

Cross Party Group on Policing,

Virtual Teams Meeting, Wednesday 10th March 2021 at 12:30

1. Present

Senedd Cymru – Welsh Parliament

John Griffiths – Chair, Member of the Senedd (MS) (Labour, Newport East)
Neil McEvoy – Member of the Senedd (MS) (Propel)
Ryland Doyle – Support officer for Mike Hedges, Member of the Senedd
Amanda Jenna – Support officer for Russell George, Member of the Senedd
Callum McSorly – Support officer for Huw Irranca Davies MS
Andrew Bettridge - Senior Communications Officer, Office of John Griffiths AM

Police and Crime Commissioners & Staff

Alun Michael – Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales and Chair of Policing in Wales
Dafydd Llywelyn – Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys
Jeff Cuthbert – Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent
Eleri Thomas – Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent
Arfon Jones – Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales
Cerith Thomas – Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, Wales Advisor
Sian Curley - Chief Executive to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent
Stephen Hughes – Chief Executive to the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales
Carys Morgans - Chief Executive to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed Powys

Chief Constables

Carl Foulkes – Chief Constable, North Wales Police
Pam Kelly – Chief Constable, Gwent Police, and Chair of the Welsh Chief Officer Group
Jeremy Vaughan – Chief Constable, South Wales Police
Claire Parmenter – Temporary Chief Constable, Dyfed-Powys Police

Police Liaison Unit

Paul Morris – Head of Police Liaison Unit
Superintendent Steve Thomas - Police Liaison Unit

2. John Griffiths MS, Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that there would be a number of lightening summaries from Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables on:

1. The Challenges of Policing in Wales during the Pandemic – Pam Kelly
2. Domestic Violence and Abuse – Jeremy Vaughan
3. Changing nature of drugs supply – Arfon Jones
4. Cyber Crime and Fraud – Dafydd Llywelyn
5. Race and Inclusion in Welsh Policing – Carl Foulkes
6. The Impact of the Pandemic on the Police Workforce – Jeff Cuthbert
7. The Critical Role of Local Partnerships – Claire Parmenter
8. Criminal Justice in Wales: A case study in co-operation – Alun Michael

There would then be an opportunity to comment or ask questions about the summaries or any other policing related matter.

3. Lightning Summaries

3.1 The Challenges of Policing in Wales during the Pandemic – Pam Kelly

The Chief Constable for Gwent, Pam Kelly, highlighted the following. Policing like other public services and the communities in Wales had faced significant challenges when responding to the pandemic. The police service in Wales was already dealing with other demands such as widespread flooding immediately prior to the commencement of lockdown in 2020 followed by various protests during the covid period. As a result of the restrictions, the service had to rapidly adapt its practices in order to look after their communities and their own staff. During the initial stages, they had to secure sufficient provision of PPE for their officers and staff; ensure custody and control rooms were properly briefed on the regulations and manage absences because of illness or officers and staff self-isolating. Crime levels had reduced from 12% to 20% across the UK, (15% in Gwent). In contrast, the level of demand calls had increased which meant added pressure for officers and staff. The rapid introduction and modification of the regulations made it challenging to brief staff at very short notice, sometimes within 24hours, so that police officers could then implement them in the community. The positive dialogue with MPs and MSs helped to ensure the process ran as effective as practicably possible. Importantly the aim was to ensure a consistency of approach across Wales and although policing was not a devolved service, it was important that it worked in a devolved way. They also worked closely with colleagues in England to ensure a more consistent approach even though the regulations were different. There had been challenges such as policing beauty spots, holiday homes or cross border areas and in that respect the style and tone of policing was important. The four E's principle had been particularly effective, namely engage, educate, encourage and as a last resort enforce, in terms of maintaining community support. Members of the public had generally, not always, worked with the police. There

had been a shift of emphasis from the early stages to going to the enforcement stage more quickly with a minority of people.

