

Policing in the pandemic

The police response to the
coronavirus pandemic during 2020

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Foreword

Policing in the pandemic

In a time of unparalleled change, the public looked to the police to keep services running and to keep order. Stepping in when many others could not or would not, the police took immediate and decisive action to keep people safe, tackle crime and find answers to problems brought by the pandemic.

This report reflects on the positive work carried out under extreme circumstances while officers and staff faced significant difficulties. We know that many within policing have felt the effects of COVID-19 personally. Sadly, some have lost their lives. On behalf of the HMICFRS board, I extend our condolences to all those who have lost relatives, friends or colleagues.

New legislation and guidance have been produced at a fast pace, and public and press interest in police actions has been significant. On rare occasions, police decision-making has been viewed by some as heavy-handed or inconsistent. While our inspection didn't assess individual cases, we are assured that the police service has reflected upon and learned from these instances.

The pandemic accelerated wider and better use of technology in several areas of policing. Other innovative practice implemented through necessity has, if adopted in the long term, the potential to permanently improve policing. There is more work to be done to assess the long-term implications of adopting some short-term changes. Some existing problems in the criminal justice system risk being deepened. Where potential problems are recognised, they should be tackled now. We make recommendations and list some learning points for consideration as policing in the current and future phases of the pandemic continues and develops.

This report presents a snapshot of policing in the pandemic between March and November 2020. This inspection was carried out quickly and remotely, using online video technology, to provide information useful to policing as it continues to respond to the pandemic. The evidence we gathered will inform our continuous assessment of the 43 police forces in England and Wales and our other inspection work, including our thematic reports. We will also review force management statements to see how forces are planning to use resources differently.

While we make several recommendations, overall the police reacted well to the difficult circumstances presented by the pandemic. The response was in the best traditions of our police service.

HMI Matt Parr

Headline findings

Dedication and commitment

We are grateful for the exceptional dedication and commitment of people in all parts of policing. Officers and staff, special constables and volunteers responded quickly and well to keep people safe and to deal with crime. This included being exposed to even greater risk than usual, adapting to significant changes in their ways of working, and adopting entirely new roles and responsibilities.

Responding to difficult circumstances

Policing has again demonstrated its capacity for responding in an emergency. At both a national and a local level, police leadership relied upon its tried and tested knowledge, structures and processes to address enormous difficulties. Where previous experience or existing measures didn't meet the problem, new solutions were quickly developed.

Adaptability

Forces had to prioritise the potentially conflicting aims of public service and the welfare of their workforces. Through innovation, flexibility and adaptability, forces generally successfully maximised the protection of staff while minimising the effect on public service.

Assessing risk and planning

Police forces had correctly recognised a flu pandemic as the highest national risk. But they had often viewed it as primarily a risk for health services, not policing. As a consequence, forces had planned in greater detail for other risks, such as terrorism and flooding, in the list of national priorities. However, they quickly and effectively adapted – and continue to adapt – their assessments and their planning.

Communication and change

Governments had to respond quickly, focusing on keeping people safe. Despite close working between the Home Office and national policing leaders, communication about restrictions and regulations was often at short notice and subject to change. Policing faced an extremely difficult situation of fast-paced announcements. At times, the introduction of, and variation to, new legislation and guidance affected the police service's ability to produce guidance and to brief staff. This inevitably led to some errors or inconsistencies in approach. In this context, policing at all levels did very well to operate coherently and to maintain public support and consent.

Enforcement activity

To secure public compliance with coronavirus rules, forces adopted the Four Es approach of engaging, explaining and encouraging before enforcing the legal requirements. Forces have on occasion encountered difficulties in correctly enforcing the coronavirus regulations, as opposed to securing compliance with guidance. Forces were generally effective in their public engagement about enforcement. We found that they worked hard to communicate about the Four Es with staff, the public and other organisations.

Better use of technology

Most forces improved their use of technology as they adapted their working practices. A significant shift towards remote working has generally been very successful. Benefits have included reduced travel time for officers and staff, and improved attendance (by the police and other organisations) at meetings, which should allow more coherent and robust decision-making. These are examples of changes that could offer long-term benefits to police effectiveness and efficiency.

Long-term impact of decisions

However, other changes resulted in a reduced service in some areas of police work. For example, to reduce the risk of infection, some forces increased the number of crimes they decided not to investigate because they were unlikely to be solved, and reduced their in-person visits to registered sex offenders. While these may have been sensible decisions at the beginning of the pandemic, forces should keep these changes under review and consider the effect on the public of permanently adopting any of them.

Test, track and trace

Officers and staff in some forces did not appear to follow the national requirement for self-isolating for test, track and trace. We were concerned about this, as was the national policing lead for this area, who wrote to forces to make sure they were clear about the requirements on them. Forces must follow the guidance and self-isolation directions when members of the workforce come into contact with someone with coronavirus symptoms.

Criminal justice system

Existing problems in the criminal justice system, such as court delays and backlogs, were exacerbated. Policing, other criminal justice bodies and governments all need to work together to ensure the system can recover from the extreme pressures caused by the pandemic.

Summary

“The police are expected to carry on as normal, when everything is not normal.”

(Police officer, interviewed as part of this inspection.)

Between March and November 2020, the police carried on protecting vulnerable people, answering requests for service, investigating crime, keeping people in custody and enforcing the law. They also stepped into the gaps left when some statutory agencies withdrew or reduced their frontline services. We are grateful to the police service for the swift and effective action taken to deal with the threats that the pandemic presented.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) quickly recognised the pandemic's challenges, and by mid-March set up Operation Talla (Op Talla). The National Police Co-ordination Centre (NPoCC) carried out the actions needed to achieve Op Talla's aims. These were to get the most out of co-ordination, communication and collaboration, to provide advice and act as the focal point for government.

At the start of March, requests for service were at about the same level as in 2019. Calls to 999 and 101 reduced as COVID-19 entered the public consciousness in mid-March and the first restrictions were announced. But while there were fewer requests for service than a year earlier, the police dealt with many calls linked to the pandemic.

As the pattern of criminal behaviour changed, forces rapidly adapted. Some crimes were less frequent. Others were recorded more often, possibly as forces cleared up outstanding cases. Pursuing investigations presented new problems, although we found many examples of forces adapting and coping, often by using technology better. Some innovations proved so successful that they are likely to be adopted permanently.

Most forces followed national guidance encouraging frontline officers to arrest only when essential. With court sittings suspended, custody suite staff were busier as they had to organise remote online remand hearings from police custody. This switch offers some advantages to the process of justice but has passed significant costs to the police. We found it difficult to obtain evidence that decisions were made in the best interests of detainees when they exercised their rights to legal advice and representation provided remotely.

Many forces expressed frequent frustration at the lack of notice they were given about some changes in the law and guidance. Some senior officers told us they were unable to provide timely and clear operational guidance to frontline officers. But some forces

were able to point to occasions when, after being consulted by the Government, they influenced some of the changes.

All forces followed the Four Es approach in their policing of the coronavirus regulations. Enforcement was a last resort after engaging, explaining and encouraging. Officers issued fixed penalty notices when dealing with incidents. But the complicated and unique legislative environment resulted in some problems for police enforcement activity.

Forces made a major switch to handling contact with the public online. Forces must set clear standards for online contacts and have the data available to monitor what is happening. We think lessons can be learned from the experiences of other services that have moved further and faster to online contact methods.

Home working became more common for many officers and staff. Meetings with other organisations, such as social care, health and education, were conducted using video technology. Forces generally adapted their processes well. But while online meetings and working at home can suit both forces and staff, they may be storing up problems for the future. For example, forces should be aware of any backlog of annual leave that has built up.

Most forces worked effectively with their formal staff associations and networks to identify and address workforce concerns. But we found little evidence of systems to monitor how line managers were maintaining contact with shielding/self-isolating staff or home workers. Some managers felt overloaded and some occupational health units were understaffed and overstretched.

Police forces routinely plan for civil emergencies, usually as part of multi-agency arrangements. This involves working through local resilience forums (LRFs). But LRFs are designed for co-ordination and leadership during events that are serious, localised and short term, not for a long-lasting pandemic.

Many forces had prepared risk assessments for a flu pandemic, which had been rated as the highest priority national risk. However, police, working with LRFs, had not tested preparations for dealing with a pandemic through exercises as they had done for terrorism or weather-related scenarios. A health-led flu pandemic national exercise had been scheduled to take place in 2019 but was cancelled due to the demands of Brexit planning.

Forces need to consider the sustainability of any temporary measures that change the way they work. They should understand the positive, negative and unintended consequences before deciding if new ways of working should become permanent.

Some of the problems we describe in our report predate the pandemic. New ones have also emerged. All need resource, time and political support to provide a solution. Policing, the criminal justice system and governments must work together to solve these problems.

Continuing to respond to the pandemic

Recommendations to forces

To help forces in their continuing response to the pandemic, we make five recommendations. We will assess the progress against these recommendations in our future inspection work.

Managing registered sex offenders

Forces must immediately make sure that officers understand and correctly implement the guidance for managing registered sex offenders during the pandemic.

Legislation and guidance

Forces must immediately make sure they can manage their responses to changes in coronavirus-related legislation. They must ensure frontline officers and staff are clear about the difference between legislation and guidance.

Test, track and trace

Forces must immediately put in place a policy to make sure that they follow the guidance and self-isolation directions when members of the workforce come into contact with someone with coronavirus symptoms.

Custody records

Forces must immediately make sure that they clearly and consistently record on custody records information about how/when/if detainees are informed of the temporary changes to how they can exercise their rights to legal advice and representation. The record must make clear how any consents are obtained about the way in which legal advice and representation are provided.

Overall scale and impact of changes

Within six months, forces must assess the sustainability of any temporary measures introduced during the pandemic that change the way they work. They must understand positive, negative and unintended consequences of the scale and impact of the changes before determining if any of these new ways of working should continue.

Recommendations to national bodies

To help national bodies in their continuing response to the pandemic and future, long-term, protracted national emergencies, we make two recommendations.

LRFs

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Cabinet Office's Civil Contingencies Secretariat (the national authority for resilience and civil protection) should co-ordinate a review of LRFs to make sure that:

- LRFs and strategic co-ordinating groups (SCGs) are able to deal with future, long-term, protracted national emergencies as well as short-term, one-off events. SCGs provide strategic direction throughout the course of an emergency, establishing the most important long-term aims and setting the direction for lower level tiers of the multi-agency organisations involved in the LRF;
- regional approaches for SCGs contribute to effective LRF performance during long-term, protracted national emergencies;
- the status and authority of LRF chairs help them to achieve consensus among disparate bodies, which can be difficult, particularly in force areas with multiple local authorities;
- the legal status of LRFs provides clarity for whether accountability in decision-making sits with the LRF itself or the individual member organisations, chairs or attendees;
- a national process is in place to quality assure LRF risk assessments, including the risk assessment for a flu pandemic;
- the purpose, content and presentation of community risk registers are consistent and inform the public effectively;
- individual organisations in LRFs know the required standard of training and competency for LRF gold commanders to chair/attend an SCG is through multi-agency gold incident command (MAGIC) course accreditation; and
- LRFs benefit from continuous professional development and can influence the activities of other organisations (local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others).

Expertise and advice

The NPCC should work with government departments to make sure that effective structures and processes are in place for consultation and timely communication on those responses to the pandemic that affect operational policing.

Learning points for forces

To assist forces, we have listed some learning points for their immediate consideration. Not every force will need to implement each point. Each force should decide what is appropriate in its own circumstances. Almost all the learning points are from positive practice described in our report. Some forces may already be taking these approaches but others may not have begun to consider them.

Demand and pressures

- Forces should make sure they are fully aware of the potential pressures, including new demand, that are building up as a consequence of the response to the pandemic, and prepare to manage them.
- Force management statements should reflect fully the pressures, demand and resource implications resulting from the pandemic.

Technology

In line with the national policing approach to technology, forces (locally/regionally/nationally) should work to ensure that their IT systems are compatible with those of other forces, and of other organisations, such as social care, health and education.

Training

Forces should make sure that:

- contact centre staff are aware of the increased risks of vulnerability for everyone in the population;
- they provide effective support to managers on how to manage remotely, such as training, guidance and performance-monitoring tools;
- they have senior officers who are MAGIC-trained and have the relevant competencies to contribute effectively to SCGs; and
- relevant planning departments (force and LRF) collate a training record to ensure accreditation and competence is maintained for emergency response and recovery scenarios.

Workforce wellbeing

Forces should:

- identify potential wellbeing pressures building up in their workforces and mitigate these;
- make sure that staffing levels are resilient, check that bubble arrangements remain fit for purpose, prepare for more staff needing to self-isolate, and plan for a potential increase in sickness absence that could affect public-facing roles more than others;
- introduce measures to help staff with the longer-term health and wellbeing effects of COVID-19;
- make sure they have a plan for managing annual leave, which should recognise the importance of the workforce needing to recuperate;

- make the most of home working opportunities and other flexible working arrangements where appropriate for the workforce and the organisation;
- ensure they maintain sufficient stocks of personal protective equipment (PPE), check for certification dates and have up-to-date health and safety assessments;
- engage in meaningful consultation to listen to the views of their workforces and understand their concerns; and
- make sure their communication is effective and that the workforce understands what is required and why it is important.

Data

Forces should:

- collect enough of the right information at the right level and detail about the continuing effects of the pandemic (costs, new/additional demand, absence, annual leave, custody and detainees etc) so that they can resource their work appropriately; and
- ensure duty management systems provide the data needed to effectively manage the workforce.

Learning

Forces should make sure they have effective ways to establish lessons learned to help inform their future practices and ways of working.

Learning points for LRFs

To assist LRFs, we have listed some learning points for immediate consideration. Not every LRF will need to implement each point. Each LRF should decide what is appropriate in its own circumstances. Almost all the learning points are from positive practice described in our report. Some LRFs may already be taking these approaches but others may not have begun to consider them.

- Each LRF should make sure it fully understands third-sector (charity and non-profit organisations) involvement and how it can assist during civil emergencies.
- Each LRF area should establish a multi-agency intelligence cell. This facility helps to build a commonly-agreed local picture of the effect of a civil emergency from information available to all organisations, from whatever source. The NPCC should issue guidance on the best approach with a suggested list of the main data sources to provide a consistent approach to data processing and understanding.
- Each LRF area should create a single point of communication externally and internally throughout LRF partnership organisations by resourcing and establishing multi-agency information cells. Force media specialists and representatives from other organisations should work together in the cell arrangement to make sure that communication with the public is consistent.
- Relevant planning departments (force and LRF) should collate a training record to ensure they have the right level of accreditation and competence for emergency response and recovery situations.

Methodology

In March 2020, we suspended all inspection work requiring appreciable contributions from police forces and fire and rescue services, so that they could focus on responding to the pandemic. In July 2020, we announced our intention to inspect the police response. Our inspection took a snapshot of policing and assessed what happened from March to November 2020.

We consulted many interested parties about the aspects of policing that our inspection should cover. We couldn't include everything that came out of that consultation. The aspects we don't cover include the policing of protests and demonstrations during 2020. On 11 March 2021, we published our report about the policing of protests, including protests in respect of the pandemic.¹ And on 30 March 2021, we published a report into the Metropolitan Police Service's handling of the Sarah Everard vigil on Clapham Common.²

We developed inspection themes through a three-stage process:

- a wide-ranging informal consultation with interested parties, including the Home Office and the NPCC, from which we compiled a long list of possible topics for inspection;
- a working group of senior staff from HMICFRS teams considered and added to this list; and
- the same group then slimmed down the list into the agreed themes.

Our inspection assessed how policing:

- understood and prepared for the potential and actual impact of the pandemic;
- responded initially and continues to respond to the pandemic; and
- is evaluating the response to the pandemic, establishing what is and is not working and using this to shape how the police service operates in such circumstances.

Our inspection focused on:

- preparation for the pandemic;
- overall leadership;
- working with other organisations;

¹ [*Getting the balance right? An inspection of how effectively the police deal with protests*](#), HMICFRS, 11 March 2021.

² [*The Sarah Everard vigil: an inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service's policing of a vigil held in commemoration of Sarah Everard on Clapham Common on Saturday 13 March 2021*](#), HMICFRS, 30 March 2021.

- policing – workforce wellbeing, protecting people who are vulnerable, requests for service, investigating crime, enforcing coronavirus legislation (the Four Es approach – engage, explain, encourage, enforce); and
- arrangements for keeping people in custody.

At the same time as we were planning to carry out our inspection, different parts of the police and the criminal justice system response were being examined by different organisations, and in different ways. We built on our consistent and strong connections with the College of Policing, the Home Office, the NPoCC, the Cabinet Office, individual forces, NPCC leads and others to ensure our inspection activity dovetailed with, built on and fed into other related work. Through our strong links with Op Talla we made sure that our inspection assessed immediate changes while Op Talla focused on the longer term.

Our inspection gathered evidence from forces and national policing organisations for three of the themes: preparation for the pandemic, overall leadership and working with other organisations. For the remaining six themes, we spoke only to police forces, but this included gathering their views on support provided at national level. Our remit did not include inspecting government and local policing bodies.

