



COVID-19 Response 2020/21

An update to the Police & Crime Plan
and Fire & Rescue Plan



STAFFORDSHIRE COMMISSIONER
Police | Fire and Rescue | Crime



Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 on the United Kingdom has already been profound, with significant loss of life and devastating impact on the economic infrastructure with every person affected in some way. As a result of statutory public health restrictions, intended to slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect the NHS, some democratic processes have been delayed including the scheduled election for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, which has now been postponed until 7 May 2021.

The Commissioner has determined that his priorities, which are set out in the Police and Crime Plan *Safer, Fairer, United Communities for Staffordshire* and the Fire and Rescue Plan, will remain the same:



1	Prevention and early intervention
2	Protecting Staffordshire and its people
3	Public confidence
4	Service reform

	Modern Policing A police force that is fit for a changing future
	Early Intervention Tackling root causes before they become a problem
	Victims Enabling victims of crime to get the support they need to move on
	Offenders Preventing offending in the first place and reducing the likelihood of re-offending
	Public Confidence Making sure everything that happens contributes to individuals & communities feeling safer & reassured

However, in the interim, the emergency situation created by COVID-19 means that not all business can be conducted as usual. In order to fulfil his statutory responsibilities in the current situation, the Commissioner and his office will refocus efforts and resources. This plan sets out how we are adapting, specifically:

- **Ensuring Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service have sufficient people to respond to the crisis and that their safety and wellbeing needs are met.**
- **On behalf of the public, holding both services to account for service delivery in a changing environment, including ensuring their response is sufficient, proportionate and ethical.**
- **Facilitating effective partnership working between local partner agencies, other emergency services in the region and commissioned services to ensure a joined-up approach in ensuring community safety, protecting vulnerable people and delivering criminal justice.**
- **Ensuring the services we commission continue to deliver support for people throughout the crisis and, where necessary, commissioning services to address new needs identified.**
- **Playing an active role in ensuring the local, regional and national response to the crisis meets the needs of the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.**

Background

The World Health Organisation declared the coronavirus outbreak a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' on 31 January 2020. On 11 March, COVID-19 was characterised as a pandemic.

On 3 March 2020, the Prime Minister introduced the Government's coronavirus action plan of measures for the UK, following a declaration of 'threat to public health' under regulation 3 of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020. The PM has since held a series of Cabinet Office Briefing Room A (COBRA) meetings to develop the Government's strategy for the coronavirus. These meetings are attended by a cross-departmental range of senior ministers, the chief medical officer, security officials, military chiefs, emergency services leaders and civil servants. The strategy is driven by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies and provides the framework for the UK's response, with Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) co-ordinating the local response.

On 23 March 2020, the Government announced restrictions aimed at reducing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). These restrictions require people not to leave their homes except for:

- **shopping for basic necessities, as infrequently as possible;**
- **one form of exercise a day;**
- **any medical need, to provide care or to help a vulnerable person; and**
- **travelling to and from work, but only where absolutely necessary.**

The Coronavirus Act 2020 (the Act) received Royal assent on 25 March 2020. The Act broadly continues and supplements measures within the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020, and aims to support the Government's strategy by:

- **increasing the available health and social care workforce;**
- **easing the burden on frontline staff;**
- **containing and slowing the virus;**
- **managing the deceased with respect and dignity; and**
- **supporting people.**

This Act introduced powers for the police to enforce the Government's restrictions to help prevent significant further transmission of the virus.

This is a situation that can change rapidly. As the prevalence of the virus changes over time, Government guidance will alter and the local response will adapt accordingly.

Delivering services in a changing world

Restrictions on movement have impacted on the usual profile of crime and anti-social behaviour:

- **Overall crime has reduced by around 35%. Acquisitive crimes such as burglary and car crime, violence in public spaces and drug-related crimes are significantly lower. Burglaries and damage at commercial and public buildings might increase at unattended premises.**
- **As street crimes reduce, there is a risk of an increase in online crimes such as fraud and child sexual exploitation.**
- **Organised crime gangs are quick to seize opportunities presented by the pandemic and capitalise on them by adapting their methods and diversifying into new opportunities and territories.**
- **There is a risk of increased exploitation of vulnerable groups such as the elderly through distraction burglary and fraud.**
- **There is a risk domestic abuse will increase but also a risk that cases might go unreported if people find it difficult to do so.**
- **Restrictions on movement can serve to heighten community tensions, particularly at times of warm weather, public holidays and major events such as religious festivals. Hate crime can be an element of this.**
- **Anti-social behaviour has increased by over 50% and is becoming more centred on COVID-19 related issues,**

including reports of non-compliance with social distancing guidelines and inappropriate use of public spaces for exercise.