The Strategic Co-Ordination Groups (SCGs) were a multi-agency partnership group chaired by police officers and they ensured an effective collective response e.g. establishing temporary mortuaries, raising awareness within communities, implementing the restrictions and setting up vaccination centres.

Matters were progressing to the recovery phase and the challenges for communities associated with coming out of a lockdown e.g. bereavement, economic, mental health and vulnerability around domestic abuse. Preparations were in hand for the re-opening of the night-time economy and a spike in crime trends. Prevention and a swift response were preferable to a cure and there was a responsibility in line with the partnership approach to keep communities safe. There was still lots of work to do and the police service was appreciative of the support from partners.

3.2 Domestic Violence and Abuse – Jeremy Vaughan

The Chief Constable for South Wales, Jeremy Vaughan, highlighted the following. Since March 2020, there had been an increase in household tensions forced by covid and there had been limitations on support services especially health. Victims had been locked in with perpetrators and the police had worked hard to encourage messages to communities and partners directly to report domestic violence and abuse. There had been a communications strategy including personal messages from police and partners across Wales. The live fear free helpline received 600 contacts in January and Welsh Women's Aid had seen an uptake.

Pharmacies and supermarkets discrete contact with police resulted in a victim extracted from a long-term relationship.

During the previous year, there had been an 11.3% reduction of domestic violence reported to South Wales Police. That may be a real reflection in part due to a slower economy especially the night-time economy. However, some did not feel they could do it whilst in lockdown and matters had improved as lockdown opened up.

The police were working with perpetrators through the Drive scheme and with partners in terms of refuge and housing capacity.

The courts services had prioritised domestic violence and abuse cases backlog, which was half what it was compared to last June/July.

A number of other crimes were under investigation and the police stood ready to respond to the economy opening up, greater freedom of movement and historical cases.

3.3 Changing nature of drugs supply – Arfon Jones

Arfon Jones, the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales, highlighted an ongoing survey that the campaign charity Release was doing. It sought the views of drug users about how things had changed. There had been 2600 responses to date and of note was the following:

- There had been no shortages of drugs during lockdown and it was very much business as usual. There had been shortages when lockdown was lifted during June/July 2020 however, matters had since returned to normal.
- There had been increased use of drugs and alcohol.
- Drug suppliers had been fastidious in assisting their customers to protect themselves from the virus i.e. complying with the Covid regulations. Their motive for doing so was to ensure their customer base remained in place and not because of Covid.
- Cannabis was the most frequently reported drug used and “Party drugs” had seen a decline due to premises closed and no parties taking place.
- Worryingly drug use was increasing, as were withdrawal symptoms, increased non-fatal overdoses and sharing equipment resulting in unintended consequences.

North Wales Police had found more use of tablets such as benzodiazepines, tramadol and Xanax, purchased via the dark web. Samples showed that they were fake which increased the risk of overdose.

There had been successful operations with the border force targeting post offices, as organised crime gangs could not use county lines couriers due to lockdown restrictions.

Treatment services in Wales were prescribing Buvidal, a licensed treatment for opioid dependence, because it lasted longer and there was no need to collect other treatment from pharmacies. The Area Planning Board was funding the service.

3.4 Cyber Crime and Fraud – Dafydd Llywelyn

Dafydd Llywelyn, Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys, talked about the changing nature of crime and the surge to use technology as an alternative during lockdown and Dyfed-Powys had noticed a significant increase of victims on line.

The Office for National Statistics did not quote fraud as part of recorded crime figures because of the exponential increase during the previous 4-5 years. The alternative was to go to the Fraud Intelligence Bureau and Dyfed Powys were not content that victims were given the appropriate level of service. In response a fraud triage had been set up in force and it recorded virtually a doubling of victims in 2020/21 (1946 victims) compared to 2019/20 (3896 victims). This force was working with the banking protocol via operation signature to identify fraud at an early stage and to safeguard financial transactions.