We did not set out to inspect the relationships between government and national policing organisations. However, throughout our inspection, police leaders told us about their experience of government involvement and strategic leadership during the initial response to the pandemic.

We devised a specific approach for the inspection that we hadn't used before. We inspected quickly and remotely, using online video technology, at service-wide, national and force levels, as well as at local partnership working level.

We gathered information from all 43 forces in England and Wales as well as the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the States of Jersey Police and the British Transport Police. We asked all forces to send us copies of relevant documents. We also asked all forces to answer a questionnaire, allowing them to self-assess various aspects of their responses. We collected data, surveyed custody staff and asked questions in a public perception survey.

For this report, we used official crime statistics, and the data that forces provided weekly to NPCC/NPoCC (Op Talla) from 8 March 2020 onwards. Forces were asked to report the data on a small selection of crime and demand, including domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation/abuse. The aim of the data collection was to monitor change throughout the service. It gave the NPCC/NPoCC (Op Talla) a more immediate picture based on unvalidated data.

In a representative selection of forces, we completed more detailed inspections. We chose the forces for a variety of reasons, including their sizes and geographical locations. They are listed in an annex at the end of the report. To lessen disruption to forces and reduce infection risk, we visited only a few of them. We completed most of the fieldwork online from early October to the middle of November. We are very grateful for the support forces gave us by arranging online meetings.

We issued a bulletin of early findings in December 2020 to give police swift feedback and information to help with the continuing response. As with our normal methodology for thematic inspections, we are not making graded judgments. To assist and support policing and other bodies, we make several recommendations and list learning points for consideration.

The evidence we gathered will inform the continuous assessment for our PEEL and other inspection work, and other thematic reports. We will review force management statements to see how forces are planning to use resources differently.

In early 2021, we also reported our detailed findings about how custody services operated during the pandemic. We specifically aimed this report at custody specialists in policing. We will publish a bulletin report about domestic abuse in spring 2021.

Our inspection findings informed a joint report into the criminal justice system's response to the pandemic by all the relevant inspectorates. This report – [*Impact of the pandemic on the Criminal Justice System*](#) – was published in January 2021. We comment on some of this in our own report.

We reported on the fire and rescue service response to the pandemic in January 2021.

Preparing for the threat of a pandemic

For this part of our assessment, we inspected ten forces.

Understanding the threat

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a duty on Category 1 responders (local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others) to work together to plan and prepare for civil emergencies. Planning takes place through the LRF. Police forces routinely plan for civil emergencies, usually as part of multi-agency arrangements involving LRFs.

To prepare their plans, police forces need to understand what a pandemic might involve. Most forces had prepared a risk assessment for a flu pandemic with their LRFs within the last three years. We found these were broadly in line with Cabinet Office guidance. Since the first national lockdown began in March 2020, all forces and LRFs reviewed and adapted – and continue to adapt – their flu pandemic risk assessments for the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the ten forces we inspected, a pandemic was first or very high on their lists of risks, in line with Cabinet Office guidance. But many people we spoke to were candid that a pandemic was seen as a health concern. It was not treated with the same importance as more obvious and recent public emergencies, such as flooding or a terrorist attack.

Although a good starting point, the flu pandemic risk assessments often couldn't and didn't anticipate the wide-ranging impact of COVID-19. In particular, some worst-case scenario planning didn't take account of the enforcement and public order requirements that emerged. Few forces fully recognised the likely impact on the role of the police locally. But forces and other organisations quickly adapted their risk assessments and plans to take account of the growing emergency. It is crucial that forces and other organisations continue constantly to review and update their plans.

Positive examples we found included how **Norfolk Constabulary** put planning at the centre of its continuous improvement programme. The **Police Service of Northern Ireland** annually reviewed its business continuity planning arrangements, issuing a certificate of assurance to show that its plans were up to date and compliant. This ensured the service's preparedness to respond to any contingency such as a pandemic.

To understand and predict the changing impact of the pandemic locally, some forces and LRFs made use of local data such as death rates and hospital admissions. They then devised proportionate response plans. To support this, several forces contributed to multi-agency intelligence cells. Police and other organisations contributed staff to the cells to provide a central point for information.

LRFs provide information about the risks the public may face, for example from flooding, terrorism or a pandemic. This is detailed in community risk registers, which are published in a broad range of formats, some more informative than others. Few registers can be immediately accessed through force websites. We were disappointed by force officers' and staff's (and some senior leaders') poor knowledge of the community risk register.

Exercising and training

The National Resilience Standards for LRFs ask that all members are competent to perform their roles. Members must routinely work together to understand each others' roles. LRFs should have a structured approach to individual and collective learning and training.

We found good evidence of multi-agency co-operation on training. Many LRFs have established ways of ensuring well-informed and timely joint training. But we found no evidence of formal training needs analysis being carried out and used to inform the content.

To be effective, LRFs need to be sure that they are fully prepared for all types of emergencies. Integral to that is the practising and testing of all the elements of emergency plans. Planning for emergencies can't be considered reliable until it is exercised and has proved to be workable. LRFs should use a risk-based exercise programme to test their arrangements, simulating emergency situations, practising and testing how well their plans help them to cope with the circumstances.

They should also have clear and agreed ways of working to implement their flu pandemic plans. We were surprised that many forces had not completed a recent exercise for a flu pandemic, although most recognised it as the highest risk both nationally and locally. A health-led flu pandemic national exercise had been scheduled to take place in 2019 but was cancelled due to the demands of Brexit planning. Some forces hadn't carried out multi-agency pandemic training for some years. Instead, they focused on exercises for more obvious incidents requiring police, ambulance and fire and rescue service responses, such as terrorism or disaster scenarios.

Many forces gave examples of joint training. This aimed at a common understanding of other organisations' capabilities and working practices for a co-ordinated response to incidents of varying severity. **Leicestershire Police** gave us some examples of partnership working in response to real-life emergencies such as the Hinckley Road explosion and the fatal helicopter crash at Leicester City football ground, both in 2018. The response to these events helped to strengthen further the already strong relationships within the LRF.

In many force areas, there was more frequent joint exercising between police and other blue light services such as ambulance and fire and rescue. Some forces acknowledged that gaps still existed and took steps to provide extra training events for organisations involved in their LRFs.

Most forces provided good examples of recent multi-agency training events. However, the records we reviewed didn't always support this picture. Some forces

explained that their LRFs led a rolling programme of training, prioritising community risk registers, national mandates and current local concerns. Some forces had training budgets for emergency planning. But this wasn't consistent throughout forces and (we were told) didn't represent significant sums of money.

Some forces had been involved in national exercises, mainly for terrorism or other disaster-related scenarios. Forces told us that these exercises had strengthened their relationships with other organisations, such as ambulance, health, fire and rescue services as well as local councils, and had helped them respond to the pandemic.

For many forces, training exercises involved working with LRF partner organisations and the military. There were some limited examples of voluntary sector agency involvement. Recognising this gap before the pandemic, **Gloucestershire Constabulary** commissioned a capability review to understand what support the third sector (charities, voluntary and community groups) could offer the LRF during major incidents.

In some forces, all chief officers and chief superintendents had received SCG training. The SCG is the gold command group in the LRF, which makes decisions on managing an emergency locally. The tactical co-ordination group (TCG) is the silver group, with bronze as the operational level in the command structure.

Gold commanders are expected to attain the MAGIC training standard. Most forces referred to MAGIC training courses, and some told us that all police gold commanders should have attended the course to equip them to perform the SCG chair role. We were surprised that some forces had a shortage of officers trained to this level.

Not all partner agencies had staff trained in MAGIC. Individual LRF partner organisations decided who should represent them at SCGs. Some took responsibility for ensuring that these representatives were sufficiently trained. In some force areas, there were shortages of MAGIC courses. The lack of senior leaders in those areas who were MAGIC trained meant that forces and other organisations couldn't be sure that staff involved in SCGs had the relevant competencies.

In most forces, training departments keep records to make sure that individual officers maintain accreditation in specialisms such as firearms and public order. But we found that the same scrutiny was not routinely applied to emergency planning. Some forces told us that the LRF kept multi-agency training records. In others, the operational planning department maintained records. The lack of detail raised questions as to the consistency and accuracy of such records. This didn't help forces in making sure that officers were fully trained.

Many forces have significantly reduced their capacity for force and multi-agency training since the start of the pandemic. Most forces and partner agencies focused only on responding to the pandemic. Those forces that did maintain specialist training told us this meant they could be sure, in the long term, they would have enough specialist staff trained to the right level (for example, no backlog of re-licensing staff). Training for future events became less of a priority.

Contingency planning

Each force, and the organisations it works with, will have a different approach to its local multi-agency plans for a pandemic and the corresponding police response plans. The standard of multi-agency plans we reviewed was generally good. They were useful in determining the structures and initial action to be taken. But the role of the police in a pandemic had been underestimated by most forces and partnerships. As with the risk assessments, they focused on the health response with police having a generally supporting role. Forces didn't anticipate enforcing new pandemic-specific legislation.

All ten forces we inspected recognised the potential impact of the pandemic on policing. We found lots of examples of effective contingency planning through which forces:

- identified their critical service areas and rated them in priority order, such as the response to requests for help, safe custody procedures and support for victims;
- established trigger points for action when staffing levels reached critical levels (described as 'minimum operating levels' in one force);
- developed plans to maintain staffing levels in priority services using realistic assumptions about the impact of the pandemic; and
- maintained a detailed overview of staffing levels and the availability of trained specialists, often reviewed on a daily basis.

We were told of concerns in forces about the capability to maintain policing services in the long term, as and when demand returns to pre-pandemic levels. We found a few good examples of forces using table-top exercises to test their contingency plans and assumptions. Several forces recognised the potential for people in critical roles to become exhausted and overwhelmed. As a result, they planned to make sure their organisations had enough capacity to be resilient.

Disappointingly, in a few forces we were told that existing duty management systems could not provide the data needed to effectively manage the workforces. This meant they had to do additional work to collect the necessary data.

Responding to the pandemic

Strategic leadership: national

The NPCC set up Op Talla in mid-March 2020. Its aim was to get the most out of co-ordination, communication and collaboration between forces so that wherever possible there were consistent national approaches and end results. Op Talla worked closely with the College of Policing and the NPoCC.

Op Talla became the forum for close working with the Home Office. This included the secondment of a senior official from the civil service to Op Talla. It also developed structures and processes that provided frequent and direct access to national policing and Home Office leaders as well as with police leaders throughout the UK.

Forces told us they had a mostly positive view of the advice and support given by the NPCC, Op Talla and the C19 National Foresight Group (a cross-government and multi-agency group set up to support the UK response to the pandemic). They were aware that these organisations faced considerable pressures, particularly in the early stages, due in part to their modest resource levels. The C19 National Foresight Group was seen by LRFs and policing as providing an effective voice for LRFs.

In addition to the national work of Op Talla, different structures assisted communication between governments and policing throughout England and Wales:

- **Forces in England** had a link to central Government for information through the government liaison officers (GLOs) attached to each LRF, as well as links to the Home Office. Most forces reported good relationships with the GLOs who attended SCG meetings. But the GLOs sometimes couldn't meet forces' need for up-to-date information.
- In the **Welsh Government**, a police liaison unit (PLU) provided the strategic link between the four police forces in Wales, the four police and crime commissioners and the Welsh Government. It supported partnership working between policing and other public, private and third sector agencies in Wales. Through the Policing in Wales group, the chief constables and police and crime commissioners had a single point of contact with national and devolved governments. The PLU also supported the Policing Partnership Board for Wales, attended by national and devolved Government representatives along with the main interested parties. Overall, the well-established relationships between Welsh forces and the Welsh Government were collaborative and effective.
- In **Jersey**, a police officer was embedded in Government to operate as a point of communication. This contributed to a more harmonious relationship and better decision-making and demonstrates the benefit of close and consistent working.

- The GLO role was also critical in managing the relationship with the **Metropolitan Police Service**, which also benefited from having a Minister for London. Senior leaders from the SCG, health, the Metropolitan Police Service, local authorities and the GLO met daily.
- In addition, since April 2020, the Home Secretary has met regularly with police service senior leaders, including the **Metropolitan Police Service** commissioner. At each meeting the service brought in a chief constable to give each the opportunity to describe how things were in their area.

Despite these structures and the work of Op Talla, many forces expressed frustration at the way that some Government announcements were communicated. Several forces and NPoCC also expressed concern that they had not (up to the time of our inspection) been consulted in advance of legislation being announced, or given much advance notice that changes were being introduced. This made it difficult to produce advice to forces on enforcing legislation.

Government departments were working in a fast-moving and extremely difficult environment. However, the pace of change in legislation and associated advice was a problem. Forces could only supply their own directions for operational staff once the Government had produced its legislation and associated advice, and Op Talla had devised its own national guidance.

Some forces expressed concern that they first heard of certain changes at the 5pm daily televised government briefings. In some cases, the changes required immediate implementation and many forces felt disadvantaged by a lack of notice and consultation. Sometimes what was announced was only guidance and wasn't followed up with legislation and associated advice. This caused some operational difficulties and created confusion among officers and staff. We deal further with this problem in the 'Engaging, explaining, encouraging, enforcing' section of this report.

We found that **Welsh** forces generally felt properly consulted on draft legislation. For example, they identified a potential loophole in the proposal about large gatherings, which was then fixed. With the devolved Welsh Government, the size and complexity of the networks and working relationships are different from the rest of the UK. We were told that the devolution of responsibility for health was a factor in the effectiveness of these relationships.

Op Talla provided evidence to us that its access and influence with the Home Office didn't extend to the Department of Health and Social Care. The Department was responsible for developing and issuing much of the legislation and guidance on which policing relied.

During our inspection, many forces raised concerns that the design of the national test, track and trace programme didn't fully consider the roles of police officers and staff. The introduction of the NHS Test and Trace app also presented some difficulties for police forces. Closer consultation with policing experts during the design of the programme and the app could have improved confidence that they were appropriate for the police service. We write about this in more detail in the 'Workforce wellbeing: Test, track and trace' section of this report.

Op Talla was an effective way of communicating what worked between forces, for example the early experience of forces enforcing local lockdowns. Op Talla issued clear guidance that was valued by most forces we spoke to. Its bulletins were regarded as highly relevant and responsive to the needs of the service. Its guidance was supported by regular dial-ins, which were a useful forum for discussing the best ways of working.

Early in the pandemic the national policing bodies, Op Talla and NPoCC each sent some complex guidance to forces at the same time. This sometimes led to confusing messages. In the 'Workforce wellbeing' section of this report, we write about how this affected choices for PPE. The volume of guidance sent to forces meant that it wasn't easy to understand quickly. But feedback from forces led to better co-ordination and a more appropriate level of detail in the guidance.

Equally, not all national guidance from the national policing bodies was appropriate for all parts of the police service, particularly those operating under devolved administrations and subject to different regulations. For example, separate guidance was required for English and Welsh forces as the regulations were different for each country. Some chief constables also told us that it was sometimes difficult to balance NPCC and NPoCC guidance about enforcement while taking account of their own force contexts and, to the extent relevant, the differing views of their local politicians.

All forces need timely and consistent communication from governments about legal requirements, supported by well thought-out advice and guidance, to help them to protect the public. Our inspection found that work was needed to improve the consistency of communication arrangements throughout England and Wales.

Strategic leadership: local

Working together

In this inspection, we didn't have the opportunity to speak to representatives from a very wide range of partner agencies, such as local authorities, health services, voluntary and charity organisations. Nevertheless, those representatives we did speak to were clear that the blue light services (police, ambulance, fire and rescue) have fully adopted the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). Most police forces saw this as a normal part of their working practices.

Control rooms incorporated the JESIP assessment model M/ETHANE (the mnemonic for a consistent way of passing incident information between services and their control rooms). They assessed incidents and communicated findings to ambulance and fire and rescue services who were also familiar with M/ETHANE and could respond without delays.

Many interviewees told us that JESIP was fully accepted and understood throughout their LRFs. However, some partner agencies told us that, while they were aware of JESIP, it was understood to a much lesser extent by non-blue light responders within the LRFs.

Partnerships adapted to working from home and established new ways of communicating. Meetings and data exchange processes were adapted or changed for safeguarding, providing protection and support to ensure the safety of vulnerable

people and prevent further harm. This was so they could better monitor and include emerging 'at risk' groups, vulnerable people and perpetrators.

In most areas, meeting structures were updated to concentrate on the most important concerns. **Durham Constabulary** told us that the area's multi-agency intelligence cell conducted a threat assessment taking in cyber crime, child sexual abuse and exploitation, and vulnerability more widely. This was to make sure the police and other organisations could cope with possible critical risks faced by the most vulnerable people where there has been a disruption or change in services.

Some partnerships have done better than others in adopting video conferencing. We heard some frustration at the lack of compatibility in the technology each organisation used initially. Generally, this has been overcome. Agencies were well represented; attendance improved and was at an appropriate level within organisations. Some areas reported increased effectiveness from having online remote partnership meetings. Many partnerships thought this practice should continue beyond the pandemic. But some partner agencies were reluctant to use video-conferencing technology, citing security concerns or IT incompatibility. Voluntary sector partners may also be excluded if they lack the technology or the necessary skills to access it.

