

**Report to the Police & Crime Panel by the Police & Crime
Commissioner for South Wales, Rt Hon Alun Michael**

South Wales Police: Looking to the future

**The importance of Neighbourhood Policing, Community Safety and
the role of the PCSO in post-Pandemic South Wales**

The last two years have been difficult and unsettling for all public services and I know from many people - Councillors in particular - that they have worries about local crime and antisocial behaviour. In recent weeks I have heard these concerns from a variety of communities in our towns and cities across South Wales, often with pleas for the issues to be sorted out by the police. These are reasonable concerns and the world as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic is certainly full of challenges, but it's vitally important to fully understand the nature of the problems we face to take the right actions.

First the impact of the epidemic should not be underestimated. Many lives have been lost, families have been torn apart, people's hopes and aspirations have been disrupted and the progress through their years in education have been disrupted for children and young people. For many, the impact will continue to be felt for many years.

Second the impact has been massively disruptive for businesses and for our public services. While the biggest direct impact has been on the NHS and on Care Sectors, every Council and every Agency has had to do things differently. In many cases demand has increased or responding to public demand has become ever more difficult. And little has completely "returned to normal" or will do so completely any time soon.

At the start of the first Lockdown behavioural scientists warned us that imposing strict regulations for an extended period of time – basically that you can do so for a couple of months at most if the public are behind you and accept the need for the restrictions. After that it would become more and more difficult, and compliance could not be achieved by enforcement alone.

That's why there has been unanimity within Policing in Wales about the need to take people with us. Compliance with the COVID-19 regulations has not been won by enforcement alone but through the restrained and largely consistent application of the "Four Es" – the four-step escalation principles

- Engage with people, with patience and good humour
- Explain why the regulations are so necessary
- Encourage people to stick within them and
- Enforce when it's necessary, without fear or favour

An impatient person might rush through to the fourth stage quite rapidly – and of course there are circumstances in which that must be what happens – but I am amazed and full of admiration for the successful way our Police Officers and PCSOs have helped our communities to stick together.

To me it seems completely unsurprising that there are problems of behaviour, that people are looking for an outlet for pent-up energy, that some are seduced by the unscientific nonsense from anti-vaxxers and that it seems attractive to "break free" for a bit of fun on a

beach or in an illegal rave or that drink or drugs can fuel anger and conflict which sometimes boil over into localised behaviour that is completely unacceptable. Indeed, when you are on the receiving end of such behaviour it is literally unacceptable, and a speedy and effective police response is crucial – but it's also important to get the balance right and to remember Robert Peel's two main principles.....

- The first responsibility of the Police is to prevent crime (success is demonstrated by the absence of crime and harm, not the presence of activity)
- The Police are the Public and the Public are the Police (the police cannot succeed as an outside “occupying force” and must be a part of the community they police.

There were occasions during the last 18 months when some people wanted a crackdown by the Police. But while that was sometimes needed, there was always a careful judgement to be made about when to enforce and when to cut people some slack, how to balance the different principles that the police must always bear in mind even in these difficult and challenging times.

I will give two examples:

- We knew that the Easter Weekend would be challenging as fine weather came with a step towards relaxation of the rules. On Good Friday the steps of the Senedd were ram-packed with people who had clearly made it their destination for the day. It was odd, because as I saw for myself the behaviour around 90% of Cardiff Bay was of people showing respect for each other, obeying the distancing rules and being pleasant and good humoured. I was asked why the police had not dived in to enforce the regulations physically and it was a matter of judgement. That judgement was supported by a senior Council Officer who commented that there had been challenging behaviour in many other cities at the same time but while some ended up in running fights through the parks, with police and members of the public ending up in hospital, in Cardiff nobody got seriously hurt and people went home peacefully. It made me proud of our police”, he said.
- Black Lives Matters brought inevitable tension between two key principles: First the need to have the COVID-19 rules obeyed to save lives and protect the NHS and second the need to protect the democratic right to peaceful protest. A strict application of the rules would have led to enforcement to prevent the protest but careful observation by the organisers of the principles of distancing, mature discussion and restraint by the Police allowed the demonstrations to take place while keeping risk to a minimum. Some people were outraged that “the police allowed the rules to be broken” whereas that careful nuanced approach allowed an important message of both local significance and of international solidarity to be heard and understood.

In general, there have been positive aspects to the way we have responded to the Pandemic in Wales – our sense of community and the way that Welsh Government Ministers have worked with local government and the police to cope with extraordinary times as well as the exemplary commitment of our heroes in the NHS and care services. Those are the foundations on which we now need to build for our post-Pandemic future.