Romance fraud in 2019/20 resulted in 20 victims losing £70k compared to 2020/21 thus far with 70 victims losing £1.8 Million. The total reported losses in Dyfed-Powys was £14.5 Million in 2020/21 and the crime landscape was changing. There was a need to ensure adequate resources to this area and to work with partners, the banking industry and specialists in Tarian, the Regional Organised Crime Unit.

3.5 Race and Inclusion in Welsh Policing – Carl Foulkes

Carl Foulkes, Chief Constable for North Wales, highlighted why creating an inclusive and representative workforce was important.

Operation Uplift, 20k additional officers in England and Wales, provided an opportunity to think and look at the workforce differently. All four forces in Wales had developed positive action schemes to encourage representation from different communities. Dedicated officers were engaging with communities and with officers coming through the service to offer mentor support for underrepresented groups. New joiners were supported to feel part of the organisation and with their progression thereafter. Some areas had seen a dropout rate increase for officers with 2-4 years' service.

This was not just about the police and work was ongoing with other Criminal Justice Partners in Wales to deliver a single public service response through the local criminal justice boards and Criminal Justice in Wales. The aim was to deliver the best level of service at all times, supporting communities, being representative and looking to share best practice across policing, law enforcement and other agencies.

Wales was leading in this area on a national level. CC Pam Kelly leads is the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) lead for workforce. CC Carl Foulkes is the NPCC lead for equality, ethics and diversity. That influenced policing in Wales and the UK.

As part of the work on race and inclusion, it was noted that the most underrepresented and supported were the black community. There was a need for more engagement with that community and to achieve a better represented workforce in order to address the injustice of the past and going forward.

3.6 The Impact of the Pandemic on the Police Workforce – Jeff Cuthbert

Jeff Cuthbert, Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent, talked about public expectation and how it weighed on police officers. The old adage of not being able to please everyone was relevant particularly in terms of the response to covid. Some wanted more regulations and others a light touch or no regulations at all. He was happy to report that all the surveys in Gwent showed that policing using the 4E's approach did meet with general support.

Normal crime continued and the police had to deal with covid in addition to their existing wide range of responsibilities.

There were risks for officers in terms of being assaulted or spat at and they could not of course work from home. They needed to be out in the community and there was an understandable nervousness given that they did not know whom they would encounter.

4,200 emergency workers in Wales had been assaulted during the previous 12 months. One in three officers had been assaulted including being spat at by people claiming to have covid.

Morale had been affected however, abstraction levels remained low and morale was good. Officers understood the demand and level of support needed by the public. There was no question of avoiding shifts.

A difficult area to police was dealing with acceptable excuses for not complying with the regulations particularly when they changed. Therefore, there were issues for Welsh and UK government on how they communicated restrictions to the public.

Vaccinations were a cause of disagreement and Commissioners had been lobbying Welsh Government for the issue of risk and threat to be considered as the deciding factors for those eligible to receive a vaccine. The police were not seeking to jump the queue nor suggesting those who are of a certain age or unwell should not be a priority. Given the level of risk and threats faced by officers, they should, at the very least be considered for surplus vaccines and to do so on a four nations' basis.

There was a focus on wellbeing in all four forces in Wales. That was on wellbeing and support in general as well as specific aspects such as trauma resilience. Commissioners' teams were also included within this support given the mental health issues and isolation caused by the pandemic has had an impact on them and their families.

3.7 The Critical Role of Local Partnerships – Claire Parmenter

Claire Parmenter, Temporary Chief Constable for Dyfed-Powys, talked about how well partnership working operated in Wales and how the pandemic had highlighted it.

It was pleasing to note the number of people in Wales who had been vaccinated already. The Local Authorities, Health Authorities, supported by other public bodies should be congratulated on the success of the programme. She was also grateful for the vaccination of some officers and staff, namely Firearms officers and Custody staff. There was an ongoing concern between PCCs and Chief Constables that other officers and staff were at occupational risk and they should be vaccinated.