Most forces, with their partner organisations, made sure that their communication with the public was consistent. Within a multi-agency intelligence cell arrangement, force media specialists and representatives from the partner organisations agreed what needed to be said and each organisation then used this wording.

LRFs

LRFs aren't legal entities and don't have powers to direct their members. But the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and regulations made under it make it clear that responders, through an LRF, have a collective responsibility to plan, prepare and communicate in a multi-agency environment. A total of 42 LRFs serve communities defined by the boundaries of police areas throughout England and Wales. Northern Ireland and London have different arrangements.

We found that LRFs were best able to secure consensus and strategic direction where organisations were willing and engaged. LRFs depend at all levels on effective personal relationships. We heard about numerous examples of the LRF reaching consensus easily because of close working relationships built on mutual respect. The ability of an LRF member to effect change or influence their respective organisation was often linked to their seniority.

Most people we spoke to in the forces we inspected thought that organisations worked well together within the recognised command structure planned for and provided by the LRF, SCG and TCG. All the forces we inspected set up SCGs to oversee the response of the partner organisations on behalf of the LRFs. We were told that any conflicting interests or different priorities were addressed through constructive working at senior levels, drawing on good relationships built during previous incidents and exercises.

Many inspected forces felt that the strength of decision-making within LRFs was in the pre-pandemic emergency preparation phase, with the SCGs being more effective

during the pandemic. LRFs reflect the local operating environment in the diversity of the organisations attending, the seniority of members and governance structures. There is no fixed template. This meant that local needs could usually be addressed quickly and without conflict.

Many people we spoke to believed that the LRF structure lacked the resilience to address an emergency lasting as long as this pandemic. LRFs were established to co-ordinate a partnership response to smaller-scale, time-limited events easily identified by geographic boundaries, such as localised flooding. They were never intended to deal with an international pandemic that has already lasted a year and resulted in tens of thousands of deaths.

With this in mind, forces and partnerships tried to develop more appropriate structures and processes while still responding as traditional LRFs. A partnership response to an incident, whether a spontaneous or pre-planned response, requires the co-ordination of resources, not only from the emergency services. Events such as the response to natural disasters have been effectively commanded from a strategic command centre (SCC), usually but not exclusively in police premises, where partner agencies work side by side. Most LRFs either limited their use of the SCC model or didn't use it at all, as this wasn't a situation that required quick deployment of resources from a physical centre.

We found that an effective partnership response to the pandemic required effective leadership. The two main leadership roles are the chairs of the LRF and SCG. We asked whether the nature of the pandemic had influenced the selection for these roles. Partnerships adopted a realistic approach, suitable to their areas, and each with a different rationale. Most described a mature discussion leading to the appointment of the chair, although there were some differences. For example, in some places the chair of the LRF was chosen because that post (such as the chief executive of the local authority or the chief constable) had always held the role or because it was an organisation's turn to hold the role. We found a similar mix with the selection of SCG chairs.

We also heard concern about the role of the LRF chair in signing decisions. We heard examples of LRFs chaired by police officers making decisions on topics outside law enforcement, such as the supply of PPE to care homes. Many forces told us that the lack of a statutory framework for LRFs meant that a chair's decision may be open to legal challenge, were the decision to have an adverse effect.

The planning and establishment of multi-agency intelligence cells was particularly effective in supporting LRFs and SCGs. While partnerships may use different names for these cells, the function was the same: building a commonly agreed local picture of the effect of the pandemic from information available to all organisations, from whatever source.

Forces and LRFs used social media to good effect to reach a wider local audience. Choosing designated individuals to be the face of an LRF's response was useful for both internal and external audiences. Few forces have begun to evaluate the effectiveness of public messaging. We found some notable examples, such as software to monitor social media and some neighbourhood survey tools, but these were not common.

We found some co-ordination of neighbouring forces, and to a degree LRFs, within regions. This made the LRF and policing responses fit better with the NHS regional structure and created opportunities for mutual support. Regional SCGs are considered by some organisations to be a more effective way to tackle a protracted national emergency. Cabinet Office guidance recommends a regional approach chaired, in England, by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government but to date this has been taken up only by the south west region and within devolved administrations.

A regional approach should address many of the boundary problems faced by partner organisations as the work of most is not restricted to police force areas. We have commented before, for example in *State of Policing 2019*, on the disadvantages as well as the advantages of the 43-force structure. Forces should act in the regional and national policing interest when there is a case to do so.

Leading forces

We found that the chief officers we interviewed were operating effectively in the context of intense pressure, excessive working hours and a relentless pace with no immediate sign of a conclusion. Leadership teams within forces were generally working well and were communicating a clear, common purpose and plan for policing during the pandemic. Overall, existing police governance structures and processes were effective at addressing the situations that emerged. Through these structures, chief officers were able to oversee the development of their strategies and their forces' progress towards them.

We found that senior leaders used effective methods to inform their communities and staff of the latest developments and changes to regulations. **Leicestershire Police** adapted an existing online community consultation facility to keep local communities informed. The levels of community engagement were high and the response to this was more positive than the force had anticipated. Feedback showed that communities were supportive of the police response to the pandemic. Within the force, the chief constable used an online forum to communicate regularly with officers and staff. This was very well received.

However, there were high-profile cases where some forces' approaches to enforcement in particular were at odds with national thinking or the public mood. These cases attracted significant press coverage. We did not inspect these instances but are satisfied that the forces involved and the wider policing community have reflected upon them and learned from them. We also recognise that the number and frequency of such instances suggest that they were the exception that proved the rule in relation to the wider effectiveness of force leadership.

Policing during the pandemic

For this part of our assessment, we inspected ten forces. While we didn't inspect national approaches, we found that Op Talla had several work strands that influenced local activity. We describe examples of these where appropriate.

Requests for service: police contact management and response

Answering requests for service

Forces deal with the majority of contact from the public through police control rooms, from 101 or 999 calls. We found that forces answered the public's requests for service much as they had done before the pandemic. They still screened and prioritised requests using THRIVE (to assess threat, harm, risk, vulnerability) or similar risk assessments. Most forces added risk assessment questions about COVID-19 to help them to direct resources. Most forces used special constables to support their response to requests for service.

Understanding and managing demand

Generally, forces had a good understanding of the daily demands on their contact management centres and the availability of officers and staff to meet those demands. During the pandemic, forces collected and analysed more demand data more often in order to make decisions about service levels. Op Talla gathered forces' information weekly to create a national picture of policing's overall ability to respond. But some of the forces we inspected found their IT systems limited their ability to fully understand their demand and the resources available to meet it.

A few forces cut resources and rationed services before they needed to, in anticipation of the pandemic causing increases in demand. Future decisions about what service levels are possible must also be made using data about daily demand. A clear understanding of demand and capacity is therefore vital.

Making contact management centres COVID-safe

Forces had robust contingency plans for maintaining critical services such as answering 999 calls and dispatching police officers quickly. Many forces split their contact management services across multiple sites to improve resilience. Over the past ten years, forces had cut costs by moving towards having single-site centres. Many forces responded to the need for social distancing by moving into their back-up sites or using training or major incident facilities. This followed existing contingency plans and was carried out in a matter of hours.

For example, **Kent Police** sorted out some minor IT problems and was able to move from one site to four in under 72 hours. It was helped by having recently practised putting this plan into operation. At the time of our inspection, the force's contact management centre was experiencing its lowest-ever absence rate.

Maintaining the contact centre workforce

Forces prepared for total predicted staff absence rates reaching 35 percent or even 50 percent, but this didn't happen. However, they still made efforts to maintain their contact management workforces and improve their resilience. Splitting sites into social bubbles isn't the only method of protecting resilience, nor is it sufficient without additional measures. Obvious steps taken to cut the risk of infection in contact management centres included installing screens, one-way systems and limiting access by non-essential personnel. More forces may have more staff who need to self-isolate as the pandemic progresses, so all forces need to make sure their bubbling arrangements remain fit for purpose.

Generally, although recruitment and training were adversely affected early on, these problems were overcome. Forces told us they were able to continue to bring people into contact management, which has a higher turnover rate than most other areas of policing. **West Yorkshire Police** recruited former members of staff and created a small bank of staff who could then fill any gaps.

In April, **Devon and Cornwall Police** gave two classes of new officer recruits two weeks of intensive training to take 999 and 101 calls. The force created a marker for the incident record to inform other staff that someone less experienced had handled the call.

Remote working in contact management

Forces also helped some contact management staff to work from home. This was limited by the accessibility of the relevant technology and appropriate software systems to support their work. Home workers found it easiest to respond to email and online requests for service. Taking 101 non-emergency calls was not as common and being able to co-ordinate dispatching officers was very rare. We found no example of forces taking 999 calls from home. **Gwent Police** successfully implemented a facility for staff working from home to answer 101 non-emergency calls.

Throughout the pandemic, one force supported a highly vulnerable force incident manager (an inspector on duty overseeing incidents with overall operational responsibility) to work from home. Other vulnerable staff members in the force supported radio dispatchers from home, called back victims and created crime records.

Staff working from home in contact centre teams helped forces to maintain their resilience. We heard many positive examples of home working from contact management staff. However, there are some concerns about remote working that we reflect on elsewhere in this report. Off-site working is also associated with some information management risks, including security and privacy arrangements when working at home.

More, or better, remote working capabilities was the second most popular choice when we asked forces about the changes in contact centres that they wanted to keep after the pandemic. The most popular was increased digital contact and online reporting. Before confirming these arrangements as established practices, forces will need to make sure that their risk assessments and rationales are fit for purpose in all circumstances and not solely for responding to the pandemic. New ways of working should maintain current service provision and performance, if not improve it.

Assessing risk and prioritising requests

All forces continued to use a risk assessment and prioritising process to determine their response to requests for service, the most widely used being THRIVE. Overwhelmingly, forces applied the same processes to pandemic-related incidents as for all other requests. They also applied the same processes to online reports as for telephone reports. Some forces initiated alternative processes for dealing with pandemic-related reports, but after internal reviews, reverted to using THRIVE.

Nine of the ten forces we inspected added questions to the THRIVE assessment specifically to gauge the risk of attending addresses. All had the same aims: assessing any infection risk for officers attending, determining the need for PPE or diverting the call for a remote response by telephone or online if it was suitable. For example, ambulance staff worked in the **Police Service of Northern Ireland** control room throughout the initial stages of the pandemic. They provided swift medical and PPE advice, specifically about COVID-19, to police officers and staff.

Assessing risks in vulnerability

We found more variability between forces in how they helped their staff to assess the risks for people who were vulnerable. Not enough forces were making sure that their contact centre staff were aware of the predictable additional risks from the pandemic for everyone in the population. These risks made more people vulnerable than before. Staff needed to know how these factors might influence their risk assessment and prioritisation of the requests for service.

Some forces expanded their briefings to discuss the additional risks that could make more people more vulnerable. These included increased mental health difficulties or more instances of online child sexual exploitation. They also aimed to help staff to understand how vulnerability may be hidden. This may have been because domestic abuse victims weren't able to distance themselves from their abusers, or because children were not being seen by anyone outside their homes when their schools were closed.

In April, **Leicestershire Police** produced an intranet article for all staff based on a Home Office public campaign 'At home shouldn't mean at risk' that was also publicised on all social media channels. This highlighted the need for additional vigilance to identify vulnerability in the type of questioning used, the benefits in issuing a public protection notice, and looking beyond the obvious causes or complaints.

Other forces enhanced their quality assurance processes to reduce the chances of missing elements of risk and vulnerability. For example, **Nottinghamshire Police** included content about vulnerability in its vlogs (video blogs), updating officers and staff on how to spot and act on concerns.

Before the pandemic, we had found that forces were getting better at identifying vulnerability. But we reported in *A call for help*³ that in most forces there were inconsistent approaches to the risk assessment of vulnerability. This was serious enough to constitute an area for improvement in one third of forces. We shall continue to examine how forces are assessing risks and vulnerability in our PEEL inspection programme.

Contact using digital channels

Online contact from the public increased. This method for contacting the police became better known and was used more. Methods of contacting the police should continue to move to mirror more closely those in other large organisations such as local councils, hospitals, banks, utility and insurance companies.

Between 30 March and 30 November 2020, online reporting of crimes increased by 34.2 percent, from 311,470 to 417,988 compared with the same period in 2019. Forces sent weekly data giving their understanding of demand to the NPCC/NPoCC (Op Talla). These numbers aren't official crime statistics; the NPCC/NPoCC allowed us to use the data to inform our inspection.

Many forces ran publicity campaigns to encourage online contact, which will have resulted in some of the increase in reporting pandemic-related incidents online. But forces also saw increases in online contact for other reasons. The provision of online services expanded during the pandemic to help meet the increase in public demand. The NPCC had aimed for this growth to happen consistently throughout England and Wales in its 2019 National Contact Management Strategy.

Most forces told us they would carry on accelerating their provision of digital contact and online reporting methods for the public. They told us that staff working remotely could easily handle online methods of contact. It was helpful to have this higher rate of online contact when, at the same time, they needed to create space in contact centres and protect vulnerable members of the workforce. An online waiting list could be prioritised, but a telephone holding queue could not. Operators could quickly answer common requests for information and could simultaneously handle three or four requests for service.

But we found examples where digital contact was considered to be at a lower service level than telephone contact. The public's requests were dealt with only when staff had capacity to do so, not to established standards. Two forces told us that waiting times on web chat could be two hours.

Much of the shift to online contact was pandemic-specific, but some wasn't. The public expect a similar standard of service whether they use the telephone or digital means to contact the police. Similar changes are happening in, for example, online GP appointments and other parts of the public sector. We would expect there to be some learning available from these examples. Forces need to make sure that they have clear standards, performance management and governance structures for digital contact and that they monitor and report on them regularly.

³ [A call for help: police contact management through call handling and control rooms in 2018/19](#), HMICFRS, 9 July 2020.

Responding without deployment

Routine requests for service were more likely to receive a remote response during the pandemic, rather than a police officer or member of staff attending.

Emergency incident numbers remained reasonably steady. Priority incidents increased slightly and were likely to be attended in person rather than dealt with remotely – although this may not always have been the case. Routine incidents were the most likely to be dealt with by remote means.

Remote deployment or response means completing the same activities as would be done in person, but doing so by telephone, email, web chat or video meeting. Many members of the public would not have wanted to see police officers and staff face-to-face unless it was absolutely necessary. A remote response could work best for both the public and the force.

Responding remotely meant a lower risk of infection for officers, staff and the public and there were some efficiencies in how forces worked. Officers and staff who were working from home could carry out remote deployments, increasing the contribution vulnerable and isolating staff and those with caring responsibilities could make during pandemic restrictions.

For example, in **Durham Constabulary** incidents were allocated directly to officers. They assessed the incident with the caller to make a decision on whether it could be dealt with over the phone or in person. This made efficient use of the officer's expertise at the first contact. **Devon and Cornwall Police** sent all routine incident logs to a desk-top resolution team. **Kent Police** ran two appointment schedules: one for telephone contact, run by staff working from home, and one for face-to-face attendance.

Forces should check that their decision-making processes are robust and that service standards meet public expectations. Forces should be satisfied that deployment decisions benefit the person concerned and not just benefit the police. The workforce has to be clear about the service standards it is working within. The public should have some clarity as to the circumstances that are likely to lead to a police officer or member of staff visiting them in person. Forces will need to be able to show that they understand the scale and effect of remote deployment in all its forms, as opposed to attendance in person.

Resolution without deployment

We found that responding without deployment was expanding into resolution without deployment. A move to telephone resolution and desk-based resolutions was under way before the pandemic, and this increased. But in *A call for help*⁴ we reported our concern that there were no national guidelines or national quality assurance and assessment processes for resolution without deployment. Clear expectations must always be set and adhered to for decision-making. And nationally, through Op Talla's recovery, reform and learning programme, policing realised there was a growing trend towards remote deployment and resolution.

⁴ [A call for help: police contact management through call handling and control rooms in 2018/19](#), HMICFRS, 9 July 2020.

In our inspection, we asked forces what changes to their contact management they wished to keep. The third and fourth most popular were to resolve more problems by phone and to have more online appointments.

Analysing changes in deployment

Once the pandemic has passed, forces will need to be able to understand the scale and effect of remote deployment (response and resolution), as opposed to attendance in person. They should analyse the effect on, for example:

- victims' willingness to engage with the criminal justice system at first point of contact (and on later withdrawals from engagement);
- rapport-building with victims and witnesses;
- identification and disclosure of safeguarding risks; and
- public satisfaction.

To do this, forces need clarity in the data they are collecting and reporting on. They should make the necessary changes to their data collection methods to determine the scale of their remote deployment versus attendance in person.

Protecting people who are vulnerable

Demand

Forces predicted variations in the demand to protect people who are vulnerable. They also predicted staff absences due to the effects of the pandemic. They had contingency plans to cope if these things happened.

The level of calls on police forces to protect people who are vulnerable or at risk varied throughout England and Wales as government restrictions and guidelines changed. But variations in demand were not uniform.

