

Emergency Police and Crime Plan 2020

*Ensuring the resilience and recovery of West Midlands Police
and supporting our communities through COVID-19*



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Introduction

**David Jamieson,
West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner**

We are in truly unprecedented times. COVID-19 has temporarily changed how all of us live. The illness, self-isolation and staying at home are impacting on all of us in profound ways. The impacts on West Midlands Police are huge too.

Firstly our officers and staff carry out essential duties that have to continue, despite the crisis. This means that they are more likely than most to come into contact with the virus and therefore a proportion of our staff at any point will have to self-isolate and take time off to recover. This is placing a strain on policing. I will be working closely with government to bring about a flexible approach to funding to ensure West Midlands Police has the resources it needs to get through this period.

The demands on police are changing too. Police are at the forefront on engaging with the public, and if necessary enforcing the government's measures to keep people at home and socially distanced. These are unprecedented, but necessary curbs on the way people live their lives, that were not even seen during times of war. They require a pragmatic policing style to maintain public health and public support.

Crime is going to change significantly during the COVID-19 crisis. Organised crime groups will seek to exploit the situation and domestic abuse in the home will become more likely. This requires a responsive policing approach, at a time when staffing resources are likely to be reduced. This will mean difficult decisions on prioritising the response to other crimes.

At this challenging time help for groups supporting victims and working to reduce crime is crucial too. They will have to operate differently, but they are needed more than ever. Help for rough sleepers and other vulnerable groups, such as those suffering from drug addiction and ensuring they are supported is important too.

The Force is going to increasingly need the support of volunteers as this crisis continues. Their support and goodwill will be just as important as the Force recovers and returns to normal. I want to retain as much of that support and spirit as possible in the ongoing fight to make our streets safer.

Technology is playing an ever bigger role in all of our lives, and West Midlands Police is no different. The investment we've made to date is helping our officers to work flexibly. There will be no let-up in investment in technology. That drive needs to continue and accelerate as we recover from the national emergency.

This period is going to place great stress upon communities and the cohesion between different groups. Policing has a key role to play within that. I will be monitoring the situation closely and providing leadership to ensure that a medical emergency does not also become a public order emergency.

The weeks and months ahead will be the toughest we have faced for a long, long time. Having a police force that is resilient enough to get through the crisis and recovers quickly is crucial. That is the prime aim of this emergency Police and Crime Plan.

West Midlands Police's mission during the crisis

The Force's mission: To preserve life and protect the public by working in partnership with Public Health and other agencies to provide a coordinated response to contain cases of infection; **delay** the onset of cases in the West Midlands Conurbation, **mitigate** the impact of cases on the communities, preventing deterioration where practicable; and plan for **recovery**.

Summary

The existing 2016-2020 Police and Crime Plan remains in place. This is an emergency, additional chapter of Police and Crime Plan. It sets out four objectives:

- Ensure West Midlands Police responds efficiently and effectively to COVID-19, and works in partnership to protect the public of the West Midlands
- Protect the organisational health of West Midlands Police, so it not only responds to the national emergency effectively, but recovers and returns to normality as quickly as possible
- Lead and support the partnership response to the national emergency
- Ensure the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner does all it can to effectively respond to the national emergency, commissioning services that mitigate its effect and support the return to normality

Background – the risks we face

The nature of policing and crime will inevitably shift and change in the response to and recovery from the national emergency.

While some demand may fall - such as that associated with the night time economy and driving offences - in other areas demand could increase. Key risks are domestic and interpersonal violence, the increase of fraud, increased demand from poor mental health, community tensions and public order, and protecting the most vulnerable.

Crime patterns could significantly alter as social distancing and other changes impact on illegal economies and the ways that serious and organised criminals operate.

Shortages of staple goods, due in part to stockpiling, create risks of community tension, thefts from shops and public order incidents. Hate crimes may increase. Police will be called upon to break up public gatherings and enforce social isolation, perhaps in controversial circumstances. Financial pressures arising from job losses and reduced income create risks of criminality and strain people's mental health.

A reduction in supply of high harm drugs such as heroin and crack cocaine could lead to more individuals seeking support from already stretched treatment services and the increase of more harmful synthetic alternatives such as fentanyl, which is 50 times stronger than heroin. Those suffering with addiction will almost certainly continue contact with others as they try to source drugs, including alcohol, which makes self-isolation and social distancing unlikely. People living with addictions are often very vulnerable, and have significant health issues. Reduced supply of illicit drugs may drive up prices, with knock effects throughout the criminal economy, such as those addicted resorting to more serious crimes to pay for drugs.