Following the elections in May, when I was given a new mandate as your Police and Crime Commissioner, I have again put Neighbourhood Policing, Community Safety and local partnership working at the heart of my mission. These three elements are based on values

and principles and I'm pleased to say that we are pursuing values that I and the Chief Constable share. They are also at the heart of the Chief Constable's mission and the approach of officers and staff across South Wales. So, at a meeting of my Strategic Board last Thursday, we explored in detail what that means in changed times and will be reporting at the next Panel meeting on the developments that flowed from that in-depth review.

It isn't simple.

We all feared that this summer would be challenging, and it has been.

- Communities are at last emerging from the restrictions - but while some things are starting to revert to normal, the virus is still causing illness, some deaths and continued disruption,
- Many people are nervous of public places.
- People have been prevented from travelling abroad on holiday and are frustrated about their lives not being completely restored to how things were before Lockdown.

The result is demand on South Wales Police that has been even greater than normal.

- July saw the highest-ever monthly total of 999 calls, at 24,265 for South Wales
- that's 25% higher than in the same month in 2018
- as well as more than 42,000 non-emergency calls,
- that's an average of a further 57 calls an hour.

Our resources are not unlimited, but an enormous amount of work is going into ways of coping with that demand and into giving people the response they need especially in an emergency whether it's the result of crime and violence on our streets or domestic violence and abuse or the myriad other causes of calls to 999.

Prompt response to 999 has been maintained but the pressure on the non-emergency 101 service has been enormous and I know from many local councillors that when there are unpredictable peaks in demand the delay in response can cause frustration for them and for their constituents. That's why I want to stress that great efforts are being made to strengthen the team to cope with the unprecedented demand and to ask that those who can use alternative ways of contacting the police to do so, protecting the 101 service for those for whom it is the only option. We will report on progress at the Panel's next meeting.

I am working through the task of writing to every Councillor in South Wales asking them to help us tell people about the alternatives that are open to them.....

- Follow this link: [Contact us | South Wales Police \(south-wales.police.uk\)](https://south-wales.police.uk)
- Provide information: <https://bit.ly/SWPPProvideInfo>
- Send a private message on Facebook/Twitter to [@SWPolice](https://www.facebook.com/SWPPolice) or the link for your own local authority area such as [@SWPNeathPTalbot](https://www.facebook.com/SWPNeathPTalbot)
- Send an email to: SWP101@south-wales.police.uk
- Also, when a spike in calls to 101 causes a delay, a message can be left enabling staff to call back when things quieten down.

I know it's frustrating if you are the person waiting on the line, but I stress that it's not a failure to answer the phone. Every time I have investigated a delay mentioned to me by a Councillor it turns out they had the bad luck to phone when something had just happened – like a major

incident on the M4 leading to a flood of calls – so I am asking people to please bear with our hard-pressed staff and to “stick with us”.

Let’s hope there will soon be a reduction in calls that arise from relaxation of the Covid-19 restrictions and the wider social impacts of the pandemic – but only a fool would guarantee that it will happen quickly.

It’s true and easy to say that 999 should only be used in a real emergency – to ensure that phone lines are free for those who do need immediate help – but it’s also worth reminding ourselves that 101 was never meant to be a police service and 80% plus of non-emergency calls are not about crime. With limited resources (Whitehall has cut the Police Grant by over a third in recent years) great efforts are nevertheless being made in South Wales to give people the response they need.

As well as a fast response to emergencies and to their other calls I know that people want to see a local police presence on their streets and action to nip things in the bud as problems start to emerge locally. Again, the pandemic has forced the Police to divert resources into coping with the emergency and as we head into the Autumn it will be important to renew the joint work of Police and Councils on Community Safety and tackling antisocial behaviour.

I don’t have a magic wand for dealing with these issues, but together we can make a real difference and our PCSOs have a central role in enabling that to happen.

It’s important to note that the role of the PCSO is about three things:

- It is about communicating - listening to local people and providing information to the community.
- It is about local problem-solving.
- And it’s about enabling the community to work together to tackle local issues.

PCSOs strive to make our communities safer and stronger by the part they play, and their visible presence helps to inspire confidence. Because of their local engagement they often pick up information that hasn’t reached official channels and can pick up bad things that are happening in our communities – including exploitation and violence – to enable early intervention to tackle the problem. The head of the National Crime Agency regularly stresses that the role of the PCSO is relevant to her task of tackling violent and organised crime as well as to lower-level crime and antisocial behaviour. That’s why we have worked hard to protect neighbourhood policing, despite the impact of austerity and deep cuts in the national police budget.