- Forces told us that at the beginning of lockdown sexual offences where the victim was a child appeared to be fewer than they had dealt with in 2019. However, most noticed an increase from June 2020 onwards. This seems to be supported by partial and unverified data collated by Op Talla.
- Between 30 March and 1 November 2020, there was a reduction of 23.1 percent in reported missing people. Yet two forces reported that there had been an increase in reports of missing people.
- From the weekly data collection sent by forces to NPCC/NPoCC (Op Talla) between 30 March and 1 November 2020, calls related to domestic abuse increased by 1.8 percent. But 15 forces reported a reduction in domestic abuse calls.
- From the official crime statistics reported in February 2021, for the year ending September 2020 (provisional and not yet fully reconciled with police forces), domestic abuse offences increased by 10 percent between April and June 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. And 12 percent from June to September 2020 compared with the same period in 2019.

Our domestic abuse bulletin in spring 2021 will report on this in more detail.

Early in the first national lockdown, some statutory agencies withdrew or reduced their frontline services. Police forces stepped in, extending their remits. Examples included:

- visiting vulnerable families in some force areas to check on their safety as social workers withdrew from home visits;
- in **West Yorkshire Police**, an officer was asked to take photographs of the inside of a house and email them to a social worker so that social services could assess if it was suitable for a child to live in;
- also in **West Yorkshire**, probation staff were asking police to undertake probation visits. These were to make safeguarding disclosures to families and tell them about potential risks posed by an offender to, for example, children and vulnerable adults within a family;
- children being brought into police stations for extended periods under police protection as some local authorities struggled more than usual to provide emergency accommodation; and
- staff from the National Probation Service had little face-to-face contact with registered sex offenders early in the pandemic. They weren't able to access ViSOR, the dangerous persons database management tool used by the police and other agencies to manage registered sex offenders and other dangerous offenders. This led in some cases to the police undertaking visits and contributing to active risk management (ARMS) assessments that should have been completed by a probation officer.

Reporting of vulnerability incidents by third parties (for example, other family members and neighbours) also increased. Forces believed that with everyone spending far more time than usual at home, people were noticing worrying behaviour that they may otherwise have missed. This additional awareness and reporting also brought to attention families previously not known to the police. Worryingly, there was an apparent increase in child neglect offences being reported after restrictions in the first two national lockdowns were lifted.

Analysis, policy change and intervention

Police forces made sure they could continue to protect vulnerable people. Some forces conducted analyses with other safeguarding partner organisations and the third sector (charities, voluntary and community groups). These analyses established risk to victims from perpetrators that was likely to increase due to lockdown restrictions. Innovative work by forces included:

- in **Gwent**, police and probation staff set up a daily call to discuss domestic abuse incidents and information. This covered suspects in custody and offenders who had failed to keep probation appointments, indicating a potential increase in risk;
- as lockdown measures eased, domestic homicide and reporting of domestic abuse both increased. **Leicestershire Police** listed all high-risk domestic abuse cases for fortnightly face-to-face visits and neighbourhood teams were instructed to be aware of the cases;
- some forces worked with local authority children's services to identify children and families who may be at heightened risk. Social worker visits had reduced and children were not being seen by teachers while schools were closed;

- **Humberside Police** worked with local authorities to identify children considered to be at increased risk of harm from sexual exploitation and other criminal activity. More at-risk children were identified and interventions increased, including joint home visits;
- **Devon and Cornwall Police** worked together with social workers and school staff to make sure that safeguarding measures were effective and timely for children at risk from increases in alcohol-related neglect and domestic violence;
- housing providers went above and beyond their normal work to find alternative accommodation to safeguard victims. Forces worked with housing providers to find places for perpetrators of abuse to live, away from their victims. Lockdown restrictions reduced the options for perpetrators who had to live somewhere other than their family homes. This could be, for example, because of bail conditions or domestic violence protection notices/orders that order a suspected perpetrator not to return to a victim's home and/or not to contact the victim;
- forces reviewing and changing their policies. For example, some forces offered extra support and safeguarding for repeat victims of domestic abuse who had fewer opportunities to seek help themselves; and
- **Leicestershire Police** joined with victim support services to create posters and messaging to support victims of domestic abuse. These had updated information about online and telephone support in the absence of face-to-face services.

Working with other organisations

Partnership meetings and data exchange processes for safeguarding were adapted or changed, providing protection and support to ensure the safety of vulnerable people and prevent further harm. This was to better monitor and include emerging at-risk groups, vulnerable people and perpetrators. In most areas, meeting structures were updated to concentrate on the most important concerns. This ensured that the critical risks faced by the most vulnerable people could be managed in the event of a disruption or change in services.

Online remote meetings were difficult at first due to some IT incompatibility between organisations and forces. In most cases, these problems were quickly resolved. We found that organisations were well represented in their attendance and sent staff at appropriate levels of seniority. In some areas, we were told that the effectiveness of partnership meetings increased through using video technology.

In **Humberside**, the force and its partner organisations, such as health and social care, had already considered switching to video technology for multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) meetings. These bring together the main local safeguarding agencies to better identify risks to children and improve decision-making, interventions and end results. This was in place by the time of our inspection. Attendance improved, resulting in enhanced information exchange, leading to earlier and more informed decision-making. This meant better results for vulnerable people. This way of working is likely to continue after the pandemic.

In most cases, operational level safeguarding meetings with other organisations also benefited from moving online. These included, but weren't limited to:

- child protection conferences;
- planning meetings;
- multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) for people at high or very high risk of serious harm from violent and sexual offenders living in the community; and
- multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) about high-risk domestic abuse victims.

Forces reported increased attendance and engagement by partner agencies. They saw significant savings in time and cost. They reported greater productivity and enhanced safeguarding activity.

In some cases, forces faced resistance in trying to move their partner agencies towards online meetings. During the initial national lockdown, such meetings became necessary to continue to protect vulnerable people. Feedback from partner agencies to forces was largely positive. Many forces anticipated that current arrangements would continue after the pandemic.

Information exchange

Information exchange between the police and partner agencies was mostly effective. Most forces already worked with statutory and some non-statutory partner agencies to form a MASH (sometimes known by a different name).

The agencies involved in each MASH can share information securely. This helps professionals to establish and understand risk earlier and respond to problems faced by known and previously unknown vulnerable people. The most appropriate services then carry out prevention and proactive activity to support the vulnerable and develop strategies to tackle perpetrators.

There was some initial disruption to the normal function of MASHs as officers and staff started working from home. Sharing information securely was hard. Incompatible IT systems, for example with **Durham Constabulary's** MASH partners, made joint online screening and decision-making difficult. This improved after agencies discussed the situation, and subsequently several staff were re-introduced to the MASH rota. However, sharing information and holding meetings online became common. Forces told us that in many cases this improved their responses to vulnerable people.

Most forces continued to work with Operation Encompass, an arrangement that helps schools offer immediate support for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. Police share information with schools about domestic abuse incidents that have affected their students. Many children known to be vulnerable were still attending school. For those vulnerable children not attending school, teachers were regularly contacting them at home. Information from Operation Encompass ensured that school staff were aware of continuing risks.

External communications

Forces highlighted the changing nature of risk and hidden harms faced by vulnerable people and encouraged people to report concerns. They worked with other organisations and used innovative methods of communication. Most forces have taken part in national and local campaigns to highlight additional risks from domestic abuse, online child abuse and older people being at risk of fraud. In some cases, local policing bodies provided additional funding.

In **Durham Constabulary**, joint media campaigns were implemented through the child, adult and domestic abuse strategic partnership groups. Posters were displayed in public spaces and supermarkets to encourage vulnerable people to contact the police or other agencies with their concerns.

Kent Police worked with health services to get fraud prevention messages to the elderly through custom-printed pharmacy bags. Some forces, such as **Sussex** and **West Yorkshire**, worked with organisations to provide training to other frontline workers and volunteers to encourage them to be vigilant spotting signs of abuse or neglect. **West Yorkshire Police** worked with postal staff and other delivery vehicle drivers through a project encouraging them to use professional curiosity to identify potentially vulnerable people, rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value.

Internal communications

Forces provided internal communications, briefings and additional training to officers and staff that highlighted the risks from hidden harms during the pandemic restrictions. These included details of emerging risks to vulnerable groups, the need to exercise greater professional curiosity when attending incidents and, where necessary, to make referrals to statutory and supportive services.

In **Wiltshire Police**, staff from public protection roles gave presentations over five weeks to all frontline uniformed staff. This included topics such as hidden harms, modern-day slavery, vulnerable adults, missing and exploited children, coercive and controlling behaviour within relationships, and building prosecutions without the victim's support.

Online child sexual abuse

The National Crime Agency believes that the risk to children from online offenders increased as children and offenders spent more time online at home. Some forces adapted their processes to mitigate potential increases in demand. They adapted their risk assessments and the ways in which they used their resources, and prioritised cases. However, most forces we inspected reported only small or moderate increases in demand.

From 20 April–27 December 2020, indicative data suggests that there was a 9.4 percent decrease in the reporting to the police of offences involving indecent images of children compared with the same period in 2019. This data is indicative because it was only available for 35 forces and was not available for every week. This data does not necessarily mean that the risk to children decreased, as offences may not have been reported to the police.

Forces regularly monitored the demand from reports of online child sexual abuse. Senior managers used this information in their regular pandemic meetings reviews so that they could react and make changes to working practices when required.

When demand dropped from other types of vulnerability, several forces, such as **Nottinghamshire Police**, redeployed staff from other safeguarding teams to add to their online paedophile investigation capabilities. As a result, most forces didn't report any significant increase in backlogs of new cases.

However, we were told about some backlogs in digital forensic services. Fewer staff were in the workplace; the nature of the case material means that this work can't be done at home. This led to further significant delays in an already stretched system.

Criminal exploitation of children and county lines

Forces told us they were aware that the risks to children from criminal exploitation and county lines drug dealing was likely to change as perpetrators changed the ways in which they offended. At a strategic level, the police and other organisations responded jointly to this through their existing meeting structures. Staff working in intelligence and analytical functions adapted their focus and monitored the emerging risks.

Operationally, forces took the initiative during periods of reduced demand in some other areas of policing to try to identify children at risk of exploitation. In some forces, such as **Gwent**, staff engaged virtually with children at risk of exploitation, using audio and video technology. In some cases, this led to the children having more engagement with safeguarding professionals.

Mental health

Forces told us that the demand from mental health incidents initially dropped. However, the demand appeared to increase as restrictions were eased. This seems to be supported by partial and unverified data collated by Op Talla.

We found a mixed picture for joint early response and prioritising services in the forces we inspected. These services can have mental health specialists working in the force control room or with response officers. For example, in some areas of **Devon and Cornwall**, joint response vehicles continued going to people in mental health crisis. A paramedic, a police officer and an approved mental health professional worked together in a South Western Ambulance Service vehicle. Staff had access to NHS data so that they could make informed decisions and take appropriate action at the scene of incidents.

In Exeter, mental health professionals were based in the control room to advise police colleagues. In **Durham Constabulary**, during our inspection, mental health professionals were based in the contact centre to advise frontline officers. However, in **Kent**, health services had to close two of the three section 136 suites (Mental Health Act places of safety) because of work planned pre-pandemic to modify the facilities. With no suitable safe places available, police officers had to remain with vulnerable people in A&E. Subsequently, as a result of the well-established relationships with health service managers, the matter was urgently reviewed, and alternative provision made.

Managing registered sex offenders

When the first national lockdown began, forces made changes managing registered sex offenders in the community. National guidance issued in March 2020 advised that home visits to offenders should be considered as part of the overall risk management plan for each offender based on their individual circumstances. The guidance added that it was reasonable to consider the necessity for a face-to-face visit based on the current risk assessment and existing risk management plan.

Forces interpreted the national guidance in different ways. Some forces stopped visiting low- and some medium-risk offenders in favour of telephone or virtual online visits. They maintained visits to high-risk offenders in a COVID-safe way where possible. As restrictions were lifted, some forces returned to visiting registered sex offenders at all risk levels.

However, some forces did not return to working to the College of Policing's approved professional practice. This meant that forces might not be managing dangerous offenders appropriately. This could put vulnerable people at risk. We raised this risk with the NPCC lead, who responded swiftly and immediately issued new guidance. Forces should make sure that officers understand this guidance correctly.

The use of the ViSOR dangerous persons database management tool is governed by strict security protocols that are not compatible with remote or home working. Forces faced problems maintaining continuity while adhering to social distancing and COVID-safe office guidance.

Managing registered sex offenders and other offenders is a multi-agency responsibility. During the initial stages of the pandemic, staff from the National Probation Service were having little face-to-face contact with offenders and were not able to access ViSOR. This led in some cases to the police extending their remit to undertake visits and contribute to ARMS assessments that should have been completed by probation officers.

Engaging, explaining, encouraging, enforcing

Enforcing coronavirus legislation

At the beginning of the pandemic, Parliament passed the Coronavirus Act 2020, which made emergency provision for a range of temporary measures to deal with the consequences of the pandemic. These included things such as the temporary authorisation of medical personnel, the relaxation of measures for the protection of vulnerable people, and the postponement of elections. As far as the police were concerned, the Act's principal provisions concerned the closure of premises or restrictions on their use, and special powers for the police to assist medical personnel dealing with persons suspected of being infected by the virus.

The principal lockdown provisions were not made under the Coronavirus Act 2020, but in a statutory instrument made by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984: the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020. Welsh Ministers made parallel regulations. The first set of regulations was made on 26 March 2020 and came into effect even before they were laid before Parliament. In the months which

followed, the regulations were amended and supplemented a considerable number of times, when lockdown restrictions were eased or strengthened, imposed, relaxed and re-imposed, in different parts of the country, for different periods and with differing intensities. The first set of regulations covered 11 pages; the last set extended to 123 pages. It was hard to keep up with them.

These instruments created new criminal offences. Penalties were specified, including escalating fines which could be issued by police officers (and challenged in court).

The offences which attracted the greatest public attention were failures to comply with lockdown restrictions. For the first time, even in war time, the public were confined to their homes, and a person was only allowed out if they had a reasonable excuse. The first regulations contained a non-exhaustive list of 13 reasonable excuses, including obtaining basic necessities such as food and medical supplies, taking exercise, travelling to and from work and escaping violence or other harm. The principle was 'reasonable excuse', but unfortunately that was not widely understood.

It is a fundamental principle of interpretation of legislation (primary and secondary) that it should be construed in the light of and to give effect to its statutory purpose. The purpose in this case was preventing, protecting against, delaying or otherwise controlling the incidence or transmission of coronavirus. With that purpose in mind, it became much easier to understand the cases where members of the public were legitimately outside their homes and where they were not. Regrettably, in too many cases front-line police officers did not receive these explanations which would have made their jobs much easier.

Their difficulty was made worse by a widespread confusion in relation to the status of Government announcements and statements by ministers. Ministers asserting that their guidance – which had no higher status than requests – were in fact “instructions to the British people” inevitably confused people. In some cases, police officers misunderstood the distinction, and appeared to believe that ministerial instructions were equivalent to the criminal law.

For example, the two-metre distancing 'rule' has only ever been in guidance (aside from some requirements on the hospitality sector such as licensed premises and restaurants). The request to 'stay local' has never been a legal requirement. The suggested limits on the number of times a person could go out to exercise in a day and for how long were only ever in guidance, not regulations.

Some forces told us that they sought legal advice on the regulations so that they could produce clear guidance for their workforces. But the speed with which regulations were made and amended (usually by being added to) was great. And to many, the distinction between law and guidance remained uncertain.

In these circumstances, mistakes were made. During the initial lockdown, there was significant media coverage of what was often described as police overreach. High-profile examples included road checks to identify unnecessary journeys, drone surveillance of people in open and almost deserted places, and police action in relation to non-essential shopping and what was thought to be excessive exercise.

The exhortation only to take ‘essential journeys’ was no more than guidance; it was not the law.

It is not the function of the police to treat government guidance, however well-intentioned (as it undoubtedly was), as rules of the criminal law. Ministers may create criminal offences only if authorised by Parliament to do so; they may not do so by the simple expedient of demanding action from a podium or behind a lectern.

And as difficulties arose and some well-publicised mistakes were made, public confidence in, and support for, the police were inevitably put at risk. And yet, despite these extraordinary difficulties and pressures, a very significant proportion of police work to deal with the lockdown was measured, proportionate and sound.

In May 2020, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) published a review of initial cases under coronavirus laws. The review found that the vast majority of prosecutions under the regulations – 175 out of 187 – had been charged correctly. Seven cases were discontinued in court on the day of the defendant’s appearance, and five convictions were returned to be re-opened and withdrawn. Errors were most commonly Welsh regulations being applied in England or vice versa. However, the review also found that all 44 cases under the Coronavirus Act 2020 were incorrectly charged. This was because there was no evidence that the cases concerned potentially infectious people.

It is essential that the police are seen to be enforcing the criminal law, and not appearing to act as the coercive agents of ministers. The model of British policing is very different from those found in authoritarian countries, and nothing must be allowed to be done which leads the public to believe ministers can criminalise actions by edict then enforced by the police.

