assist in managing domestic violence perpetrators in our communities.

### Child Protection

South Wales Police recorded 54% fewer crimes against children in April 2020 when compared with the same period in 2019. The force has liaised with NSPCC, Child-Line, MARF and MARAC who have confirmed that they have not seen an increase in the number of referrals to them either.

Operation Encompass is continuing and, in some circumstances, school staff are in daily contact with families (contact level is based on vulnerability of child) and safeguarding leads are made aware of any Operation Encompass referrals that are made because of that contact. There has been a slight increase in the number of Operation Encompass referrals during April 2020.

Child Abuse Investigation Units across the force are currently operating as usual and Child Protection Conferences and Strategy Meetings are continuing with no issues reported.

South Wales Police social media messages to young people are being communicated via 'local YouTubers' with extensive youth audiences. For example, Ben Phillips has 1.8M followers, his message went live on 16 April and so far has been viewed by 52.1k of his followers.

### **Policing Tone and Style**

Officers and staff continue to deal with most incidents of restrictions being breached using the '4-E' Escalation Model.

1. **Engage:** officers will ask whether an individual is aware of the government request; establish individual circumstances and how quickly someone can comply.
2. **Explain:** officers will explain the risks to public health, and to the NHS in line with government guidance.
3. **Encourage:** officers will encourage voluntary compliance with the regulations
4. **Enforce:** if faced with non-compliance, officers will, if necessary and proportionate:
  - direct those without a reasonable excuse to go home, using reasonable force if needed;
  - issue a penalty notice for disorder (PND) of £60, to discourage further non-compliance;
  - use prohibition notices to stop public gatherings which do not comply with Government Regulations.
  - use existing licencing powers where businesses and organisations fail to comply

Between 23 March 2020 and 05 May 2020 13,445 COVID-19 penalty notices were issued across England and Wales. Of the 45 forces (including British Transport Police and Ministry of Defence), South Wales Police was ranked 34<sup>th</sup> when reviewing the number of penalty notices issued in this period, meaning that 33 forces issued more. During the same period, when comparing the number of penalty notices issued up to 05 May 2020 as ratio to population, South Wales Police issued 1 notice per 8,478 members of the population (157). Locally this can be compared to Dyfed Powys Police who issued 1 notice per 1,242 members of the population (417), North Wales Police who issued 1 notice per 4,885 members of the population (143) and Gwent Police, who issued 1 notice per 8,327 members of the population (71).

Between 23 March 2020 and 2359 hours on Sunday 18 May 2020, South Wales Police officers and PCSOs issued 229 sanctions for breaches of the COVID-19 restrictions, this includes penalty notices (179) and arrests (50).

The following common types of incidents have been noted in regards to breaches:

- House parties, and social gatherings at addresses by persons of different households,
- Youths congregating in groups in public places,
- Persons not adhering to government guidance in respect of social distancing and/or essential travel

When dealing with the public, officers continue to be alert to identifying child safeguarding issues, issues of homelessness, and issues linked to domestic abuse, considering appropriate support for these groups and engaging with our partners to ensure they get the safeguarding that they need.

The Communications Cell continue to deliver key messaging to the public and monitor local and national media, through traditional media channels and social media, to identify matters of concerns or opportunities for learning. The Neighbourhood Policing Teams across the force also continue to provide guidance and reassurance to our communities during this challenging period.

### **COMPLAINTS (Between 23 March 2020 and 04 May 2020)**

Between 23 March 2020 and 04 May 2020, 149 complaints were recorded by the Professional Standards Department. This can be compared to 127 received during the same period in 2019 and represents an increase of 22%. However, it is important to note that this follows a significant change to the regulations as outlined in the Police and Crime Act, which came into effect on 01 February 2020, which has expanded the definition of a complaint and given the complainant the right to insist it is recorded, even if the issue can be service recovered.

Of the 149 complaints recorded since civil restrictions were implemented, 33 (22%), relate to COVID-19. This equates to an average of 5.5 COVID-19 complaints per week and a complaint in 0.4% of the 7,772 COVID-19 related incidents reported during this time period.

Common themes of complaints are:

#### **Distancing**

These complaints relate to officers not adhering to social distancing guidance when dealing with the complainant, or officers not wearing PPE. For example:

A complainant was arrested under the Malicious Communications Act and alleged attending officers were trying to deliberately infect him with COVID-19 as one had wounds to their arm. He further went on to deface his cell in Custody.

#### **Isolation 'intrusion'**

These complaints related to officers not taking into account that the complainant is self-isolating / shielding and entering their property. For example:

A PCSO responding to an ASB incident / neighbour dispute was accused of putting the offending party in jeopardy by trying to contact her when she was self-isolating.

#### **Responding to Isolation Breaches**

These complaints relate to reports of COVID-19 breaches not being responded to. For example:

A complainant reported a nearby pub allegedly flouting restriction obligations, which they stated was being ignored by police.

#### **Timeliness**

These reports relate to isolation leading to delays in dealing with current investigations. For example:

A complainant was assaulted at a pub and complained the investigation was delayed, which was due to solicitors not being able to attend as they were in isolation.

Officers and PCSOs continue to adhere to the existing body worn video force policy, enabling the efficient and effective investigation of allegations misconduct or complaints.

## **Recruitment**

Both the Commissioner's Team and the Force are committed to continue with the recruitment and training of officers and staff during this challenging period, adapting training processes to ensure compliance with Government restrictions. The assessment centre scheduled for March 2020 had to be cancelled but Human Resources are working with the College of Policing to design and develop an appropriate assessment centre moving forward, which takes into account social distancing. Early indications from the college is that this will run on an online platform and will be ready for implementation imminently.

There are currently 68 student officers undergoing initial training and, despite the cancellation of the March assessment centre, there are enough candidates for the next three intakes which are scheduled for June, September and December (48 per intake). The aim remains for 349 officers to start their training between now and March 2021, at 13 week intervals. The force will be advertising at the end of June for constables and intakes of Special Constables and PCSO's are also planned during the same period.

Training will be undertaken through pre-recorded lessons, facilitated 'live' sessions through Skype, self-directed learning and tutorials in smaller groups. In addition, our Learning and Development Services Team have amended the order of the officer training programme in order to facilitate the urgent deployment of student officers after 8 weeks training should the situation arise, however this will not be implemented unless absolutely necessary.

## **Special Constabulary**

The extended South Wales Police family includes 155 committed Special Constables who collectively volunteered over 56,000 hours in 2019/20.

It is therefore not a surprise that the contribution of our Special Constables to the policing of the COVID-19 challenge has been remarkable, with over 10,815 hours of voluntary service given between 23 March 2020 and 06 May 2020. This represents an 86% increase when compared with the same period in 2019 and a significant increase in the average hours volunteered each month by Special Constables. This is evidenced below in Figure 3:

Fig 3.