In terms of enforcement there had been good partnership working with Welsh Government including timely and regular consultation, which was helpful. Policing had been responsive and agile in reacting to the new regulations.

The wider partnership structure across Wales had been invaluable. Existing partners such as Natural Resources Wales had come to the fore in the previous 12 months. Police licensing teams had worked closely with Local Authority teams around enforcement, closures and checks. That was testament to the close working at a local level.

The Health Boards had done a fantastic job. Forces incident management teams had worked well, and a multi-agency approach to transmission rates, community engagement and the 4E's also proved invaluable.

The effectiveness of Op Talla – the police in Wales led the strategic co-ordination group was outlined.

Local and all Wales connectivity via the SCGs provided an opportunity to share a joined up holistic approach feeding the national picture. Feedback on partnership working in Wales had been held up as an exemplar of good practice.

In terms of track and trace, national arrangements supported by local track and trace ensured early identification and isolation allowing forces to manage risk and ensure they continued to provide a service to communities despite abstractions of staff.

The lateral flow-testing pilot in South Wales Police was very useful and it would be rolled out more widely. Mass testing across force hotspots had reduced transmission.

It was important to learn and take the best from the past 12 months to develop and enhance partnership working across Wales.

3.8 Criminal Justice in Wales: A case study in co-operation – Alun Michael

Alun Michael, Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales, described a real Welsh success story in terms of partnership working between policing and probation who worked well with each other before the pandemic by preventing crime and increasing efficiency and effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System. That involved recognising the impact of adverse childhood experiences, working with women offenders, tackling domestic violence and abuse.

There was a major crisis when Covid-19, 12 months ago, led to the closure of the courts. It was clearly not possible to deliver justice when the courts were closed. A recovery group was established and it met weekly with the head of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Court service, Probation, representatives of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), Chief Constables and heads of Probation.

Practical action had been taken, namely:

- The opening of a “Nightingale” court in Swansea
- The use of volunteers to marshal juries in Cardiff
- The extension of a dock in Newport
- Re-opening of magistrates courts across Wales and
- Delivery of remote evidence

The recovery group evolved to a steering group in September 2020 and it became even more representative. It met fortnightly and a jointly funded co-ordinator was appointed. It had issued a statement of purpose that set out how the delivery of the criminal justice system in Wales would be improved. It created a new logo that symbolised those developments.

That was a success story that had been acknowledged by the Ministry of Justice officials, by judges and the Lord Chancellor who said that we are better in Wales at

working together and getting things done. That had been done by non-devolved bodies working in a devolved environment with devolved partners and making it a success instead of a problem. .

The Chair thanked everyone for their presentations that had been recorded and there was a lot of information that could be drawn upon for future meetings.

3. Questions and discussion

3.1 The Chair read out a question from the meeting chat bar, as posted by Neil McEvoy MS as follows:

Why are “Propel” volunteers living in fear of being harassed and cautioned by the police for delivering leaflets while police and community support officers (PCSOs) and police officers are relying on regulations to carry out the same activity? Police officers in South Wales are even knocking on doors. The regulations allow voluntary activity such as leafletting so why is South Wales Police getting involved in politics.

Mr McEvoy MS, added to his question by referring to an email from South Wales Police he had opened that day which explained they were relying on the regulations to carry out their activities namely, “Health protection coronavirus restriction number 5 Wales regulations 2020 paragraph 1 schedule 4”, which referred to a reasonable excuse when there are no other practical alternatives. They did not rely on a private company nor the postal system because it was not operationally effective nor reasonably practical; as such, they were carrying out their duties.

Mr McEvoy MS, accepted that the police should be able to distribute leaflets in the way described however; he did not accept that he was not able to do likewise according to the police who tried to caution him. He also felt “Propel” members were fearful of delivering leaflets in case they were cautioned or harassed by the police. He had issued his volunteers with gloves and copies of the guidance in case officers challenged them. He did not have an issue with most front line officers however; he felt the Chief Constable was being political. He wanted to know why it was acceptable for police officers to carry out duties that he is not allowed to do as a politician.