Forces must always make sure their officers and staff are perfectly clear what is law and what is not, and have the plainest explanation of the limits of their powers and how best they should use them to maintain public confidence and support. The NPCC and the College of Policing should ensure that national standards are set which emphasise and simply explain the proper powers of the police and what they are not required to do.

The Four Es: Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce

Policing has an important role in helping to deal with the public health emergency by engaging with the public, explaining the law and encouraging compliance with it. All forces adopted the Four Es approach suggested by Op Talla and the NPCC. The NPCC and the College of Policing issued guidance. This aimed to help officers make sure that the public understood what was being asked, why it was being asked and from whom it was being asked.

In their self-assessments, all forces told us they had adopted the Four Es approach. But we found that most forces found it difficult to give a consistent message. As already explained, problems affecting forces’ performance included the complexity of the legislation, differences throughout England and Wales in how the regulations were applied or interpreted, and which legislation applied to a given area. This was compounded by the frequency of changes in the overall situation, in announcements and in the legislation itself. It was also made more difficult by variations in infection

rates, the application of different local lockdowns, and national communication that was not always effective. Forces consistently told us that they were not given enough time to adjust their responses or messaging in relation to changes. Communication was often through media news releases or national announcements online late at night.

The pandemic legislation covers many elements including localised restrictions, large gatherings, face coverings, regulations relating to business and international travel quarantine. Each of the elements required specific consideration by each force accounting for local demand, resources and planning. To make sure that the police response was matched to the community and to the identified risk, forces needed to consult in depth with their LRFs, other organisations and local government. Each time government changed guidance and legislation, each force had to consider what response was required, how that was communicated and how to update staff.

The pandemic situation changed quickly and the requirements to respond to it also changed. We were told that most of the changes had to be communicated in forces through briefings, emails, force intranets and in meetings. Structured training to support the communication was not always possible. Officers told us they often felt unsupported in this fast-changing context and weren't always clear about what applied in their local areas. They told us that they found it difficult to explain, engage and encourage when faced with the large number of changes.

How forces updated the public changed significantly. The first thing the public heard when calling 101, or were told when making other contact, was what the police service response to the pandemic would be. Most forces created a dedicated page on their websites that guided visitors to government or NHS pages. But most websites lacked local context to show what the force response would be. Some did take the opportunity to engage, explain and encourage. **Wiltshire Police's** website provided in-depth detail on what the force was doing and **Cumbria Constabulary** included more detail on the virus and the pandemic regulations.

Forces increased engagement using social media and local websites. **Humberside Police** trained 400 officers to improve social media skills so that they could engage with the public more effectively. We were told of senior leaders putting out messages through news outlets and local radio stations. **Kent Police's** chief constable had a regular slot on the local radio. Many forces used radio broadcasts to get messages out to the public successfully. A few forces had dedicated communication officers to support their public engagement. Some made videos explaining their forces' approach and why enforcement action was being taken.

Most forces used their neighbourhood policing teams and enhanced their patrol plans to make their Four Es approach work. We mostly found this way of working to be happening in similar ways throughout England and Wales.

For example, over seven days, **Cumbria Constabulary** recorded 795 occasions where it had engaged, explained and encouraged. It also issued 88 fixed penalty notices (FPNs). An FPN gives the person to whom it is issued the opportunity of paying a fine to avoid a conviction. The force created a pandemic engagement form to be accessed either through the force's intranet from a desktop or laptop computer, or on an app on an officer's mobile phone. The detailed information from the forms was

analysed by the force to make sure its deployment of officers and their use of the Four Es was proportionate and that enforcement was legitimate.

The system provided the force and other organisations in Cumbria with detailed analysis for each district in the force area and was supported by community impact assessments. As a result, the force monitored the activity of its dedicated neighbourhood policing team COVID patrols. This information was cross-referenced to each neighbourhood policing team patrol plan to check that information and intelligence were acted on and areas of higher risk were being proactively patrolled.

Enforcement

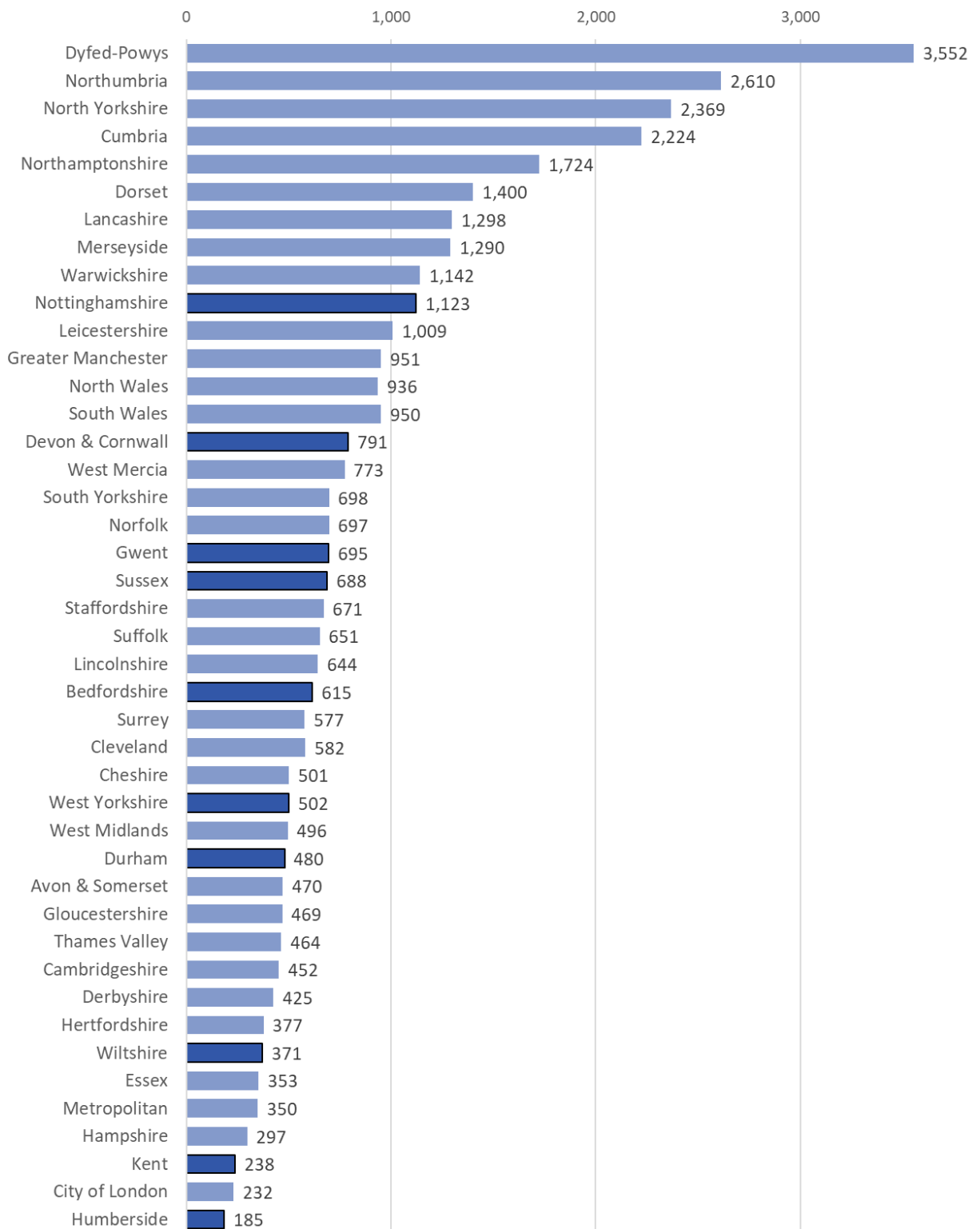
All forces consistently said that enforcement was their last option. But enforcing the pandemic regulations was not straightforward as local restrictions changed regularly. The data on FPNs indicates that forces more readily applied enforcement measures during the first lockdown, particularly in relation to breaches of movement restrictions. Most forces allocated dedicated resources to manage breaches of the regulations. And we found a focus on using local neighbourhood policing teams to improve engagement and safeguarding. Forces were clearly supporting their communities at this difficult time. But despite police forces' attempts to explain and engage, some people continued to breach regulations.

The chart below shows the number of FPNs issued by forces throughout England and Wales from 27 March 2020 to 17 January 2021. We use this date range because of the time lag between forces issuing FPNs and the national ACRO criminal records office processing them. To provide a clear national snapshot of FPNs for a reporting period, the NPCC uses ACRO criminal records office data. The NPCC only provides FPN data submitted by forces and then processed by ACRO.

The chart below also shows the variation in those numbers. The variation is likely to reflect a range of factors including the different approaches each force took to issuing FPNs for breaches of the regulations. As we conducted fieldwork for this theme in only 10 of the 43 forces, we have not been able to examine this variation fully.

The number of FPNs issued should not be seen as a measure of the amount of police activity involved in enforcing the regulations, or the level of public non-compliance with them. As we say elsewhere in this report, officers often issued FPNs as a last resort, having first tried to engage with the public, explaining and encouraging compliance with the new regulations.

Figure 1: FPNs issued per million population under Coronavirus Regulations by police forces in England and Wales, 27 March 2020 to 17 January 2021



Dark blue indicates forces interviewed for this inspection. We used the City of London’s daytime population to calculate its FPN rate.

Source: NPCC update on crime trends and FPNs issued under coronavirus regulations 28 January 2021

All forces set up processes using both traditional and new systems to report on their activity relating to enforcement. Some forces installed electronic FPNs on officers' mobile devices. Instead of having to manually complete a paper form, fill in details on a spreadsheet on return to the office and then send off the records, the officer could complete and upload the FPN electronically. The details were sent to the ACRO criminal records office to issue the FPN and receive payments. The electronic FPN allowed forces quicker access to data and instant monitoring by senior leaders.

Forces also told us that the development and use of pandemic smart apps helped them to manage breaches better. The apps provided officers with an easy reference point for the current version of the regulations. They also outlined each force's own approach to the Four Es and had enough information to help frontline staff deal with repeat breaches.

Forces told us that the FPN proved to be a useful tool for enforcing the regulations. But they also told us how important it was that all parts of the criminal justice system were able to support their enforcement work. A particular concern for some forces was the CPS decision to charge other offences in preference to coronavirus offences. This resulted in coronavirus regulation charges sometimes being dropped as they did not increase the length of people's sentences. For example, a suspect would be charged only for possession with intent to supply drugs and not for also breaching coronavirus regulations. We discuss charging decisions in more detail in the criminal justice system section of this report.

As lockdown rules changed, reports of breaches increased. Test and trace activity also created more demands on forces as officers enforced the requirement for members of the public to self-isolate. To support policing, the government provided an additional £30 million in funding for pandemic enforcement work. Forces used the funding in different ways. Some examples included paying for overtime, pandemic-specific teams and pandemic-dedicated police cars.

Despite forces increasing patrols, supported by the £30 million funding, breaches in some areas showed no signs of slowing. Most forces reported large gatherings, businesses breaching the rules, and several protests in their areas. As areas of the UK moved in and out of tiers, the demand and the need to enforce regulations changed. Most forces introduced systems to monitor the changes to make sure they were able to respond effectively. When they saw high virus infection rates in a specific area, they focused on their enforcement approach. Often, a chief officer was the force representative communicating with the public.

For **Greater Manchester Police**, the chief constable released a statement reinforcing the Four Es approach to policing new Tier 3 restrictions.⁵ Officers were asked to consider enforcement at an earlier stage where clear breaches of legislation were found, for example in cases of large house parties. As a result, 120 FPNs were issued

⁵ The four-tier system was introduced by the Government to establish restrictions on freedom in proportion to the risks which the Secretary of State determined to exist in the different areas in question. Tier 2 was the least restrictive, while Tier 4 instructed the public to stay at home as much as possible. Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers and Obligations of Undertakings) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

in seven days after Tier 3 restrictions began in Greater Manchester. Officers went to more than 1,500 coronavirus regulations-related incidents in the same seven days.

Most forces operated daily control room logs to assess the consistency of their approaches to enforcement. They assessed contact records, FPNs and closures. In addition, they measured and monitored repeat offenders and repeat breaches.

British Transport Police developed software so that all pandemic-related interactions with members of the public could be recorded by officers in a similar way to recording stop and search. The details, including ethnicity and outcome, were recorded to help the force to show proportionality. They were also recorded to monitor and learn lessons from the activity and provide the necessary data for any future audit or enquiry. We were told that, at the time of our inspection, about 61,000 interactions were on the force database.

Evaluation

Forces needed to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of their application of the Four Es, especially enforcement. To understand how police actions had affected public confidence, [we commissioned market analysts YouGov to provide an online public perception survey](#). Between 27 and 29 November 2020, 2,033 adults in England and Wales were asked:

- how effective the police have been at providing advice and information about the pandemic;
- how effective the police have been at providing information on how to report incidents or crime during the pandemic;
- how the police should enforce coronavirus restrictions;
- what they thought about how the police have enforced the coronavirus restrictions; and
- how visible the police have been during the pandemic.

The survey found that:

- one third of respondents (33 percent) believed the police were effective at providing pandemic-related guidance, while one third (35 percent) thought they had not been effective; the remaining third (33 percent) did not know;
- most respondents (70 percent) had not seen any information on how to report crime to the police during the pandemic;
- the majority (75 percent) believed the police should enforce some or all coronavirus restrictions;
- most people felt the police either were doing the right amount (33 percent) or should have done more (38 percent) to enforce restrictions; and
- visibility was more likely to have decreased (for 20 percent of respondents) than increased (for 13 percent of respondents) during the pandemic.

All forces adapted their internal systems and introduced processes to monitor and implement the Four Es approach effectively. But few forces were able to check public reaction. **Leicestershire Police** completed a community survey, which showed that 37 percent thought the police response to the pandemic had been excellent and

43 percent good. Only 19 percent thought it had been fair, poor or very poor. To find out about the effect on its communities, **Northumbria Police** held online meetings with local groups.

Most forces used technology to scrutinise the appropriateness of their Four Es approaches. This included, for example, using footage from body-worn video to review the issuing of FPNs. Forces generally engaged independent bodies, such as their independent advisory groups, to check the legitimacy of their approaches. Those forces using the single online home facility, a consistent national approach to reporting crimes and for accessing non-emergency services, told us it had proved positive in improving reporting and messaging. We have written about this facility in *A call for help*⁶ and expect to see all 43 forces become involved, shaping it to reflect local context.

Evaluation improved as responding to the pandemic became part of normal police work. We found that police forces continually reviewed their responses. For example, **Gloucestershire Constabulary** and the **Police Service of Northern Ireland** conducted in-depth reviews with lessons learned and new processes introduced to address the findings. From the outset of the pandemic, **Wiltshire Police** set up a process to monitor each stage of the Four Es approach, creating a database for each 'E'. Some forces, including **Wiltshire Police**, had a scrutiny panel to monitor whether the issuing of FPNs under coronavirus regulations was affecting particular groups in society disproportionately.

Investigating crime

Changing demand

At the start of March 2020, requests for service broadly matched 2019 levels. As COVID-19 entered the public consciousness in mid-March, and with the announcement of the first coronavirus restrictions:

- 999 calls reduced from almost 163,000 to fewer than 124,000; and
- 101 calls reduced from more than 260,000 to fewer than 223,000.

(Source: Weekly NPCC/NPoCC (Op Talla) data for week starting 8 March to week starting 5 April.)

Despite the initial reductions in call numbers, the police dealt with many calls linked to COVID-19. For example, in the week starting 12 April, forces dealt with more than 78,000 incidents where COVID-19 was logged as a factor – a rate of more than one COVID-19 incident every eight seconds.

Recorded crime reported weekly to NPCC/NPoCC (Op Talla) remained lower than in 2019 throughout much of March to June (initial lockdown), before returning to normal levels in the late summer. While recorded crime reduced overall, the police had to deal with changes in the nature of the demand. Offences involving domestic abuse and assaults on the police and other emergency workers were higher than in 2019.

⁶ [A call for help: police contact management through call handling and control rooms in 2018/19](#), HMICFRS, 9 July 2020.

Crime levels

Official crime statistics for the year to the end of September 2020 weren't available until the beginning of February 2021. We reflect on some of these statistics below.

Recorded crime shows unprecedented changes. The incidence of crimes in some categories reduced significantly following the introduction of the first national lockdown. Thefts reduced by a third as did recorded robbery. Offences involving firearms and knives or sharp objects also reduced. Conversely, some crime types, most notably public order and drugs offences, increased compared with 2019. Some forces attributed this to officers having more time to take the initiative and find offenders rather than any increase in criminal activity. With so few other cars on the roads, drugs offenders were less able to hide in plain sight.

Figure 2: Police recorded crime excluding UK finance crime, April to September 2020

Crime group	2019/20	2020/21	Change	Change %
Criminal damage and arson	282,662	244,045	-38,617	-14%
Drug offences	89,819	105,813	15,994	18%
Fraud offences	344,016	327,090	-16,926	-5%
Miscellaneous crimes	53,263	55,908	2,645	5%
Possession of weapons offences	24,249	23,524	-725	-3%
Public order offences	242,911	260,693	17,782	7%
Robbery	45,157	30,140	-15,017	-33%
Sexual offences	82,695	72,876	-9,819	-12%
Theft offences	989,585	651,223	-338,362	-34%
Violence against the person	890,880	913,106	22,226	2%
Total	3,045,237	2,684,418	-360,819	-12%

Source: Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables: updated 3 February 2021

Prioritising investigations

Police forces use their own policies to determine which recorded crimes should be allocated for investigation and by which departments. These decisions are often based on solvability factors, vulnerability and/or assessments of threat, harm and risk.

