

Police and Crime Panel - Extraordinary Report on COVID-19 1st June 2021

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a performance update on the force's response to policing the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with changes to the Welsh Government's restrictions. This report covers performance during the period of 23rd March 2020 to 7th March 2021, with a focus on the period from 26th December 2020 onwards.

Call Demand

The number of calls received at the Public Service Centre from 23rd March 2020 to 7rd March 2021 was lower than in the same period in 2019/20, with 9% fewer emergency calls and 4% fewer non-emergency calls. However, average wait times for emergency calls have increased from 4 seconds to 6 seconds and for non-emergency calls have increased from 92 seconds to 100 seconds. Throughout the week calls have been concentrated between 1500hrs-1900hrs, however when it comes to the weekend there is a shift towards the evening, with the highest volume of calls focused on Saturday nights from 1600hrs-0000hrs.

For the period 3rd Jan – 7th March 2021 the Public Service Centre received 9% fewer calls than the same period in 2020, as well as 12% fewer non-emergency calls. The average wait time for emergency calls for this time period increased from 4 seconds in 2020 to 8 seconds in 2021, also non-emergency call wait time has increased from 45 seconds in 2020 to 153 seconds in 2021. For this period, calls are concentrated at weekends. On average from 1700hrs on Saturdays calls pick up to a peak at 2300hrs before dropping off through the early hours of the morning. Sunday averages show a peak from 0000hrs – 0300hrs and higher volumes between 1200hrs – 1600hrs.