- **Those with existing mental health conditions are more susceptible to increased levels of stress and anxiety presented by the restrictions.**

Officers will continue to police by consent, explaining the circumstances for the intervention and encouraging individuals to comply with the Government request. Only where necessary will they take enforcement action, if people are not listening and continuing to put others at risk. They should broadly follow four steps:

- **Engage – encourage voluntary compliance.**
- **Explain – stress the risks to public health and the NHS. Educate people about the risks.**
- **Encourage – seek compliance, emphasise the benefits to the NHS of staying at home, and how this can save lives and reduce risk for more vulnerable people in society.**
- **Enforce – instruct them to go home, leave an area or disperse, ensure parents are taking necessary steps to stop their children breaking these rules, potentially issue a fixed penalty notice or arrest where proportionate and necessary.**

Ensuring sufficient resources

In engaging in this way, officers need to be alert to potential child safeguarding, homelessness, mental health or domestic abuse issues, which may provide a viable reason why an individual is outdoors. For instance, they may be unable to return home due to safety concerns. In these situations, the police will need to identify appropriate support and make suitable arrangements for safeguarding.

The Fire and Rescue Service is also seeing changing patterns of demand, such as increased fires from fly-tipped waste and burning waste at home. They are also engaged in providing logistical support to local authority partners and other emergency services in managing the crisis.

Police officers, police staff and firefighters are team workers who are dealing with the public all day, every day and so, unfortunately, are at greater risk of contracting the virus either accidentally or through the deliberate acts of others. This has required both services to quickly adapt to new ways of working.

The Commissioner and his team play an active role in supporting the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer in helping to keep the public safe during the coronavirus outbreak.

Assurances have been given that Government funding will be made available to cover the additional costs of the response to COVID-19. Spending relating to the crisis is being recorded and monitored to assist future claims processes and minimise the direct impact on Staffordshire council tax payers. We will also be alert to new external funding opportunities to maximise the money available for policing and fire and rescue services in Staffordshire. This will include supporting any bids for funding, directly linked both to the immediate response to the current crisis, and the medium and longer-term impact of the crisis on our communities.

The Staffordshire Resilience Forum (LRF) brings together frontline responders, such as Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, and other agencies with a significant role to play in managing and recovering from the effect of emergencies. The LRF's COVID-19 Strategic Co-ordinating Group oversees the management of essential resources across all agencies, including practical aspects such as the provision of sufficient PPE.

The Commissioner's Office is represented in the command structure for policing at Gold, Silver and Bronze Command levels and in the Fire & Rescue Tactical Cell meetings. These groups provide strategic, operational

and tactical leadership and co-ordination of the services' response to COVID-19, including resource allocation, scenario planning and risk management and mitigation.

Plans are continuing to increase police officer numbers through Operation Uplift, with intakes planned throughout the year. Additional capabilities funded through the Commissioner's increase in the council tax precept will also be fully implemented, including enhancements to roads policing, dealing with missing persons and targeting perpetrators of serious and organised crime.

We remain committed to the transformation and modernising strategy of both the estates and technology. We will continue to co-locate police and fire services in the same buildings to reduce costs to both services. We will also continue to support the upgrade of police IT infrastructure and key systems and implement the Niche records management system, which will deliver significant operating savings for the force.

We continue our ambition for the further development of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service with the launch of their new Corporate Safety Plan.



Holding services to account

There is a Government and public expectation that arrangements to hold police forces and fire and rescue services to account will continue. In addition to the office's role in the governance structure in place for the COVID-19 response, existing governance arrangements will be used for this purpose. While the frequency, scope and focus might change, we will continue to do so through robust governance arrangements. These range from detailed scrutiny sessions to public performance meetings and the direct accountability of the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer to the Commissioner.

We will continue to monitor performance and scrutinise services, but ensure that this does not distract them from their COVID-19 response. Indeed, a major purpose of this process is to ensure the force and fire service have sufficient resources in place to respond to the crisis and are directing them appropriately.



Accountability arrangements will also include providing checks and balances around the implementation of police powers introduced through the emergency provisions within the Act.

The Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel will continue to meet to scrutinise financial and other activities across policing and fire and rescue, but will adapt its processes to the current restrictions.