Most forces continued with their existing allocation policies. Thirteen forces reported amendments, some of which were to be implemented only in the event of unmanageable demand. Others simply offered guidance for officers about proportionality, allowing discretion to investigate offences based on the seriousness of cases. Some were more fundamental. **Kent Police** expanded its use of an existing investigative tool. This used an algorithm to efficiently target for investigation the most solvable high-volume crime cases, while always considering the public interest.

We understand why some crimes that forces assessed as unlikely to be solved were not investigated and 'filed at first instance' or 'screened out'. It prevented workloads becoming unmanageable, allowing more time to concentrate on more serious offences and those with clear lines of inquiry. It also seemed sensible to have contingencies for amending thresholds in the event of increased demand or reduced staff.

But we have concerns about the possible detrimental effect for victims resulting from any changes in approach, especially at a time of changes in demand. Any changes in decisions about whether to investigate offences with viable lines of inquiry or named suspects would be especially worrying.

At first, some forces chose not to pursue any warrants for arrest, or any outstanding investigations that could result in arrest. In cases of alleged offences at the lower end of the spectrum, this was understandable for a limited time, until the impact of the pandemic became clearer. Other forces saw the changes in the nature of demand as an opportunity to 'clear up' cases with outstanding named suspects. It is important that forces work with local policing bodies and victims' groups to consider the changes. Forces need to analyse the changes, assess how they affect the quality of service for victims, and monitor the effect on end results.

Capacity to meet changing demand

Most forces managed investigative demand without the need to change the ways they used their resources. But many had contingency plans in case demand exceeded capacity, for example as a result of increased absences, or because of staff self-isolating.

We were told by 11 forces that they needed to shift their resources to make sure that all investigative functions continued to operate effectively. One force used officers from its homicide team to help to clear outstanding sexual offence investigations.

Because of the changes in the nature of demand, forces told us that staff, particularly investigators, could concentrate on clearing their outstanding investigations. They reduced backlogs and, with increased supervision, specialist guidance and support, improved the quality of investigations. One force used detectives working from home to review investigations where there was a named suspect.

Forces need to assess how they might sustain improvements as demand returns to more normal levels. We have commented previously about shortages of trained detectives in our *PEEL Effectiveness 2016* report⁷ and our *PEEL Effectiveness 2017* report.⁸ Responding to the pandemic may have affected capacity even more.

⁷ [PEEL: police effectiveness 2016 – a national overview](#), HMICFRS, 2 March 2017.

⁸ [PEEL: police effectiveness 2017 – a national overview](#), HMICFRS, 22 March 2018.

Supporting investigations

Some forces reported little effect on their specialist investigative and support functions. Most found solutions to problems so that they could carry on working, making best use of technology and remote working. But existing difficulties have worsened, including:

- analytical staff having to do other work in response to the pandemic;
- conducting interviews, in line with Achieving Best Evidence guidance, while being COVID-safe (see below);
- submission and examination of forensic exhibits and examination of digital media. In some forces, only a limited number of staff could be in offices safely and those staff working from home could carry out only limited tasks; and
- surveillance activity was reported as problematical; there was less traffic on the roads and generally fewer people moving around. Some forces reduced or suspended surveillance activity for a short time; others were able to increase patrolling because of changes in the nature of demand.

Achieving Best Evidence interview guidance

The guidance is to make sure that vulnerable and intimidated witnesses are supported before and during a criminal trial to help them give their best evidence in what can be a traumatic and intimidating experience. It applies to both prosecution and defence witnesses and is intended for everyone. This includes the police, social workers and members of the legal profession. Much of this involves close contact between people, which can be difficult in COVID-safe circumstances.

Serious crime

Investigations into serious crime can't be suspended, so several forces reviewed their capability in respect of major and organised crime investigations. They switched people around within departments. Some forces said they were able to work safely and effectively by changing working practices. One force conducted a murder investigation remotely.

Gathering evidence

Unsurprisingly, responding to crime reports and carrying out the resulting investigations presented many problems. Generally, forces were able to find solutions; some of these may lead to permanent change.

Minimising face-to-face contact to protect both the public and the investigators presented difficulties. Many victims and witnesses were naturally reluctant to meet police. Standard follow-up activities, such as house-to-house inquiries and CCTV collection, had to be done differently.

We were consistently told that getting witness statements was one of the biggest problems. This became even more difficult when dealing with older, vulnerable and/or shielding witnesses. Some people worried that attending a police station breached government guidance about essential journeys.

Other difficulties included:

- collecting medical evidence, especially from hospitals, which had their own strict procedures;
- not being able to gather medical evidence early enough when investigating complaints of sexual offences;
- restrictions on prison visits;
- many business premises being closed for extended periods, preventing the collection of evidence; and
- dealing with members of the public who presented with or claimed to have coronavirus symptoms.

But we found many examples of forces adapting and coping, often using technology. Some practices have proved so successful that they are likely to be adopted permanently. These included:

- taking witness statements remotely, usually by phone. Acceptance of electronic signatures has made this more effective. This reduced the number of face-to-face personal interactions required so victims were not at risk from infection. It has also proved a much more efficient use of police time and has been widely implemented;
- digitally transferring statements and evidence directly to the CPS;
- using staff working from home, often those isolating or shielding, to conduct remote investigations or review older cases; and
- adapting and amending policy and procedure to manage scenes of sudden and unexpected death where COVID-19 was believed to be present. In **Cheshire**, HM Coroner agreed that police officers, in exceptional circumstances and to avoid significant delays, could pronounce 'life extinct' when faced with an obvious death, such as decapitation, and if no medical professional was available. Certification of death by suitably qualified clinicians remained a requirement.

Dealing with suspects

Nearly all forces said that dealing with suspects in custody and conducting interviews had proved difficult, potentially hindering investigations. We discuss this in more detail in the Keeping people in custody section of our report.

Suspect interviews are a vital stage of the investigative process, particularly in serious and complex cases. Legal representatives and other interested parties, such as interpreters and appropriate adults, were on occasions reluctant to attend custody suites. Managing detainees suspected of, or claiming to be, suffering symptoms of the virus created further difficulties.

Forces adopted the temporary interview protocol (agreed by the NPCC, the CPS, the Law Society, the Criminal Law Solicitors' Association and the London Criminal Courts Solicitors' Association) that introduced guidance to allow detainees to exercise their rights to legal advice and representation using audio and video technology. This allowed remote provision using audio and video technology. Estimates suggest that these measures were being used in over half of investigations.

Out-of-court disposals

Out-of-court disposals (OOCs) present options to the police to offer people alternatives to prosecution. They allow the police to deal quickly and proportionately with low-level, often first-time, offences that can be resolved satisfactorily and in the public interest without going to court. Their use should involve victim engagement and be, for example:

- fair to victim and offender;
- proportionate to the crime involved;
- designed to reduce further offending;
- clear and made in a timely manner; and
- consistent throughout all police forces.

We asked forces if they had increased their use of OOCs rather than prosecuting offenders. The results were mixed, but many forces reported that they were actively evaluating this. Reasons to use OOCs included:

- keeping people suspected of minor offences out of custody areas – this was because of the need to operate in a COVID-safe environment;
- perceived difficulties receiving charging advice from the CPS in a timely manner, or receiving advice from the CPS that an OOC was more appropriate; and/or
- the perception that court delays meant that the victim was unlikely to receive swift justice if the suspect was charged.

Other examples included a force that revised authorisation levels so that OOCs could be used at the earliest opportunity. Some forces went further and worked with CPS colleagues to review cases awaiting trial to establish if any were suitable to be dealt with by an OOC.

During the pandemic there were clear benefits to this approach. Swifter investigations could be done with much less face-to-face interaction. It also reduced the demand on courts and the queues for trials. But it is important that forces work with local policing bodies and victims' groups to consider the extent to which the changes affect the quality of service for victims and to monitor the effect on end results. Decisions must be fair to victims and offenders, with their best interests central to decisions. Forces should as far as possible be acting consistently with other forces in their decision-making.

Keeping people in custody

For this part of our assessment, we inspected five forces.

We also report our detailed findings about how custody services operate in the COVID-19 environment, aiming specifically at informing custody specialists.

Managing demand

Forces responded quickly to make sure they had enough custody officers and staff to maintain custody services. They planned to manage demand by keeping the number of detainees entering custody as low as possible.

Forces followed NPCC guidance encouraging frontline officers to arrest only when essential. Officers were instead guided to think about alternatives to taking individuals into custody. These included issuing FPNs or street bail (bailing someone on the street rather than at a police station). Forces introduced or revised their policies and procedures. For example, arresting officers phoned to discuss a case with the custody suite when considering an arrest. Or, where there were COVID-19 concerns, forces made sure advice was readily available from an inspector. The five forces we visited had a mixture of arrangements to make sure that bringing a detainee into custody was the right course of action. Arrests were made where necessary, irrespective of any COVID-19 concerns.

Some forces we inspected chose initially to keep detainee numbers down by not actively pursuing any warrants for arrest or any outstanding investigations that could result in a detainee being brought into custody. However, when the anticipated staffing shortages did not materialise, they quickly began to clear outstanding cases. The **Metropolitan Police Service** took the opportunity of people being at home more often in lockdown to find and arrest outstanding suspects and deal with cases.

The numbers of detainees entering custody varied from force to force. Overall, forces told us that the total numbers from April to August 2020 slightly decreased compared with the same period in 2019, particularly for children.

However, the work of custody staff expanded due to additional demands on them. These included supporting remote remand hearings and supervising some of the remote legal advice and representation arrangements, using audio and video technology. We found forces had to look after more detainees for longer while they waited for their remote virtual remand hearings. Forces often reported that they struggled to meet this new demand. We found little planning within the wider criminal justice system about how these hearings can and should be managed in future.

Mental health and custody

Forces reported having to deal with the effects of an increase in mental ill health in the population. Health services have forecast that this problem will continue to increase due to the effects of loneliness, isolation and anxiety. Forces rely heavily on mental health services to support them when dealing with people with mental ill health, both on the street and in custody. Increased demand could make this more difficult. Finding health-based places of safety (to avoid taking into custody people detained under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983) and arranging statutory assessments for detainees in custody may also become even more of a problem.

Making the custody environment COVID-safe

Forces invested, and continue to invest, in health and wellbeing to make custody suites as COVID-safe as possible for staff, detainees and visitors. This included physical changes to suites and enhanced cleaning. Supplies of PPE were readily available for their own staff as well as staff from other agencies, detainees and visitors to custody. The safety measures also meant that custody officers could direct and control the movement of people in suites much better than previously. We have criticised custody officers before for not exercising this control. We welcome this improvement.

Most staff we spoke to and surveyed felt that their force was working hard to keep them COVID-safe. One respondent said: “The constabulary has always maintained huge amounts of PPE for us to use, encouraged us to use it and to spread around good practice to others attending.” Some of the five forces we inspected obtained coronavirus testing kits, although testing was not routinely provided. All of the inspected forces closely monitored sickness. People unable to work in the custody suites (because they had to shield or self-isolate) were redeployed to administrative and other functions that support custody services.

Forces developed their own custody guidance based on the national guidance. They made changes to procedures as more became known about the effect of the pandemic, for example in the use of PPE. They used a range of methods to inform staff about the changes, such as regular briefings, emails and video messages. Staff we spoke to, and surveyed, told us they felt well informed, although in the early days the volume of information nationally and locally was overwhelming and confusing.

Managing detainee risks

The forces we inspected had enhanced their approaches to risk assessment. They identified detainees with, or suspected of having, coronavirus symptoms. The risks of spreading the virus were well managed.

We found some effective screening arrangements to identify any COVID-19 risks before a detainee entered custody. If risks were identified, forces kept the detainees as isolated as possible within custody suites and looked after them safely. Most forces had some arrangements for releasing detainees potentially at risk of having coronavirus as safely as they could. This was usually by taking them home and telling them to self-isolate. However, if a released detainee was not prepared to co-operate with any release arrangements (as police vehicles might not be immediately available and officers involved might need to be diverted from their main duties), the best forces could do was to provide a face mask and advise the detainee to return home and self-isolate.

Legal advice and representation for detainees

Forces followed the temporary interview protocol for legal advice and representation for detainees to be provided remotely using audio and video technology. However, most forces told us they did not know how many detainees used remote, rather than in-person, means to exercise their rights to legal advice and representation. They estimated it was well over half, but without more accurate information it was difficult to show the difference made by the temporary interview protocol.

The implementation of the temporary interview protocol varied across the forces we inspected. From custody records, we couldn't tell how/when/if detainees were informed of the changes to options for legal advice. Neither was it clear how any consents about the way in which legal representation was provided were obtained and recorded on custody records. The NPCC lead for custody raised this concern with forces in September and asked them to make sure that informed consent was recorded. Forces should record this information clearly and consistently.

The temporary interview protocol asked custody officers to satisfy themselves that the decision to use a video or a telephone link did not adversely affect the detainee's ability to communicate effectively with their solicitor. However, there were differences in understanding what this meant in practice. Most custody officers we spoke to felt that they had little influence over these decisions, with solicitors deciding whether they would attend in person. We found little evidence that police inspectors considered this when authorising further detention under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. That statute and the relevant code of practice made under it require that the inspector should be satisfied during the review that the detainee exercised their right to legal advice and representation in an appropriate manner. Often, the reasons why the inspector was satisfied were not recorded. This makes it difficult for the police to show that the decisions made were in the best interests of detainees.

Increases in use of pre-charge bail

The use of pre-charge police bail increased significantly. Some forces told us they struggled to obtain CPS charging decisions other than when they wanted to remand a suspect, and so they had to release detainees on pre-charge bail. The changes allowing legal advice to be given remotely led to increased use of prepared statements. This also resulted in detainees being bailed to return for an interview. This use of bail is not good for victims and delays swift justice for detainees.

To help safeguard victims, bail conditions are often required for detainees released while being investigated for domestic abuse offences. But if investigations can't be finalised within applicable bail periods, some suspects may have to be released under investigation. The problems this may cause were a concern before the pandemic. We examined them in more detail in our joint thematic report *Pre-charge bail and released under investigation: striking a balance*.⁹

Remote courts and virtual remand hearings

Faced with court closures, forces and HM Courts & Tribunals Service acted quickly to set up, or extend existing, virtual court arrangements. These allowed remand hearings to take place from within police custody. Some forces already had some remote court arrangements. Others had to set them up from scratch. **Gloucestershire Constabulary** and **Avon and Somerset Police**, working with the court service, helped to set up a court for remand hearings only. This reduced delays by removing the need for such hearings to be slotted in between other defendants due to appear before the courts. Other forces may wish to replicate this idea. In **Wales**, virtual courts were used only (and rarely) for detainees with, or suspected of having, coronavirus.

These arrangements generally worked well. However, they placed additional demands and responsibilities on forces as they continued to manage the detainees' risks and meet their care and welfare needs during their extended detention.

Some of the other problems with remote remand hearings were:

- the cost to forces of holding detainees in custody for longer than previously while waiting for a hearing, and then waiting for transport to prison;

⁹ [Pre-charge bail and released under investigation: striking a balance](#), HMICFRS and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, 8 December 2020.

- the inefficient use of police officers' time when dealing with detainees waiting for hearings;
- the cost for some forces of investing in technology to enable hearings to take place; and
- increased and additional risks for forces in holding detainees for long periods.

We were told by 37 forces that the closure or partial closure of courts had a moderate or severe adverse effect on their custody arrangements. The most frequently cited effect was the extended time in custody for detainees waiting for their remand hearings and an increased use of virtual courts.

Some of the cost of the remote remand hearing process was passed to the police. The **Metropolitan Police Service** told us that as many as 45 staff were involved in managing the process, and it estimated a cost of £2 million a year to employ additional officers to support remote remand hearings. For **Norfolk Constabulary**, where virtual courts were already in place, it was an additional £165,000 a year. Forces told us this burden was not sustainable.

These pressures led some forces to tell us that they intended to withdraw from these remote remand hearing arrangements. Since our inspection, most forces have indeed withdrawn.

However, the remote remand hearing arrangements have some advantages. Detainees charged later in the day may be able to have their cases heard virtually. Previously, they would have been likely to remain in custody overnight before appearing in court the following morning. The risks of transporting detainees to court are also reduced. As forces withdraw from the arrangements, they, along with their partners in the criminal justice system, should work to avoid losing any potential benefits.

Information

Forces weren't always collecting enough of the right information to help them to sort out future problems. This was especially important for some of the additional demand on custody services. Forces needed to know that detainees had exercised their rights to legal advice and representation while in custody. But this information was not readily available should it be required later on in the criminal justice process. Similarly, the forces we inspected told us they did not know how much longer detainees were spending in police custody while they waited for remote remand hearings. This made it difficult to calculate the extra work and costs for forces.