Right at the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic we agreed to deploy PCSOs in ways that were unusual, such as explaining and promoting the Welsh Government’s Health Protection Regulations and joint enforcement work with local council teams. Our PCSOs have been instrumental in working with the public, playing their part in our national effort to save lives and protect the most vulnerable people in our communities.

That’s been disruptive to some of the normal activities of PCSOs – and as we emerge from the health emergency some intense work is going on to refresh the local police presence in every community. It will take a little time – it simply cannot be done overnight.

That is why I am absolutely delighted that Welsh Government Ministers have moved quickly to implement their manifesto commitment to provide 100 additional PCSOs across Wales, in

addition to the 500 they already fund. Their financial commitment will enable us to press ahead with the additional recruitment and to restore and enhance this important frontline resource in each of our communities at the same time as tackling the competing demands of tackling violent crime, drugs-related exploitation, domestic violence and abuse and internet-enabled crime. I have already explained how demand has been at extraordinarily high levels this summer – perhaps something that was inevitable as we emerge from the Pandemic – but just as in Wales we worked together to combat COVID-19 we will now work together to protect vulnerable people from the threats and harm that are faced by every community.

I sent every Councillor personally the link to my Police & Crime Plan when it was published as a refreshed document in January, and I have re-circulated it now as a reminder.



2021 - 2025 Police
& Crime Plan.pdf

The Values and Principles set out in the Plan remain valid and despite the Pandemic we have made significant progress – for example I have invested in the DRIVE programme which tackles the perpetrators of the worst domestic violence and abuse and rolled that out now to all seven local authority areas. We are working hard on all the hopes and aspirations that are set out in the Plan and they are reflected in the Chief Constable’s Delivery Plan on which an enormous amount of detailed work has been put in during the Pandemic.

There are no simple answers or easy solutions, but I can assure the Panel of the personal commitment of the Chief Constable, Jeremy Vaughan, and of police officers and staff at every level to work with our local Councillors and with our communities to prevent harm and keep our communities safe. I am telling Councillors not to be surprised to be contacted by local PCSOs if they don’t already have regular contact with them – the only way to build safe, confident communities as we emerge from all the trouble and uncertainty of COVID-19 is to do so together through honest discussion and local problem solving.

Central to the mission of South Wales Police is Neighbourhood Policing which is linked to the work of Community Safety which is a joint endeavour for the Local Police and the Local Council. Efforts are being made to refresh this work in every community across Wales, and in South Wales we will be discussing ways to do more together when we meet each Council Leader and Chief Executive in the next few weeks.

I’m always open to hearing about local problems because “local is at the heart of everything” but it is important to distinguish between specific local issues and the complex “wicked issues” that face every community through the impact of drivers of harm including Mental Health issues, Domestic Violence and Abuse, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and alcohol abuse as well as the deliberate impact of those who profit from Modern Slavery and other forms of exploitation. The only way we can properly serve each local community across the seven local authority areas and the 1.3million people that make up South Wales is to do it together and do it locally. Our commitment is to continue doing more with less and to work with you in the service of your constituents.

The strapline on the front of the Police and Crime Plan - “Everything is Connected to Everything Else” – is intended to act as a reminder that working in a silo can lead to unintended consequences and social damage. But few elements in our work are so

interconnected as the practical policing work of Neighbourhood Policing and the evidence-based teamwork that is meant to drive Community Safety.

As we emerge from the full force of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the value of Partnership has been reinforced as never before.

But it's worth reflecting on why Community Safety was a driving force in the early years of this Century but became a pale and ineffective shadow in the past ten years – something that has been recognised by the Auditor General and by Welsh Government and by our colleagues in Local Government in Wales as well as by Policing in Wales.

As envisaged in the 1998 Crime & Disorder Act, the purpose is for the Council and Police locally to jointly.....

- **analyse** local harm and demand,
- design **action** to tackle local issues,
- track the annual **progress** in doing so,
- and return to a fresh “baseline audit” after three years.

The joint leadership of Police and Council – involving other agencies, the voluntary sector and the community - is a central principle of the Community Safety Partnership.

It worked for a decade – but the progress didn't last.

- First, as the impact of Austerity built up, both Local Government and Policing lost the resources for analysing local issues. So far, we have failed in efforts to rebuild the evidence base consistently.
- Second, partnership resources were lost as councillors, council staff and police locally faced massive challenges and resources were stripped out in efforts to focus on core responsibilities.
- And third, many strands of activity have appeared to be driven by opinion rather than analysis and it must be said that the unusual circumstances of the Pandemic have made it even more difficult for everyone concerned.