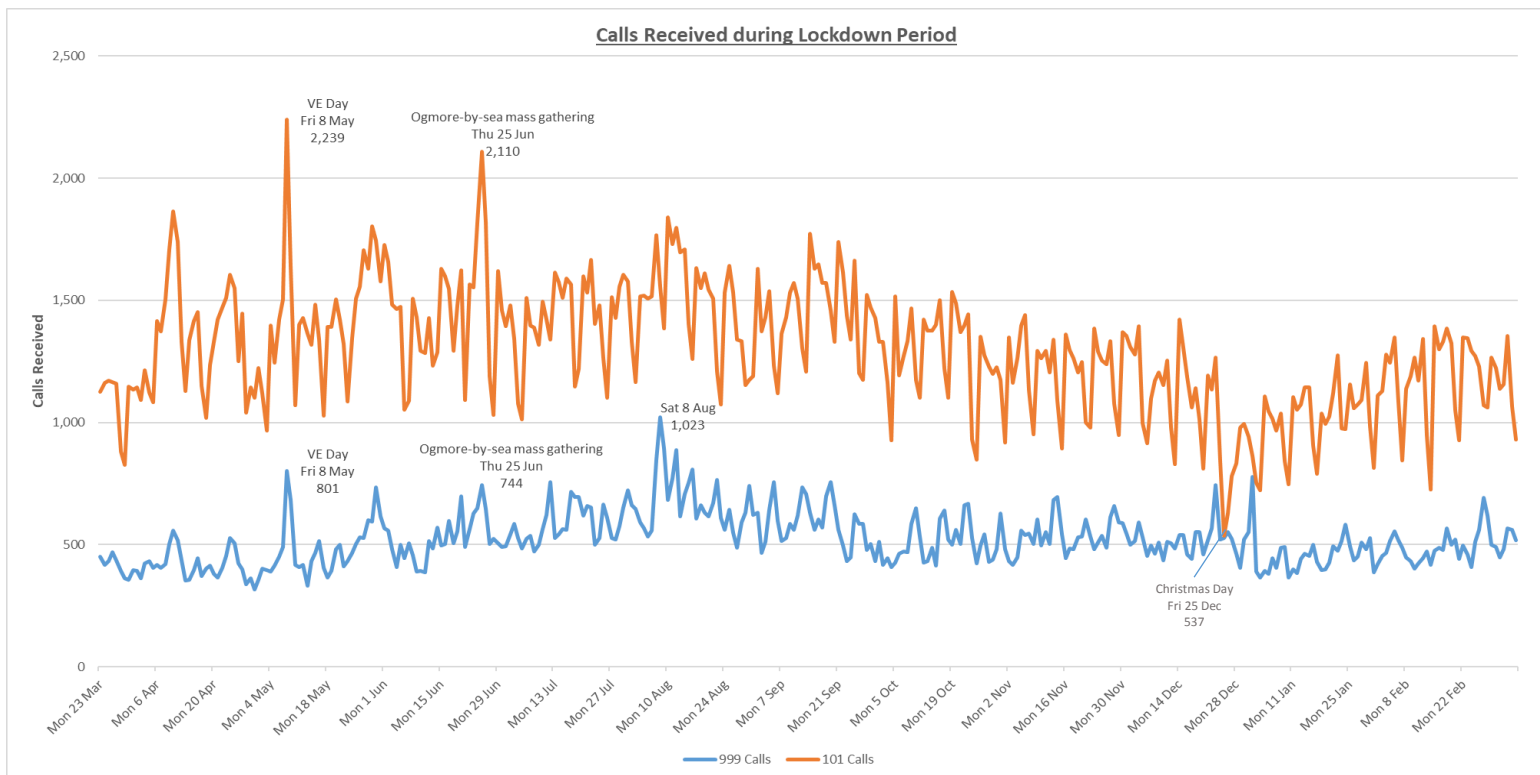


Figure 1

COVID-19 Related Occurrences (23rd March 2020 to 7th March 2021)

Under Home Office recording rules, any incidents which related to a potential breach of the COVID-19 Regulations were categorised as Environmental ASB.

Figure 2 below maps COVID-19 incidents across this period, providing a breakdown of incidents across BCU geographic areas, and details of the nature of the incidents, such as Antisocial Behaviour, Public Safety and Crime.