Forces needed to be able to assess how the pandemic was affecting custody services. While sickness and absence levels among officers and police staff were closely monitored, other areas were not. We found forces didn't have sufficient knowledge of how many detainees entering custody had, or were suspected of having, coronavirus. Looking after these detainees safely took longer because of the safety measures needed and the additional cleaning required. As the pandemic continues, this information is vital for forces to resource custody services appropriately.

Criminal justice system and the pandemic

Much of our report analyses policing up to the point of charge. We now assess the effect of the pandemic on charging decisions and going to court.

In some forces there was a shift away from charging, with more suspects dealt with by OOCs. We discuss this in the Investigations section of our report.

We do not yet know enough about the effect of greater use of OOCs. One force told us that fewer cases had resulted in community resolutions, as it had been harder to engage with mediation and support programmes. We also don't know how well victims were engaged in the decision to give an OOC. In *Out-of-court disposal work in youth offending teams*¹⁰ we reported that victims were not always consulted about these decisions.

Police forces delayed sending some cases to the CPS because they were unable to obtain relevant information from other agencies. For example, in some domestic abuse cases, the police were unable to obtain paperwork from family law courts. One force told us that several cases were put on hold for over three months, including an alleged child rape.

Forces told us of an inconsistent response from the CPS about charging decisions. Although many forces said that CPS services were largely unaffected, others reported the withdrawal of CPS direct advice (for cases other than remand cases). This caused delays in decision-making, exposing victims to greater risk and leaving suspects on bail for longer.

The wider concern for policing was that CPS lawyers advised more frequently that OOC, rather than charging, was a more suitable disposal option. This caused problems and disagreements when the police considered that a charge was more appropriate given the nature of the offence.

Changes made by HM Courts & Tribunals Service meant that people who had been charged and refused bail by the police were not physically sent to court for remand hearings. Although remote remand hearing arrangements generally worked well, they were under strain. We discuss this in the 'Keeping people in custody' section of this report.

More generally, many forces were extremely concerned about delays to court hearings, short-notice cancellations and other difficulties with the provision of court services.

We were given many examples of serious case hearings cancelled at short notice. In one example, an alleged rape occurred very early in 2018 and the defendant was charged in July 2018. The case was adjourned several times until October 2020 when the defendant claimed to have tested positive for coronavirus. The case was again adjourned to April 2021.

¹⁰ [Out-of-court disposal work in youth offending teams](#), HM Inspectorate of Probation and HMICFRS, 28 March 2018.

Police officers and staff at all levels expressed significant concerns about the backlog of cases and the adverse effects on defendants, victims and witnesses. Apart from affecting the confidence of the public in the criminal justice system, it was likely that some victims would become unwilling to support prosecutions due to the delays. Police highlighted particular risks for young and vulnerable witnesses. How reasonable is it to expect them to relive traumatic events perhaps two years after the incident?

Some police officers told us that without timely consequences, some of those accused of crimes and awaiting trial were unlikely to be deterred from further offending. Vulnerable victims may also be exposed to further offending.

Some courts adapted their ways of working producing an adverse effect on some vulnerable victims. For example, some courts introduced entry through a single main entrance. This could potentially put vulnerable people in direct physical contact with their abusers.

But one force told us that the introduction of virtual hearings had protected victims more quickly by increasing the efficiency of applications for domestic violence protection orders.

Police staff in witness care units (WCUs) update victims and witnesses when court hearings are rescheduled, and so delayed. Set up in 2004, WCUs were originally jointly staffed and funded by the CPS. The CPS has now almost entirely withdrawn from providing this service. We had previously raised concerns about the funding arrangements and the apparent variations in levels of service provided by WCUs. The significant disruption to court hearings caused by the pandemic led to increased demands on these units without any additional funding. Several forces told us that they diverted resources to increase WCU staffing.

One chief constable told us that the court system was one of their biggest problems. Delayed court trials will affect defendants as well as victims and witnesses. For example, defendants are likely to remain with their cases unheard for a considerable time. Police forces work closely with local probation services to manage offenders after sentencing. We were told by forces that during the pandemic the level of probation services had in too many respects been inconsistent throughout England and Wales.

Some forces told us that daily conference calls made sure that information was exchanged effectively, particularly about offenders who pose the highest risk and those being managed under MAPPA arrangements. But other forces told us that face-to-face meetings with offenders reduced because probation officers had limited access to the MAPPA IT system, ViSOR, while working from home.

Other adverse effects they told us about were:

- inconsistent practices in relation to joint visits;
- an apparent reduction in the number of diversion programmes for offenders (programmes aimed at reducing re-offending by identifying what makes an offender break the law and providing support, education and training to help them change their behaviour);

- delays in processing breaches of licences; and
- an apparent reluctance to recall offenders who had breached licences.

Some police investigations were delayed due to restrictions placed on visiting prisons. Investigations, particularly in serious and complex cases, were probably hindered because police officers were unable to interview prisoners being held on remand.

Overall, the majority of forces felt that disruptions to services adversely affected their ability to protect vulnerable people. Disruptions as a result of CPS changes were noted by 23 forces; from court changes by 42 forces; and from probation service changes by 22 forces.

Some of the problems we describe in our report existed before the pandemic. New ones have emerged. All need resource, time and political support to provide a solution. Policing, the criminal justice system and governments must work together to solve these problems.

Workforce wellbeing

Working remotely

Many forces adapted quickly to working any time, any place, anywhere. In general, staff moved to remote working after risk assessments of their circumstances. Staff who were most at risk – including those from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, those shielding or self-isolating, and those with caring responsibilities – were, in most cases, allowed to work from home.

But this way of working needs the right technology and support, with guidance and management that includes an element of trust. Most forces encouraged widescale home working and provided technology and equipment. They made greater use of alternative workspaces and flexible hours. With the right technology, many functions could continue online with staff working remotely. This reduced the risk of the virus spreading and helped to maintain workforce wellbeing. In those forces where some tasks could be completed only in the workplace, staff could rotate between working from home and in the office.

In a few forces, home working wasn't openly available or encouraged. All members of the workforce were considered to be key workers and had to attend their workplaces, unless assessed as vulnerable.

Supporting the workforce

The pandemic gave line managers the need, and an opportunity, to understand individuals' circumstances and tailor support accordingly. Most staff reported feeling supported by their line managers and said their managers had stayed in touch with them. In line with national guidance, forces also carried out additional assessments of the increased risk to people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. This is the minimum we would expect.

Not all forces were prepared for the scale of the task they confronted and the resulting significant pressure on managers. Some overestimated the ability of supervisors to cope with the extra work – such as risk assessments, allocation of work and remote

management – without additional support. We found little evidence of systems to monitor whether line managers were maintaining contact with shielding/self-isolating staff and home workers. **Wiltshire Police** operated a system that recorded the details of the contacts through video calls on the force's online HR system, including a description of individual needs and any support offered.

Occupational health units (OHUs) performed an important role but some were unable to cope with the demand for medical and psychological support. Those OHUs that had been struggling prior to the pandemic certainly struggled during it. This seemed especially to be the case for some of the OHUs supporting forces working in collaboration. Where OHUs operated well, we heard some very positive comments about the service they provided.

Creating COVID-safe workplaces

Forces we inspected made sure that vulnerable staff could operate in a COVID-safe workplace. Line managers carried out risk assessments, and in some forces each member of the workforce completed an online survey to highlight any support they needed if they were at risk. The results were then discussed with line managers. Where workers needed to shield, they were able to work from home or were deployed to safer roles, along with carers and others. The response of chief officers to vulnerable staff was seen by the staff as positive.

Some forces gave especially good support when members of staff returned to work after shielding or being ill with coronavirus. This helped staff to return to work sooner. Support included pre-return risk assessments, 'keep in touch' days, working in bubbles for social distancing, and allowing a staged return to work.

The experience for staff remaining in the workplace was generally less positive, as measures often took time to implement. As the pandemic progressed, forces saw some improvements in safety measures. For example, the number of forces reporting it easier to sanitise shared equipment increased from 29 to 39 between March and May 2020. However, we were told frequently that safety measures were more difficult to maintain as 'compliance fatigue' became established and grew.

Forces we inspected used different approaches to safety at work. We were told of some disparity in providing COVID-safe workspaces. Operational staff in particular expressed disappointment at how slowly some forces had organised protection for them in the workplace. Some individuals felt that they were just expected to accept the risk. Even within forces there were some inconsistent approaches. Depending on the role of the team, some teams were split across sites. Some forces created social distancing bubbles to reduce the risk of infection and to minimise disruption through staff having to self-isolate. Others used rotas to limit numbers in the workplace.

Assessing PPE needs

Before COVID-19, PPE for police officers generally referred to items such as batons and handcuffs. Here we are considering PPE that is designed to protect people from infection. Police officers and some police staff are first responders at infection-risk incidents, particularly in the case of close-contact interactions.

Initially, forces did not have enough existing stocks of PPE, and in the main what they had did not adequately protect from coronavirus. There were also limited national stocks for all emergency services. Providing officers with reliable and consistent advice on how and when to use this equipment was a problem. Some of the advice was confusing and contradictory.

Inevitably, it took time to produce and circulate detailed, tailored police service PPE guidance. Public Health England, Public Health Wales, Public Health Agency Northern Ireland and the Health and Safety Executive were the lead bodies to provide this information for all types of workers. Although first responder guidance was given to NHS and other healthcare workers, there was a lack of specific guidance for police officers and staff.

Op Talla and the NPoCC stepped in and consulted a range of experts to create tailored guidance and specifications for forces. Before this, forces created their own PPE guidance. When Op Talla/NPoCC then circulated their guidance, there was some confusion as this differed from the initial guidance forces had received. Some forces told us they bought PPE that was no longer suitable when guidance changed, forcing them to buy new supplies. For the workforce, the changes in guidance, and communication about these changes, caused confusion and frustration, particularly on wearing masks in vehicles.

In the 'Strategic leadership: national' section of this report we write about the continuing importance of consistent and clear communication.

Purchasing PPE

Over three quarters of all 43 forces told us it was initially difficult for them to buy the required PPE. The cost of supplies increased, with one force stating: "We had to accept whatever we could at over-inflated prices". Forces had the biggest PPE supply problems when buying face masks. Some forces told us that they tried to buy PPE from local suppliers, with limited success. It was important to identify PPE that was manufactured to the required standard and properly certified, as several companies supplied non-compliant PPE or failed to fulfil orders. Some forces told us they collaborated regionally to make the most of their purchasing power.

Op Talla worked hard to quickly build up national supplies of approved PPE. From April, **Thames Valley Police** played a lead role in supporting national policing, giving access to premises to be used as a national hub to accept and distribute orders. The force also provided procurement expertise, staff, IT and additional PPE.

Purchasing PPE improved significantly from May 2020. Supplies were provided from the national hub to force distribution hubs. Most forces had single points of contact for the management of PPE, which eased distribution.

Once forces had the PPE, they gave staff written guidance or training on how to use it, although some people told us they hadn't received any training. Some forces told us they had their own staff to check that PPE met required safety levels and certification.

Test, track and trace

During our inspection, forces raised concerns that the design of the national test, track and trace programme didn't fully consider the role of police officers and staff. Closer consultation with policing experts during the design of the programme could have improved confidence that measures were appropriate for the police service.

For some members of the workforce, their day-to-day role puts them at higher risk of contracting the virus. This can be, for example, from being spat at during close contact with a member of the public they are detaining or arresting.

Most forces initially operated their own workforce track and trace systems. Test results were obtained relatively quickly, and individuals would inform a representative from their force's co-ordinating unit of a positive result. Forces could quickly identify and notify close contacts.

As the virus became more widespread, and the national test, track and trace programme was broadened to the general public as well as key workers, we were told that the situation became more difficult. Once testing became more widely available, turnaround times for results increased and in some areas capacity reduced. Delays in notifications potentially led to the virus spreading further. We were told that the amount of positive test results was increasing. This put pressure on staffing levels and increased absence in certain departments.

The introduction of the NHS Test and Trace app presented some difficulties for police forces. The NPCC first became aware of the app being introduced when it was publicly announced. There had been no prior consultation with police and no advance indication of the app's capabilities or requirements. In addition, there were concerns about the effects on operational policing, especially in the cases of covert operations. The NPCC obtained an urgent meeting with the app development team, who acknowledged that there had been an oversight in not consulting the police service before the app was introduced.

Following this meeting, and reassurance on all aspects of the app, the NPCC supported its use on a voluntary basis by all officers and staff on personal devices. The app should be used wherever possible and the NPCC encouraged staff to download it onto their personal devices.

Use of the app allows police forces to comply with their duty of care and statutory obligations to protect the public and their workforces. The contact tracing function should only be paused in the limited circumstances stated in the guidance. Forces should follow the guidance and self-isolation directions when cases occur.

During our inspection, we found confusion about the requirement to self-isolate, and concerns about the potential adverse effect of losing resources. Forces sometimes saw self-isolation as unnecessary and possibly resulting in relatively large numbers of staff being told to isolate within some teams. Some forces therefore created their own systems to reduce self-isolation for staff not displaying symptoms, contrary to national guidance. We also heard about force policies where senior officers did risk assessments to circumvent the need to self-isolate. This was after staff told them they had received a direction from the app or the national contact tracing service to self-isolate. Again, this was contrary to national guidance and, in the case of a

direction from the NHS contact trace service, a criminal offence under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Self-Isolation) (England) Regulations 2020.

Forces were told by the NPCC that the app should not be used on police devices. This was due to functions on police devices being disabled – the app requires Bluetooth wireless technology to be activated but this is not available to all staff. Officers and staff were not actively discouraged from downloading the app onto personal devices. But guidance in some forces incorrectly suggested deactivating the contact tracing function under certain circumstances, such as when wearing a face mask. This exemption was applicable only for healthcare settings. This example illustrates the confusion that existed.

The concerns described above were highlighted during our inspection activity. The NPCC lead for this area, who has also highlighted some of these problems, wrote to forces to clarify the requirements.

Communicating with the workforce

Overwhelmingly, communication with the workforce was described to us as positive and useful. Interviewees and focus groups told us that there was effective messaging, which was essential in the context of this fast-moving pandemic. In some cases, information from the force was described as clearer than that available through national communication channels.

Chief officers used a variety of ways to exchange information. Vlogs (video blogs) were popular, and with more laptops available, online video conferencing brought work colleagues together. **Sussex Police** introduced WOW – Wellbeing on Wednesday – a forum both to inform staff and find out about their needs and concerns. Subjects included sleep deprivation, financial worries and other targeted and practical wellbeing messages.

Many forces created wellbeing hubs or cells with dedicated staff to provide information and support. This helped to bring consistency and control over the information being exchanged. **Kent Police** created its COVID-19 HR and Wellbeing Hub within two days. This linked to current government guidance, force-wide guidance and changes in policy, plus frequently asked questions. It also included an open text enquiry function to raise any questions or concerns not covered elsewhere.

Information overload seemed to be a problem in some forces. This was attributed to the volume of government information and additional messaging from senior management within the force. This was a particular problem for frontline officers, who had less time to read emails and intranet pages. Following initial supervisor-led briefings, frontline members of the workforce then had to make sure for themselves that they were up to date with the information. Clear messaging was important, as was avoiding overload.

Finding out about workforce wellbeing concerns

All forces engaged and consulted with their workforces to varying degrees. But our findings indicate that this was mostly at an individual level. Initially, line managers in all forces held discussions with staff about their wellbeing, their individual circumstances and whether they were at increased risk from coronavirus. This type of engagement with the more vulnerable staff was often a priority. There was more limited formal engagement with the wider workforce on their wellbeing concerns and how to address them. Other methods included using the intranet to gather staff's views, Q&A sessions, focus groups and surveys.

Most forces worked well with their formal staff associations and networks to identify and address workforce concerns. In many forces, the formal representative groups were part of a working group or a wellbeing or COVID-19 hub.

Storing up pressures for the future

Several forces have already identified the advantages of remote working and plan to use it far more. But remote working suits some members of the workforce more than others. Some people told us that while it has been positive in the short term, longer-term remote working could have detrimental effects.

We were told about a build-up of annual leave for 2020/21, with just a few months left to take time off before a new leave year began. In some cases, officers were working overtime to cover shortfalls within their teams. We found some positive practice, such as the offer to buy back leave entitlements to reduce gaps in staffing and to prevent a build-up of leave owed. But people still need to rest and recuperate.

We were told about compliance fatigue from wearing PPE and following safety measures. Compliance fatigue can also take the form of not using one-way systems, not observing rules on room occupancy levels, and failing to observe the two-metre distance guidance. **Durham Constabulary** introduced COVID-19 compliance officers, two police inspectors who visited police stations and checked with the local commanders that the workforce was complying with the measures.

Learning from the pandemic

Not all forces had a formalised system for collating lessons learnt from the pandemic. Most have done so only in a piecemeal way.

Forces that already had good structures and processes were able to update and adapt their plans and risk assessments to take in the lessons learnt or notable practice. For example, Leicestershire Police was subject to the first, and then the longest, local lockdown in the UK. As a result, the force and the LRF engaged with several other organisations to review the effect of the first lockdown and exchanged ideas about lessons learnt. They worked with the University of Leeds to understand the impact on crime and contributed to a review conducted nationally on behalf of the government.