But the other side of a problem is an opportunity. Now, several factors come together as we emerge from the Summer to give us a massive opportunity.

Why worry about what went wrong in the past decade?

Because “a nation that fails to learn from its mistakes will be condemned to repeat its failures” whereas our determination is to build on the significant **successes** of South Wales Police.

Neighbourhood Policing – abandoned in some parts of the country – remains central to the Service in South Wales. Enhancing its effectiveness has been a priority for the Chief Constable in recent years, aided by the 200+ PCSOs provided by Welsh Government on top of the 200 already employed from Police funds and soon to be joined by a further 41.

It's not unrelated to the ambition for South Wales Police to be the best in every aspect of our work – but linking with partners and supporting each other's work is the best way to maximise our impact and minimise harm locally.

So, we look to make our approach to Neighbourhood Policing and Community Safety the most effective that it possibly can be, bearing in mind

- That there is an edginess and an unsettled feeling amongst the public generally and it is difficult to know how some of this will play out especially in terms of Anti-Social Behaviour, crime and harm in our communities. The impact on young people is particularly difficult to predict or quantify.
- That high demand is causing real problems for the non-emergency 101 Service – and despite continuing high performance by our Public Service Centre there has been a significant loss of public confidence which has been compounded by loss of “normal” local contact patterns during COVID-19.
- That our efforts in promoting Community Safety and in continuing to develop the highest possible quality of Neighbourhood Policing are central to our role.
- **That, at the same time, there are opportunities to do things differently and to do them better.**
- The experience of Joint Enforcement Teams during the Pandemic has demonstrated the enormous potential when the Police and Local Authority work together – engaging other Agencies and the Community - instead of working in separate silos. It’s involved different responses to different circumstances in different places, but common themes have emerged along with the chance to share experiences and to identify “what works”.
- **That’s what Community Safety is meant to be all about.**
- That efforts to refresh Community Safety in recent years (after it was undermined by the years of Austerity) have culminated in the creation of the Wales Safer Communities Network, led by the Safer Communities Board under the joint leadership of Policing in Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), with the support of Welsh Government. This work is coming together just when it is needed.
- That last month the Board – which I Chair along with a Local Government Leader – was given reports from a survey of both local government officers and police officers involved with Community Safety and the common sense of purpose, the will to work together and welcome for the Network was all very encouraging.
- That the additional 100 PCSOs (41 in South Wales) and our initiative in creating the Violence Prevention Unit for Wales are relevant too and the challenge is to join up these different initiatives and to make a difference when it really counts, at the local neighbourhood level across South Wales.

That is why as the Commissioner and Chief Constable we have agreed to focus on Community Safety and Neighbourhood Policing as the twin elements that go to the heart of the Commissioner’s Police and Crime Plan and the Chief Constable’s Delivery Plan

Working together is partly about learning from the success of joint working during the Pandemic, but it is also about going back to the core principles of Community Safety. I am very proud of having introduced Community Safety Partnerships in the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and even more proud to be putting the principles into practice with our Loxan Government partners in particular.

Finally, the other elements set out in the Police & Crime Plan are being pursued too and let me give one example.

Ever since I took on this role we have been trying to put the interests of the Victim at the heart of what we do. Each agency – Court Service, CPS, Probation, Police – has tried to deliver its service with the interests and experience of the victims and survivors at the centre and there have certainly been successes, but it's been left to the Victim to make sense of it all and to join up the dots. I'm excited by the way members of my team turned that on its head, they listened to victims and survivors who said they didn't want a formal Board they wanted a more relational approach through creating a network. We are setting out to listen collectively across different agencies and to challenge our won agency approach. The report – endorsed last week by both my Strategic Board and by the South Wales Criminal Justice and IOM Board – is attached and I hope the Panel will share my excitement.

I hope this report gives some sense of what we are doing, how we are emerging from the Pandemic and our ambitions for the future across South Wales.

Alun Michael,

September 2021

Annexes

- Reports on Demand Levels by BBC and ITV
- Announcement of the money for 100 additional PCSOs
- Proposals for a Victims and Survivors Network (attached as separate document)

Two Welsh police forces get more 999 calls in a month than ever before



BBC Wales Report

Police say they are dealing with "unprecedented" 999 calls, with two Welsh forces recording record monthly numbers in July.

Almost 25,000 emergency calls were received by South Wales Police last month - more than the force has had ever had in a single month. The total of 24,265 calls is equivalent to nearly 783 a day, almost 33 an hour, or more than one every two minutes.