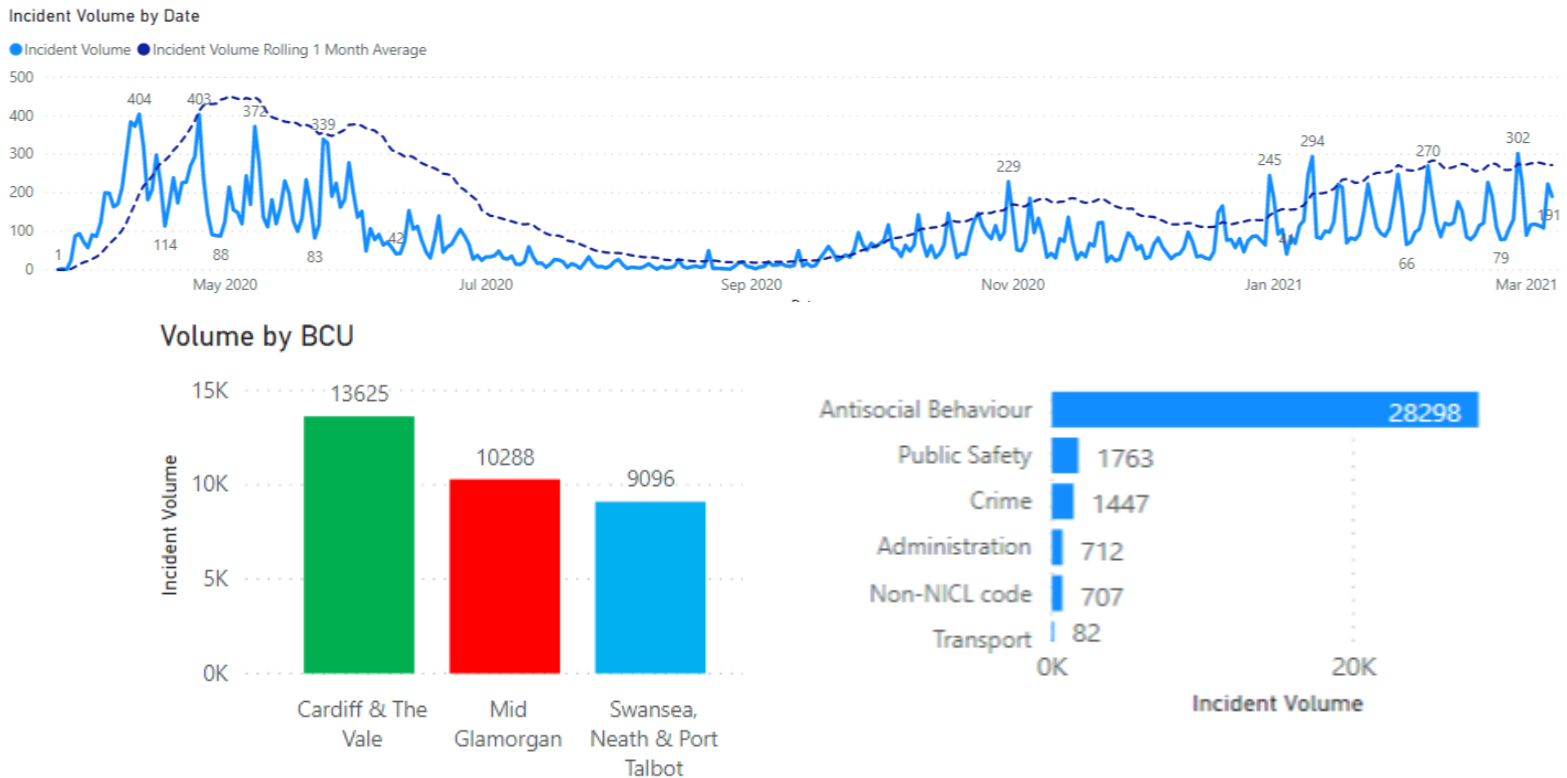


Figure 2

During the 49 week period from the start of the lock down on 23rd March 2020 to 7th March 2021, the force recorded 33,009 incidents relating to COVID-19 with the majority being related to potential breaches of the regulations. Of these, 28,298 were categorised as Antisocial Behaviour. The largest proportion of these occurrences (41.3%) was reported in Cardiff & the Vale, while Swansea, Neath & Port Talbot has seen the least (27.6%). The highest peak still remains over Easter weekend of 2020, where 404 incidents were reported on Saturday 11th April. From June there was a downwards trend and incident volumes remained low throughout the summer. Incidents began to rise upon the introduction of local lockdowns in September, peaking at 229 in early November in the Halloween weekend (within the firebreak lockdown). The incident volume dropped through December, as rules were relaxed before rising again and maintaining high levels throughout 2021 during the most recent national lockdown.

The following analysis illustrates the impact of the varying Government restrictions on COVID-19 Occurrence demand.

National Lockdown [26th December 2020 – 7th March 2021]

The Welsh Government announced that Wales would enter Lockdown on 20th December, however there was a brief relaxation of the rules on Christmas day. Then the lockdown recommenced on the 26th December. Up to 7th March there were then 9,541 COVID-19 related incidents. 42% of these were within Cardiff and The Vale, Mid Glamorgan had 30% and Swansea, Neath and Port Talbot 28%. Similar to previous periods, Cathays was the sector with the most COVID-19 related incidents at 813, followed by City [582], Neath and Pontardawe [557], Barry [474] and Merthyr [464].

Despite being in lockdown, there were still clear peaks of COVID-19 related incidents on weekends, concentrated on Saturday evenings from 5pm-12am, with very high numbers from 7pm onwards. For example, 24% of incidents for this time period have occurred on a Saturday. The daily average of COVID-19 related incidents for this period is 133, a considerable increase when compared to 10th November 2020 – 3 January 2021, which only saw 48 incidents per day.

During this period 2,342 fixed penalty notices were issued across the Force. 45% of these were issued within Cardiff and The Vale, 28% in Mid Glamorgan and 25% in Swansea, Neath and Port Talbot. Of these fixed penalty notices 1,725 were issued due to indoor gatherings, 296 due to movement and 251 linked to outdoor gatherings. These three regulation groups saw by far the highest volumes of fixed penalty notices, as all others have 6 or less occurrences.

It is predicted that lockdown measures will be slowly and cautiously lifted around the Easter period. This is linked to the reopening of the tourism industry, as well as all school aged children returning to school prior to the Easter break.

COVID-19 Regulation Enforcement

Between 23rd March 2020 and 7th March 2021, the force issued 3,571 fixed penalty notices. Of the BCUs, Swansea, Neath & Port Talbot BCU saw the fewest (24%) and Cardiff and the Vale the most (46%). The first peak for fixed penalty notices being issued occurred in the week of 4th May, which corresponds with the week of VE Day. The number of fixed penalty notices peaked again on 11th November with 28 Fixed Penalty Notices then the trend dropped off as rules were eased as the firebreak lockdown ended. Over Christmas, volumes of fixed penalty notices remained high and increased throughout the most recent national lockdown with a peak of 156 on 6th February. Numbers have begun to drop off through the end of February and into March.

Nationally, there has been a focus on whether COVID-19 regulation enforcement has disproportionately focused on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. In June, the force scrutinised the issuing of fixed penalty notices within the force area and again in October, prior to the appearance of Chief Constable Pam Kelly at the Home Affairs Select Committee on 21st October. The analysis compared how many persons who identified as being from a BAME background were issued fixed penalty notices, with those issued to the rest of our communities.

That scrutiny found that approximately 88.5% of notices were issued to persons under the age of 45. When applying the same scrutiny to fixed penalty notice recipients aged 16 to 24, it was found that 10.1% of those who were issued notices identified as being from a Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority community. For those aged 25 to 44 years, 11.5% of persons issued with fixed penalty

notices identified as being from these communities. These figures relate to the period until the introduction of local lockdowns in September 2020.