Fraud is likely to rise as individuals self-isolate and can become victims of manipulation, particularly when scams play on the fears and loneliness of individuals. Older people may be at additional risk from distraction burglaries and online scams.

Young people will be away from school for a long period. Demands on the police could increase through congregations of young people, poor mental health and the possible increase of violence. The further reduction in youth service and community group provision will mean there will be less diversionary activities available to reduce the risk of children being drawn into crime. Children at home may be online more, and vulnerable to grooming and sexual exploitation. Children in local authority care may be additionally vulnerable. Online radicalisation risks may increase.

An increase in the necessary precautions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 through self-isolation, social distancing and limited movement of individuals and families could lead to an increase in interpersonal and domestic abuse within the home. Significantly, the ability of victims of domestic abuse to access the community services that they need to support and help them to escape the abuse they face could reduce, leading to victims being further isolated. There are further concerns about the ability of these individuals and families to access homelessness services at a time when the risk to women and children is expected to increase. Children may face further violence, abuse and neglect due to the closure of schools, including the reduction in their ability to have access to food, support and again the potential for the isolated family environment to lead to further incidents of violence and abusive behaviour from those closest to them.

The impact on the provision of public and third sector support services could see community support groups and networks weaken. The loss of these networks, or significantly reduced services, disproportionately affect the most vulnerable people and potentially those most at risk of entering or re-entering the criminal justice system. The staff of these organisations may also be affected, if their inability to provide their normal services leads to reduction in income.

Police Officers are at potentially increased risk of contracting COVID-19. The impact of the virus will be felt through a reduction in Officers and Staff as some need to self-isolate or are sick, and the Force will need access to appropriate personal protective equipment. The relationship between the Force and our local communities in the region will need to be managed carefully, during a time in which the police will have extra powers to deal with members of the public. The approach of the police to how these powers are enforced will be important, in order to avoid increasing community tensions.

COVID-19 will disrupt the criminal justice system. Social distancing and the virus will lead to changes to custody, diversion opportunities, severe disruption in the court process, challenges within prisons and issues concerning the transportation of prisoners and the management of offenders by the probation service. The system must work together to prioritise supporting vulnerable individuals and preventing reoffending.

Victims of crime may suffer the most from the impact on the criminal justice system. COVID-19 has the potential to exacerbate the issues where victims suffer most, such as time delays, communication with police and CPS and victims ultimately left like they are alone. This can lead to them disengaging with the criminal justice process altogether. Contingency plans are essential to minimise the impact on victims of crime and continue to support them through the criminal justice process, including regular and informative communication and reducing attrition.

Objective 1: West Midlands Police responds efficiently and effectively to COVID-19, and works in partnership to protect the public of the West Midlands

The impact of the national emergency on crime and policing will be complex and multi-faceted. We will work with the Force to understand these changing patterns, and we will expect the Force to show it has understood and responded to new forms of criminality that emerge during the emergency. There is a risk that domestic violence, fraud and online harm will increase during this period. We will expect the Force to maintain a flexible and proactive approach to domestic abuse and interpersonal violence. No one should be afraid in their own home, and we will look for innovative approaches to keeping reporting channels open, followed by an effective response from the Force and partners. The internet and online working have become even more critical during this period.

Criminals may seek to use this to defraud, groom and sexually exploit. We will work with the Force, National Crime Agency and other partners to prevent where we can, protect and prepare, and pursue those who would commit these crimes. We should work as hard to keep our online spaces safe for everyone as we do the parks and public spaces in which our children and young people play.

Delaying and mitigating the spread of COVID-19 requires West Midlands Police to work in partnership with agencies and organisations from across the public and private sectors. The Force is chairing the West Midlands and Warwickshire Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) that brings together the **key agencies to lead the regional response to the national emergency**. We will play an appropriate role in relation to the SCG to **ensure good governance and oversight**. We will produce regular public reports setting out the latest information, and the collective response. We will look to maintain a proportionate and effective "holding to account" function so the public can see and understand the decisions and actions that the Force is taking with partners. We will use information from many sources to inform our oversight. The Force will have new powers thanks to emergency legislation, and we will maintain oversight of these powers to ensure their use is proportionate and effective. The Force has already given assurance that their enforcement of social distancing will be proportionate. In particular they have assured the Commissioner that they will use reasonable discretion when, for instance, allowing community support groups to provide assistance to vulnerable people whether through food deliveries or otherwise. However, we recognise that enforcement will have a role in preventing the spread of the disease, and we will support the Force to maintain an effective public order capability. We will also expect the Force to put in place enforcement and other measures to **protect NHS staff and providers of essential services, including retail staff**.