Dyfed-Powys Police said emergency calls had also hit record levels in July.

The forces are now urging people only to dial 999 in an emergency, to keep lines free for people in immediate need. Gwent Police also said it had recently had an increase in calls.

"Our public service centre also received more than 42,059 non-emergency calls during July, an average of a further 57 calls an hour," South Wales Police said.

The force said it was contacted about 18,500 times through Facebook, Twitter or its website in July.

Dyfed-Powys Police said it was experiencing an "unprecedented increase" in 999 and 101 calls.

Huge 999 call spike as Wales reopens with some 'struggling' with life after lockdown

Monday 16 August 2021



ITV Wales

Call handlers are dealing with a huge spike in emergency calls, with many "experiencing challenges" adapting to life after lockdown, a police boss has said. South Wales Police said there has also been a demand from people needing the 999 service, with a "significant increase" during evenings following the reopening of the night-time economy. The force said it has now had to reallocate resources to support its emergency control room in Bridgend and prioritise the most life-threatening incidents.

"I think we're seeing some of the outcomes of the pandemic in terms of some of the social challenges people are experiencing as we come out of it", Chief Inspector Chris Truscott told ITV News. "We're seeing a wide variety of calls now and our demand profile looks significantly different to what it did before the pandemic.

"We think that's for a number of reasons - the night-time economy reopening and people being able to do lots of things that they weren't able to do over the last 18 months."

"Normally when the children go back to school in the first week of September, we'd expect the demand to settle down and that's what we're hoping will happen. But now it certainly seems to be a consistent picture of increased demand, week on week", he added.



Donna, a call handler who has worked at the centre for nine years said, "I don't know whether people are feeling the effect of being let free so do we have peaks of a lot of calls in the evenings. "Sometimes you feel as if you're not having much of a break from the phone calls because there's a lot coming in, so you feel obliged to keep making sure that we're getting those calls through", she added.

We do get a lot of calls to the 999 service if they're not able to get through on 101, but our job is to risk assess those calls and then we can hopefully refer them to the appropriate service. The force said it wants to make the message clear that people should only call 999 if it is necessary.

100 new PCSOs funded by the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government has announced additional funding to provide a 100 Police Community Support Officers to tackle crime and support communities.

The First Minister Mark Drakeford and the Minister for Social Justice Jane Hutt have announced an extra £3.7m for additional PCSOs across Wales, bringing the total budget to over £22m.

The additional 100 PCSOs brings the total funded by the Welsh Government to 600.

The funding shows the importance the Welsh Government places on the values of community, equality and social justice. This will be another step forward to ensure strong and safe communities with resources in place to cut crime.

Highlighting the important role PCSOs play, First Minister Mark Drakeford said:

“PCSOs have provided a vital link between neighbourhoods and police services and are recognised for their willingness to become part of their communities.

“They have played a critical role in responding to the pandemic and I want to pay tribute to their unwavering commitment.

“The PCSOs have continued to step up, providing support and developing innovative ways to keep their communities safe.”

Police Community Support Officers work with police officers and share some, but not all their powers. They provide an important link between their communities and the police service to ensure people have the support they need

Some of the things PCSOs support frontline policing with are stopping speeding outside our schools, reporting vandalism or reducing anti-social behaviour.

Minister for Social Justice Jane Hutt said:

“Communities right across Wales have appreciated the vitally important difference that PCSOs make to their neighbourhoods. It’s clear to see that they’ve fast become part of their communities and have ensured that when there is a problem, individuals know their local PCSOs have their best interests at heart.

Their work to identify and understand local issues has enabled a focus on early intervention, ensuring that local support services can link up and deliver for our communities.

I’m delighted that we’re hitting the ground running on delivering our pledge to recruit 100 more PCSO’s in Wales today, demonstrating our commitment to keeping our communities and neighbourhoods in Wales safe.”

South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael said:

“PCSOs strive to make our communities safer and stronger by the part the play and their visible presence helps to inspire confidence. That is why I am absolutely delighted that Welsh Government ministers have moved so quickly to implement their manifesto commitment to 100 additional PCSOs across Wales, in addition to the 500 they already fund.

Their financial commitment enables the four Welsh forces to press ahead with the additional recruitment and to restore and enhance this important frontline resource in each of our communities at the same time as tackling the competing demands of tackling violent crime, drugs-related exploitation, domestic violence and abuse and internet-enabled crime.

Just as in Wales we worked together to combat Covid-19 we will now work together to protect vulnerable people from the threats and harm that are faced by every community.”