Forces generally had effective arrangements for risk registers, risk assessments and operational guidance to quickly include new learning. Some forces used review teams or existing evidence-based policing resources to find and discuss local notable practice. Many forces completed structured internal debriefs with staff or staff surveys to achieve this.

The LRF arrangement was crucial in recognising and discussing good ways of working among organisations involved in the partnerships. The LRF community uses an online private network that allows people working in civil protection and emergency planning to communicate across different areas and exchange information and learning. However, the JESIP joint organisational learning facility, JOL Online, wasn't widely used. Forces tended to favour the Op Talla arrangements for communicating about learning and best practice.

Nationally, the C19 National Foresight Group played an important role in disseminating good ways of working. Representation included senior civil servants from across government, NPCC, College of Policing, National Crime Agency, Joint Biosecurity Centre and the voluntary sector (for example, the Red Cross). The group supported 38 LRFs by providing rapid reviews and thematic reports to help update risk assessments. It has also enlisted support from academics.

Op Talla, working closely with colleagues from the College of Policing, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, HMICFRS, the Home Office and academia, supported forces through the College's peer support team. The peer support team is dedicated to communicating lessons learnt with forces. It established a top-ten learning report, discussing concerns as well as learning and good ways of working, identified through consultation with forces. This work is being used to inform future practice.

Annex A: Force names

We completed detailed inspections in a representative selection of 19 forces. We chose them for a variety of reasons, including their size and geographical locations.

- Bedfordshire Police
- Devon and Cornwall Police
- Durham Constabulary
- Gloucestershire Constabulary
- Gwent Police
- Humberside Police
- Kent Police
- Lancashire Constabulary
- Leicestershire Police
- Metropolitan Police Service
- Norfolk Constabulary
- Nottinghamshire Police
- South Wales Police
- South Yorkshire Police
- Sussex Police
- Thames Valley Police
- West Mercia Police
- West Yorkshire Police
- Wiltshire Police

We inspected ten forces for preparedness; five for custody and ten for the five policing themes:

Preparedness

- Gloucestershire Constabulary
- Lancashire Constabulary
- Leicestershire Police
- Metropolitan Police Service
- Norfolk Constabulary
- South Wales Police
- South Yorkshire Police
- States of Jersey Police
- Thames Valley Police
- West Mercia Police

Custody

- Gloucestershire Constabulary
- Lancashire Constabulary
- Metropolitan Police Service
- Norfolk Constabulary
- South Wales Police

Policing themes

- Bedfordshire Police
- Devon and Cornwall Police
- Durham Constabulary
- Gwent Police
- Humberside Police
- Kent Police
- Nottinghamshire Police
- Sussex Police
- West Yorkshire Police
- Wiltshire Police

Annex B: Definitions and interpretation

In this report, the words, phrases and expressions in the left-hand column have the meanings assigned to them in the right-hand column. Sometimes, there will be a fuller explanation after the definition, with references to sources and other material which may be helpful.

Term	Definition
achieving best evidence	guidance for police officers conducting interviews with vulnerable, intimidated and significant witnesses, those assigned with preparing and supporting such witnesses during the criminal justice process and those involved at the trial, both in supporting and questioning the witness in court; published by the Ministry of Justice
ACRO	entity which provides services principally in the field of the organisation and management of criminal records information and the links between criminal records and biometric information; formerly the ACPO Criminal Records Office; works with the NPCC, the National Crime Agency, the Home Office, and parts of government concerned with immigration enforcement and border services; its operations are overseen by a governance board chaired by the chair of the NPCC; the function is hosted by Hampshire Constabulary
Active Risk Management System (ARMS)	risk assessment tool used by police forces and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service to monitor and manage the risk of reoffending by registered sex offenders in the community; allows the assessment of both risk factors known to be associated with sexual reoffending, and protective factors known to be associated with reduced offending

Term	Definition
C19 National Foresight Group	online forum chaired by a senior police officer and including representatives from government departments and academia; established to support the response to the pandemic by providing a forum for attendees to seek answers to problems encountered while policing the pandemic, to share innovation and new ideas, and to encourage consistent approaches
College of Policing	professional body for policing in England and Wales; established in 2012 to provide those working in policing with the skills and knowledge necessary to prevent crime, protect the public, and secure public trust; has three complementary functions: knowledge (ensuring that over time, policing practice and standards are based on knowledge rather than custom and convention), education (supporting the development of individual members, setting educational requirements and facilitating the academic accreditation of members' expertise) and standards; its powers to set standards were conferred by the Police Act 1996, as amended by the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
community impact assessment	assessment that seeks to identify issues that may affect a community's confidence in the ability of the police to respond effectively to their needs; helps to inform forces about long-term plans to build community confidence and learn lessons for the future, thereby enhancing the police response
community risk register	register of assessments of emergencies that might happen locally; each potential emergency is rated in terms of its potential impact and the likelihood that it will occur
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)	principal prosecuting authority in England and Wales; established by section 1, Prosecution of Offences Act 1985; responsible for prosecuting criminal cases investigated by the police and other investigating bodies, and in particular for deciding charges on cases for prosecution, reviewing prosecutions to ensure the right defendants are prosecuted on the right charges before the right court, preparing cases for court, and presenting cases in magistrates' courts, the Crown court and higher court

Term	Definition
demand	in the context of this report, the amount of service that the public and other organisations require of the police; the police carry out a wide range of interventions in response to this demand including preventing disorder in towns and city centres, protecting vulnerable people and property, responding to crises, stopping crime and anti-social behaviour as it happens, and apprehending and bringing offenders to justice
Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)	government department responsible for government policy on health and adult social care matters in England, along with a few elements of the same matters which are not otherwise devolved to the Scottish Executive, Welsh Government or Northern Ireland Executive; oversees the English National Health Service
detainee	person arrested for an offence and taken into police custody
domestic abuse	incident or pattern of incidents of abusive behaviour of one person towards another, where those persons are 16 or over and are personally connected to each other; behaviour is abusive if it consists of (a) physical or sexual abuse; (b) violent or threatening behaviour; (c) controlling or coercive behaviour; (d) economic abuse or (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse; persons are personally connected if they are or have been married to each other or civil partners, engaged, in an intimate personal relationship, relatives, or where they have or once had a parental relationship in relation to the same child; the abuse may also be towards another person, such as a child

Term	Definition
Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN)	initial notice issued by the police under sections 24 to 33, Crime and Security Act 2010, following an incident of domestic abuse; designed to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic abuse; contains prohibitions that effectively bar the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim; must be authorised by a police superintendent; may be issued to an adult if the police superintendent has reasonable grounds for believing that the adult has been violent towards, or has threatened violence towards an associated person, and the DVPN is necessary to protect that person from violence or a threat of violence by the intended recipient of the DVPN; 'associated person' in this context in relation to a perpetrator of violence means a spouse or former spouse, a civil partner or former civil partner, a cohabitant or former cohabitant, someone who lives or has lived in the same household, a relative, a fiancée or former fiancée, a person with whom the perpetrator has or has had an intimate personal relationship of significant duration, a co-parent or a person sharing parental responsibilities with the perpetrator (section 62, Family Law Act 1996)
ETHANE	see METHANE
fixed penalty notice (FPN)	in this report, a notice issued by an authorised person (who may be a police officer) to a person that the authorised person reasonably believes has committed an offence under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020; any liability to conviction for the offence is discharged by payment of the fixed penalty to a local authority specified in the notice or an officer designated by the Secretary or the local authority; the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 have since been replaced with the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations 2021

Term	Definition
force management statement	annual statement, published by each force and certified by the chief constable, containing in respect of the following four years: (a) projections of demand on the force, including crime and non-crime demand, latent and patent; (b) an assessment of the state of the force's people and assets to be used to meet that demand (their condition, capacity, capability, performance, serviceability and security of supply); (c) the steps the force intends to take to improve the efficiency and economy with which the force will maintain and develop its workforce and other assets, and discharge its obligations to the public; and (d) the financial resources which the force expects to have to meet demand
Four Es (engage, explain, encourage, enforce)	four-part approach used by forces in their engagement with the public in connection with the application and, where appropriate, enforcement of pandemic-related legislation
government liaison officer (GLO)	government representative who acts as a conduit between an LRF and government departments
gold-silver-bronze command structure	framework used by emergency services for the command and control of major incidents and disasters; provides a structure for strategic (gold), tactical (silver) and operational (bronze) responses to an incident or operation; also adopted by most voluntary agencies and local authorities involved in emergencies
independent advisory group	forum in which members of the public who are independent to the police give advice to their local force on the development and review of policy, procedures and practices which may affect different communities
Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP)	five principles which provide established joint working practices (interoperability) to improve the way the police, fire and ambulance services work together when responding to incidents; jointly run and governed by the emergency services; the principles are co-location, communication, co-ordination, joint understanding of risk, and shared situational awareness; the principles are set out in <i>Joint Doctrine: The Interoperability Framework</i>

Term	Definition
Joint Organisation Learning (JOL)	process for identifying lessons from emergency services training, testing, exercises or incidents, with the aim of improving joint emergency services working practices and responses; requires the identification of lessons learned through single and multi-agency debriefs; lessons are added to a database accessible to other emergency responders
local criminal justice board (LCJB)	entity with no separate or formal legal status which brings police and crime commissioners and other criminal justice agencies together to work to maintain oversight of the criminal justice system in a local area and promote a collaborative approach to tackling its problems with the objective of providing an efficient and effective criminal justice system; usually chaired by the police and crime commissioner or the chief constable; often attended by one of the local circuit judges as a point of liaison with the judiciary, although the judge is not a member of the board
local policing body	elected entity for a police area, responsible for securing the maintenance of the police force for that area and securing that the police force is efficient and effective; holds the relevant chief constable to account for the policing of the area; establishes the budget and police and crime plan for the police force; appoints and may, after due process, remove the chief constable from office; for police areas outside London, it is the police and crime commissioner for the area in question (section 1, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011); for the City of London police area, it is the Common Council of the City of London in its capacity as police authority for that area; for the metropolitan police district, it is the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) (section 101, Police Act 1996 and section 3, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011); in Greater Manchester it is the Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester on behalf of the Greater Manchester combined authority, as provided for in the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (Transfer of Police and Crime Commissioner Functions to the Mayor) Order 2017; 2017/470)

Term	Definition
local resilience forum (LRF)	collaborative mechanism which brings together representatives from local public services responsible for planning and preparing for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies; intended to facilitate the performance of obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Contingency Planning Regulations 2005 and associated programmes, arrangements and guidance
MAGIC	multi-agency gold incident command
MAPPA	multi-agency public protection arrangements
MARAC	multi-agency risk assessment conference
MASH	multi-agency safeguarding hub
METHANE	reporting framework which provides a common structure for emergency responders and their control rooms to provide to one another information on major incidents; mnemonic stands for major incident declared, exact location, type of incident, hazards present or suspected, access-routes that are safe to use, number, type, severity of casualties, and emergency services present
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG's) Resilience and Emergencies Division	unit of MHCLG which provides the primary central government link for LRFs
multi-agency gold incident command (MAGIC)	training standard for strategic command in emergencies and major incidents where a multi-agency response is required
multi-agency intelligence cell	team made up of different agencies pooling intelligence from their own agencies into a single intelligence product to be distributed in an LRF; has no authority or decision-making capability, but relies on the existing powers and roles of its constituent agencies to acquire and appropriately share intelligence and information

Term	Definition
multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)	arrangements by which the police, probation and prison services work with other agencies to manage the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in the community
multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)	locally-held meeting of statutory and voluntary agency representatives to share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse; any agency can refer an adult or child whom they believe to be at high risk of harm; the aim of the conference is to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase that adult or child's safety, health and wellbeing; agencies that attend vary, but are likely to include the police, probation, children's health and housing services; over 250 currently in operation across England and Wales
multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)	entity which brings together local safeguarding agencies (including social care, police and health) to better identify risks to children (and in some areas, vulnerable adults) and improve decision-making, interventions and outcomes
National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC)	body which replaced the Association of Chief Police Officers on 1 April 2015; it brings together operationally independent and locally accountable chief constables and their chief officer teams to help the police service coordinate operations (including operational responses to threats such as terrorism, organised crime and national emergencies), reform, improve and provide value for money; its primary decision-making forum is the Chief Constables' Council; it is underpinned by a collaboration agreement between chief constables, police and crime commissioners and non-Home Office force equivalents under section 22A, Police Act 1996; works with the College of Policing to develop national approaches on issues such as finance, technology and human resources

Term	Definition
National Police Co-ordination Centre (NPoCC)	entity established by collaboration under section 22A, Police Act 1996, and overseen by the NPCC, which maintains an oversight of national capacity and capability of specialist policing, and co-ordinates the deployment of officers and staff from across UK policing to support forces during large-scale events and operations and in times of civil emergency; incorporates the UK disaster victim identification unit, which is concerned with the identification of victims of events creating mass fatalities
occupational health service/unit (OHU)	department in a police force which supports and promotes health, safety and wellbeing, and minimises absence through injury or ill health
Operation Encompass	process by which the police provide schools with information on domestic abuse incidents experienced by their pupils; information on a domestic abuse incident affecting a child is provided by the police to a trained member of school staff the day after officers have attended a domestic abuse incident; appropriate support can then be given, dependent upon the needs and wishes of the child
Operation Talla (Op Talla)	national operation leading the police response to COVID-19; set up by the National Police Chiefs' Council in March 2020; created to maximise police co-ordination, communication and collaboration, provide advice, and act as the police focal point for government
out of court disposal (OCD)	way of dealing with low-level crime or anti-social behaviour which is admitted by the offender and which is an alternative to a prosecution; includes simple and conditional cautions, cannabis warnings, penalty notices for disorder, and community resolutions; some have a statutory basis, and some do not
partner organisation	in relation to a police force, a public, private or voluntary sector entity, such as one concerned with health, education, housing, social care or the management of offenders, which from time to time works with the force to attain their common or complementary objectives

Term	Definition
PEEL	annual assessment of all police forces in England and Wales, carried out by HMICFRS; forces are assessed on their effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy; they are judged as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate on these categories (or pillars) based on inspection findings, analysis and Her Majesty's Inspectors' (HMIs) professional judgment across the year; the pillars each comprise three or four questions that focus on principal areas of the work of the police
personal protective equipment (PPE)	equipment designed to protect users against health or safety risks and the spread of infectious diseases; includes face, head and body protection, masks, visors and gloves; cleaning, wiping and sanitising products and specific social distancing welfare products; before the pandemic, PPE for police officers and staff was usually no more than batons, handcuffs and incapacitant spray
police and crime commissioner	local policing body in respect of a police area other than in London or Greater Manchester
police liaison unit (PLU)	unit providing a link between the four police forces in Wales, the respective police and crime commissioners and the Welsh Government; also supports partnership working between policing and other public, private and third sector agencies in Wales
released under investigation (RUI)	release of a suspect without bail whilst an investigation continues; suspects must be released under investigation, unless there is a need for further investigation and the pre-conditions for bail are fulfilled
safeguarding	activities undertaken with the aim of protecting an individual's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect
single online home	single website for all police forces; aims to help provide nationally consistent, locally branded services in a single 'digital police station'

Term	Definition
strategic command centre	co-located command centre for the senior commanders of agencies responding to a major incident (such as a natural disaster); agencies might include the local authority, environment agency, health services, military, and others where relevant
strategic co-ordinating group (SCG)	gold command group of a local resilience forum (LRF); provides strategic leadership throughout the course of an emergency and/or major incident; should not be concerned with tactical (silver) or operational (bronze) matters
tactical co-ordination group (TCG)	silver command group of a local resilience forum (LRF), sitting beneath the strategic co-ordinating group (SCG); conducts the overall multi-agency management of an emergency and/or major incident
temporary interview protocol	protocol between the National Police Chiefs' Council, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Law Society, the Criminal Law Solicitors' Association and the London Criminal Courts Solicitors' Association; introduced guidance in respect of the remote provision to detainees of legal advice and representation
THRIVE	risk assessment tool used by forces; stands for Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation Opportunities, Vulnerability of the victim and the Engagement level required to resolve the problem; elements are used to assign a priority level to an incident; may also be used to reach and justify an operational decision
victim	in relation to an alleged or suspected criminal offence, the person who – (a) says they are the person against whom that offence was or may be committed; or (b) is said or considered by another person to be the person against whom that offence was or may be committed; in using this term, there is no suggestion that the fundamental criminal justice principle of the presumption of innocence of a suspect or accused person is being disregarded

Term	Definition
ViSOR	violent and sex offenders register; national confidential database that supports MAPPA; facilitates the effective sharing of information and intelligence on violent and sexual offenders between the three MAPPA responsible authority agencies (police, probation and prisons)
vulnerability	condition of a person who is in need of special care, support or protection because of age, disability or risk of abuse or neglect
witness care unit (WCU)	police-run department which provides support and information for victims and witnesses from the point of charge through to the conclusion of a case, tailored to the needs of the victim or witness

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