We will look to ensure that community oversight of policing, such as Independent Advisory Groups, Stop and Search Panels, and Use of Force oversight, continues in some form. We will use local and regional structures, working with other PCCs, to ensure that specialist areas such as the Regional Organised Crime Unit and Counter Terrorism Unit remain effective. We will continue our oversight of the ethical use of police data. We will expect the Force to flex its resources to respond effectively to the challenges it will face. This will include, for example:

- Redeploying staff to critical functions such as Force Contact
- Supporting Officers and Staff that are self-isolated to undertake other duties via mobile working, such as telephone based investigations and victim support
- Ensuring proportionate approaches to risk management in operational processes, such as prisoner handling
- Service prioritisation, reflecting that resources will need to be allocated to the greatest risks, threat and harm
- Creating new capabilities to deal with likely new demand, such as supporting the compassionate and culturally sensitive handling of the deceased and their families

We will work with the Force to ensure that there is an effective approach to increasing the resources available locally for the response to the national emergency. This could include working with other organisations, police forces and other services, such as the armed forces. We will ensure there is an effective and safe approach to supporting community volunteering, and work to encourage former Officers and Staff to utilise their skills in support of the response.

Objective 2:

Protect the organisational health of West Midlands Police, so it not only responds to the national emergency effectively, but recovers and returns to normality as quickly as possible

Our Police Officers and Staff are working to protect us, and we must protect them in turn. We will work to give them the best possible protective equipment. They should receive effective training for new roles they are called on to carry out. COVID-19 testing should be made available as soon as possible. Aftercare, including counselling and support, particularly following work with the deceased and bereaved, will be part of the support Officers and Staff receive.

It is vital that West Midlands Police supports its Officers and Staff during the crisis, and there will be many short term decisions necessary to enable the organisation to cope. We will support the Force to balance these decisions with the need to ensure that West Midlands Police can return to normality, and indeed continue the change programme that has already increased the Force's productivity.

We expect Police Officer and Staff recruitment to continue, sustaining effective public engagement to ensure we recruit from across the West Midlands' diverse communities. We will expect the Force to look for ways to make new Officers operational as quickly as possible. We will work with the Force to support recruitment of new Police Staff into areas such as Force Contact. We will provide oversight of the vetting function so as to ensure the right posts, both in the Force and in our partner organisations, are prioritised. We want government to provide funding for the recruitment "Uplift" as part of up front grant, rather than paying it in arrears. We will also seek more flexibility in how it is used, so we can use it to recruit police staff to critical roles needed during the national emergency, for example.

We will expect the Force to effectively develop and deploy PCSOs and the Special Constabulary during this period. We will expect the Force to support wider volunteering, and in the process develop a positive and long lasting legacy. Again, we will expect to see the Force creatively and effectively engage with our diverse communities during social isolation, making use of the Street Watch networks that have developed in recent years.

We expect training and development of Staff and Officers to continue, but expect the Force to review and prioritise specialist training programmes. The partnership with Staffordshire University will need to flex to ensure that the risk to individuals is minimised while the high quality delivery is maintained. In other areas the Operational Learning Review should be reconsidered and prioritised to meet the challenges we face. There will be much to learn from how we tackle this national emergency, and we must use this opportunity well so as to inform our approach to future threats.

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We expect the Force to support the wellbeing of Officers and Staff. Everyone will be affected by COVID-19, not only through their role at work, but also on a personal level. The wellbeing strategy must be ready to provide the support that is needed for those who experience upset and trauma. The repercussions of this on wellbeing may last for years. Leaders and managers will need to show both leadership and care for those who work to them. The work to bring the Force's values to life must not be wasted. It must now be adapted to ensure learning from this crisis can be captured and used as the Force returns to normal flow of business.

We will look to use testing as soon as possible to get Officers and Staff back to work, and ensure appropriate implementation of guidance relating to those with pre-existing conditions.