We will continue to conduct reviews under the Police Complaints & Misconduct Regulations and meet our obligations under the Police Appeals Tribunal Regulations, working with the relevant parties to ensure we are able to support those processes appropriately.

We are adjusting the way we provide the Independent Custody Visitors programme by enabling phone-to-cell contact, providing PPE for direct contact where necessary.

Safer Neighbourhood Panel meetings have been postponed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. This provides an opportunity for the Commissioner to review the progress and developments of this public assurance panel and the support provided by his office.

Effective partnership working

The Commissioner will continue to exercise his statutory responsibility to chair the Staffordshire Criminal Justice Partnership Board and partake in the multi-agency Regional Criminal Justice Board. The major challenges for the criminal justice system during this period are to dispense effective justice and then to ensure backlogs being created as a result of COVID-19 are addressed effectively; a regional recovery task and finish group is being established to lead this work and the Commissioner will be represented in this.

The pandemic has created significant challenges for the management of offenders, including the Probation Service and agencies responsible for providing resettlement and rehabilitation services.

This includes the effective supervision of individuals subject to community orders and those returning to the community on licence following a period in custody. Work has been undertaken with partners on the best means of ensuring that the conditions of orders and licences are observed to prevent the risk of re-offending.

We are working with the Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) to redesign services to ensure the effective prioritisation of cases according to risk.

Services are adapting to the Prison Early Release Scheme and the Commissioner's Office is playing a major role in ensuring the right support is in place upon release to meet prisoners' needs to reduce the chance of their reoffending. We also continue to ensure that essential resettlement and rehabilitation support services, including housing, mental health and substance misuse treatment services, continue to be available.

There remains a key place for early intervention, and we are committed to continuing to work with partners to support this through our contributions to education programmes, our commissioned prevention services such as Catch 22, the Prince's Trust, the Youth Offending Prevention Services and diversionary activities. Currently, our intention is still to deliver the SPACE 2020 programme in some form, following on from years of successful activities for the young people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Our partnerships have adapted quickly and effectively to the crisis and in many cases the situation has led to services becoming more responsive and joined up than before. We will ensure that a systematic approach is taken across our partnerships to capture our learning from this experience and ensure it becomes embedded in future ways of working once the crisis is over.

Commissioning

Ensuring the delivery of services to victims and witnesses continues to be at the forefront of our work during these difficult and challenging times, where people's day-to-day lives have been drastically altered and access to support could be even more important than usual.

We have ensured funding continues to be available to all commissioned services. We are working closely with all of our commissioned services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, including Staffordshire Victim Gateway, domestic abuse, hate crime, child sexual and criminal exploitation, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM) and business crime, to adapt their delivery models to best suit the needs of the victims they are supporting. We are ensuring victims and witnesses continue to feel reassured and safeguarded, where appropriate, and receive an effective level of service. This includes support staff working from home or other locations to be available to support victims. We are providing reassurance and maintaining contact with providers, victims and witnesses, through alternative methods including telephone helplines, video conferencing and email instead of face-to-face contact.



We understand domestic abuse victims may be less likely to make contact with services during this period, so we are working hard to ensure victims know what type of support is available and how to access it. We are also developing alternative ways to report the crime and to access and receive support, such as online and skype.

We are working with services to assess and respond to emerging trends and putting contingencies in place. We are monitoring the trends and impact on victims and will look to commission additional services to meet any gaps or increases in demand. We will work with partners, such as the police and offender management, to ensure appropriate protections to prevent repeat victimisation.

Regional and national connectivity

The Commissioner will continue to chair the Regional Governance Group, which oversees policing services delivered collaboratively across the region and others in partnership with West Midlands Police. These include the Regional Organised Crime Unit, Counter Terrorism Unit, Central Motorway Policing Group and delivery of the Policing Education Qualifications Framework by Staffordshire University. He will ensure that all of these services remain resilient, adapt to new ways of working and continue to support Staffordshire effectively.

Representing the interests of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent at a national level is a major part of the Commissioner's role, which will now also need to be carried out in the context of COVID-19. This includes playing an active role in the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and regular contact with the Home Secretary, other Government ministers and officials, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services and others.

The nature and scale of the COVID-19 crisis will change in the weeks and months ahead and we will remain ready to respond quickly to changing circumstances. Organisational risks and issues are monitored and reassessed continually and our plans will be reviewed and adapted as needed.

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