As this was an operational matter, the Chair invited Jeremy Vaughan to respond.

CC Jeremy Vaughan appreciated the question and advised as follows.

Specific complaints are best dealt with in the specific. There are procedures and processes in place for that and they are subjected to rigorous oversight by the Independent Office for Police Complaints (IOPC) and Police and Crime Commissioners in terms of their statutory obligations.

These are also extraordinary times and the police service had worked desperately hard across Wales to achieve consistency in the way the frequently changing regulations (30 versions to date) were policed. That extended to people’s

interpretation of tier 4 restrictions and associated restrictions on freedom of movement and achieving consistency was a real challenge.

CC Pam Kelly also described the arrangements put in place by the police to ensure consistency across Wales. They had allocated a senior leader to work with Monitoring Officers to consider what the covid restrictions would mean leading up to the elections. They would, through that process be able to have a dialogue with candidates. During the period leading up to the elections, the police service was doing everything it could to ensure a consistent approach across all four forces in Wales with their approach. He would be briefed on that process as it unfolds.

Mr McEvoy MS did not want a briefing nor to go to the individual case he mentioned previously. He felt it was a general policy matter and could not understand why commercial leaflets could be distributed when political leaflets, in advance of an election, could not. As for the Monitoring Officers in Cardiff, he said members had been told they could be subject to the code of conduct if they distributed leaflets. As a result, Members did not wish to deliver leaflets in case they breached the code of conduct.

He felt it was a politicisation of the political process and the way it was being policed. He further felt that there was a lack of consistency as only "Propel" members had been approached and no other politicians in Wales had.

The Chair, in moving to the next question, stated that all politicians wanted to understand what was permitted and what was not and they would be provided with clarity going forward.

3.2 The Chair then asked whether there was consistency across Wales in terms of how surplus vaccine was used or were there variations in different areas in the context of officers being vaccinated?

Alun Michael responded by stating the use of surplus vaccine should be used wherever possible so that those officers at most risk could have it. There was a glitch initially however there was now consistency across Wales.

All Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables in Wales felt there should have been an assessment based on occupational risk. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) rules were being observed by all four nations however, they did not consider occupational risk should be pursued. That meant that officers who were dealing with violent individuals, some of whom spit at police were not being offered the vaccine because they did not fit the age criteria.

The matter continued to be discussed with Welsh Government and the First Minister had asked the JCVI to consider it. A similar approach had been made to the Home Secretary and the matter continued to be discussed.

3.3 Alun Michael referred to two events to celebrate two aspects of policing namely:

- A celebration of the work of Police and Community Support Officers (PCSOs) which Welsh Government contributed to and
- A celebration of the work of front line officers

It would be appreciated if members of the Senedd could re-tweet messages on the celebrations.

CC Vaughan commented that the decision on vaccinations was hugely disappointing especially as the role of a response officer was about to be celebrated i.e. they were still at work despite the risks of being infected. It would be appreciated if the celebration of their role could be supported on social media.

The Chair advised that the Group had a twitter account and his team would contact other Members of the Senedd.

T/CC Claire Parmenter was the Wales lead on PCSOs and she was grateful for the continued financial support from Welsh Government. PCSOs had played a significant role during Covid by keeping communities safe, gathering intelligence etc. and they had gone above and beyond their duties.

Jeff Cuthbert commented that colleagues in England were envious of the financial support provided by Welsh Government, without which it would not be possible to maintain it.

3.4 CC Pam Kelly mentioned the need for support as the lockdown restrictions were lifted. There were concerns about spikes in crime and there was a need for a consistency of language across the public sector and to ask communities to prepare for the period after lockdown.

The meeting concluded at 13:20