While planning for the 2022 Commonwealth Games and next year's City of Culture in Coventry will inevitably slow during the crisis, we will ensure that this activity is ready to step up as soon as possible. We will continue to monitor the implications for policing arising from Brexit.

We will continue to work with the Force on the implementation of the change programme, recognising that there will need to be reprioritisation during the crisis. This includes ensuring new systems and processes are implemented within timescales and on budget, and the benefits are delivered.

We will continue to work with the Force to ensure resources are managed effectively including redirecting resources to areas that are needed most over the coming months. We will ensure financial plans are updated to reflect the situation faced by West Midlands Police. We will also work with policing nationally to ensure resources are available to deliver services. If necessary we will lobby government to ensure greater **flexibility in the use of national funding such as "Surge" and VRU funding and additional policing resource** to help across this period of national emergency. We will seek flexibility from government in how we use external grants. We will balance budgets but ultimately request greater resource where it is needed.

We will work with the Force to continue to deliver the estates strategy where possible, including the construction of the new events control and logistics centres. We will also ensure the Force takes full consideration of social value and partnership working when recommending how sites are disposed. We recognise again that reprioritisation may be required.

Operational changes introduced during the emergency, such as greater use of home and mobile working, offer potential to be retained as the emergency abates. Similarly, some other revised practices should, with appropriate risk management and oversight, be retained. We will learn from the emergency and use this knowledge to inform our change and estates programmes.

Objective 3: Leading and supporting a partnership response to the national emergency

Civic leadership will be critical in the coming months: it can support changed public behaviour, and do much to reassure communities. We will work with our partners, and adapt existing mechanisms and structures to continue the provision of important services. The Commissioner has pledged to support organisations which receive grants so they do not face uncertainty. We expect these services to adapt their approach so the public can still access services during the crisis. Even if those services are delivered in a different way, we want those services to be creative and continue. We remain committed to partnership working, with a recognition that services will have to be delivered differently: we will work with others to identify and respond to vulnerability.

Partnership working across the Criminal Justice System (CJS) will be key. As of 18 March 2020, the Ministry of Justice confirmed that all criminal justice agencies had contingency plans in place to respond to COVID-19, including a Strategic Command Protocol which joins up the CJS response at a national level. I will ensure we translate that locally. Crown Court trials have been suspended, which will have impacts across the whole system. Self-isolation and the potential early release of prisoners will impact on communities and policing. I will ensure that our partnership structures in the West Midlands can respond appropriately.

West Midlands Community Safety Partnership will continue to provide a whole systems response to crime and disorder. We have moved to regional commissioning to ensure consistency and efficiency, while giving local community safety partnerships the ability to respond to local, emerging issues. We will ensure their use of community safety funding during the national emergency is effective. Services need to be responsive to the changing needs of the public, moving to online and social platforms where necessary to do so, in order to protect the public.

We will work with the community and our partners to deliver community messages, utilising our links into the community, faith and voluntary sector. Our work within those sectors is critical and ensures that our community-led way of working is delivered. We will support services for victims of crime to move to online until we are able to resume face to face contact. This shift will deliver longer term benefits.

We will work to reduce the risk of increased hate crime, working with the Force, our partners, our networks and the public. We will be urging coordination between West Midlands local authorities to ensure a consistent approach to Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities during the crisis. We will raise this issue nationally.

We will continue the New Chance programme for female offenders. This programme has effectively adapted its support to these women, which will be vital given the increased risk of domestic abuse during social isolation. We will also ensure effective use of Out of Court Disposals to reduce pressure and backlog of cases in the wider CJS.

We will work with partners to identify the impact the national emergency has on children who are experiencing care and what can be done throughout the response and recovery phases to support them and keep them away from harm. We will also consider and respond to the impact of on children already excluded or off-rolled from school.

We will continue to lead the region's response to fraud through the West Midlands Fraud Board, which will support the Force through partner networks and help facilitate a greater insight into how the fraud landscape is changing both during and after this crisis. As part of this fraud effort we will work closely with the Force, Local Authorities and banks to ensure that government support reaches those who need it most and is not taken advantage of by fraudsters and scammers. We will engage as appropriate with partner led activity to support businesses facing reduced income and closure.