Crime Demand

Between 23rd March 2020 and 7th March 2021, the force has recorded 91,105 crimes, a decrease of 15.6% when compared against the 107,937 crimes recorded during the the same period the previous year. At the beginning of the restrictions there was an initial increase in our positive outcome rate due to having the time to clear backlogs whilst low volumes of crimes were coming in, however that was not sustained. To date, we have secured 16,446 positive outcomes compared to 18,741 during the same period last year, a reduction of 12.3%, but not as great as the reduction in crimes.

We do not judge that this downward trend in recorded crime will continue. Instead it is almost certain that we will see a rapid rebounding effect over and above the previous level of recorded crimes driven by a reopening of non-essential retail and then the night time economy. Also with people returning to workplaces therefore leaving residences unoccupied and the socio-economic impact of the post-pandemic recession. Analysis from the Office of National Statistics indicates that Wales is losing jobs at four times the rate of the entire United Kingdom, which suggests that there will be wholesale increases in unemployment which could drive people to criminality

Violent Crime

Since the beginning of lockdown, the force has recorded 9,610 violence with injury offences (down 19.4% on the same period last year) and 10,372 violence without injury offences (down 9.7% on last year). Cardiff & the Vale reported the highest number of both violence with injury offences [35.5%] and violence without injury offences (40%) of the 3 BCUs.

For violence with injury, the trend was well below 2019 but did briefly surge to a peak in August 2020, coinciding with the “Eat Out to Help Out” scheme, and actually surpassing the August 2019 level. The impact of the local lockdowns, the firebreak lockdown and the ban on pubs selling alcohol [30th November] appears to have driven levels down to well below last year’s level. At a sector level, a 74.4% fall from 782 last year to 200 this year for Cardiff City stands out. During the most recent lockdown [26th December] we have seen continued decreases in the volume of violence with injury occurrences - within the last month [7th February – 7th March 2021] there was a 33.7% decrease compared to the same period in 2020.

For violence without injury, the trend has been much closer to last year’s with similar levels from July onwards. Cardiff City saw a 58.9% fall from 726 offences to 300 offences. Although most sectors saw a fall, several sectors saw an increase with the most notable being Ely with an increase of 21.1% from 350 last year to 424 this year.

Despite these decreases, our experience of the easing of restrictions in August indicates to us that when restrictions are next eased, violent crime related offending will return rapidly to levels normally seen and possibly beyond. We are working with partners such as the Violence Prevention Unit and the Welsh Government to ensure that we manage the risk of any reopening of the night-time economy.

Domestic Violence & Abuse

Between 23rd March 2020 and 7th March 2021, the force recorded 3,799 domestic violence and abuse-related offences of violence with injury, approximately 13% fewer than during the same

period in 2019. For domestic violence and abuse-related offences of violence without injury, 3,885 have been recorded in this period, approximately 9% fewer than in the same period in 2019.

The trends have been similar to the trends for overall violence with injury and violence without injury. Since the 23rd March, 39.5% of violence with injury crimes and 37.5% of violence without injury crimes have been domestic violence and abuse-related.

Both Mid Glamorgan and Cardiff & the Vale have around 34% Domestic violence and abuse with injury, while Swansea, Neath and Port Talbot sits slightly lower at 31%. There is a similar distribution for violence without injury.

Between 23rd March 2020 and 7th March 2021, we made 8,563 domestic violence and abuse-related arrests, a decrease of 13.7% when compared with the same in period in 2019.

We judge that there is a significant amount of under-reporting driven by various factors such as fear of reporting due to partners continuing to co-habit with their abusers due to the lockdown. However our arrest rates indicate that our officers are continuing to take positive action wherever possible to allow for safeguarding of victims to be put in place.

Child Protection

Between the 23rd March 2020 and the 7th March 2021, 5,798 crimes against children were recorded. As before the majority of these were violent crimes, stalking, harassment and sexual offences. The levels of crimes recorded rose month on month from April 2020 when 332 crimes were recorded peaking in September 2020 with 736, an increase of 122%.

The first 10 weeks of the pandemic (23rd March to 31st May) saw 779 crimes recorded. The last 10 weeks (28th December to 7th March) saw 893 crimes recorded, an increase of 15%.

January 2021 has seen 55.8% less crimes than January 2020 and February 2021, 41.5% less crimes than February 2020.

It seems clear that ongoing lockdown measures continue to have an impact on suppressing recorded crime against children. However, the reductions are not as obvious as during previous lockdowns. This may be due to increased numbers of children (including those from vulnerable backgrounds) attending hub schooling and accessing services.

We continue to remain vigilant and work with our partners to identify and respond to risk.