COVID-19 is predicted to claim thousands of lives in our area. The circumstances of these deaths will often be particularly heart-breaking, claiming loved ones in isolation, with victims unable to spend their last moments with family or friends. In our diverse area, recognising all cultural preferences and religious practice will be a challenge. We will ensure that the deceased and their families are dealt with compassionately, with care, and with religious and culturally appropriate protocols, working with partners to ensure temporary mortuary facilities are effectively and sensitively managed.

Objective 4: Ensure the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner does all it can to effectively respond to the national emergency, including commissioning services that mitigate its effect and support the return to normality

We remain committed to working with the Force and partners to maintain longer term planning and leadership in addressing the root causes of crime. That means as the emergency abates, being ready to pick up existing work on diverting people with substance misuse addictions, mental health problems or adults and young people living in difficult or abusive home circumstances, away from the criminal justice system towards evidence-based prevention activities.

Victim Services

We will continue to support victims. Support will be available to any victim of crime, including victims of domestic abuse.

We will ensure the continuation of services to victims of crime, exploring new and creative service models. We will work with providers to identify emerging trends. We have committed to ensuring that funding continues to flow to services we have commissioned, although we expect delivery models to change.

We will work with our commissioned services to ensure they are able to respond to the fast evolving needs of victims during this period. We will support services to build their resilience by offering greater flexibility around working hours, locations and types of interventions. We will work closely with partner agencies, assessing and responding to the emerging trends and putting in place contingencies. We will allow our commissioned services to flex and adapt, to utilise their existing funding differently and allow them to change their service provision to best suit the needs of victims they are supporting. Domestic abuse victims who are self-isolating at home seem less likely to make contact with service providers, meaning that what is already a hidden crime moving further out of sight. We will work with partners to create an avenue for victims to seek support online. We will continue to monitor the trends and impact on victims. We will continue to map gaps in service provision and commission services to meet demand generated by the crisis.

COVID-19's effect on the Criminal Justice System will, in turn, have an impact on victims of crime, creating anxiety, disappointment and concern. There will be time delays, potentially weaker communication with police and the Crown Prosecution Service, and victims without the ability to know or understand what may happen next.

We will work with the Force and partners to implement contingency plans to mitigate these risks. We will provide oversight of changes to service provision, and ensure these are effectively communicated to the public. We will work with partners to consider issues such as offender management, ensuring appropriate protections to prevent repeat victimisation, managing individuals released from prison, and protecting victims of harassment and stalking. We will use existing structures such as the Local Criminal Justice Board to bring these issues to the forefront.

Custody Visiting and the Appropriate Adults service

The custody visiting scheme exists to provide reassurance that police custody is safe. The enclosed nature of custody facilities (small rooms, with furniture often secured to floors) and the large proportion of detainees who are from a vulnerable background make this a challenging area during the COVID-19 outbreak. We need to maintain oversight but at the same time safeguard the health and wellbeing of our volunteers. We will continue to operate the scheme with the reduced number of volunteers and we will supplement this with increased focus on the arrangements in custody, for example we will join the weekly COVID-19 Stakeholder Group, which provides a regular update and discussion on custody. Appropriate Adults are provided for vulnerable adults in police custody.

This is a high priority service because it safeguards vulnerable people, and because it is a requirement under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act codes of practice. We will explore new ways of delivering this voluntary service, including enhanced use of personal protective equipment, and the feasibility of remote contact for volunteer Appropriate Adults. We will ensure appropriate oversight of the provision of Appropriate Adults to children, which are provided by local authorities and children's trusts.

Supporting wider economic activity

The crisis will have significant economic consequences. We will use the OPCC's spending power, and the spending power of the Force, to ensure that we procure in a way which will benefit the economy of the West Midlands. We will seek to buy services and goods locally, and use social value assessments to shape procurement decisions as far as possible. We will work with public sector partners to adopt a similar approach.

We will work with our partners to identify and support businesses which have an elevated risk of crime during this period. We will work with partners to support the economic recovery of the region, as we recognise the potential risk of unemployment and economic harm on increases in crime.

Other activity

We will work with the Force to adapt our approach to the Active Citizens Fund in response to the emergency and the recovery period.

Our pension forfeiture hearings will continue during the crisis.

If capacity allows we may be able to release OPCC staff to support Force functions, including secretariat support to Force and partnership meetings.

During this crisis and the period of returning to business as usual, Internal Audit will continue to provide assurance that risk governance and control frameworks remain robust through its consultancy and assurance role.