



10/03/21

RESPONSE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER OF WILTSHIRE AND SWINDON TO THE HMICFRS REPORT

Impact of the pandemic on the Criminal Justice System

Chief Officer comments

The Chief Constable of Wiltshire notes the published report and the challenges identified, during an unprecedented period. The force works well with our criminal justice partners and will continue to provide support in furtherance of improving systems and processes for victims and witness of crimes.

Portfolio lead comments

Wiltshire Police works well with criminal justice partners and will continue to provide support in furtherance of improving systems and processes for victims and witness of crimes. The below governance meetings support our work with partners;

- A Criminal Justice Gold meeting is in place to ensure that the correct actions and resourcing is in place to deal with the backlog facing Crime Standards and Justice whilst dealing with current demand. The Gold Group sits weekly and is chaired by ACC Cooper and the Silver group is chaired by the Head of Crime Standards and Justice.
- A weekly Wessex recovery group is in operation which includes Dorset Police, Hampshire Constabulary and other CJ partners. Wiltshire Police are an active part of this group as well as the Court Capacity and Victim & Witness sub-groups.
- Head of Crime Standards and Justice attends;
 - National Criminal Justice (CJ) Regional Leads meeting, which discusses the effects of the pandemic and other issues relating to CJ and;
 - The Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board (WCJB) to update on CS&J and the effects of the CJ backlog. The WCJB is chaired by the PCC and is attended by all CJ partners.

| Recommendations | Wiltshire response |
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| The report makes no recommendations to police. | As above. |

Police and Crime Commissioner's comments

I welcome the HMICFRS report on "Impact of the pandemic on the Criminal Justice System", which has been prepared and published collaboratively by Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution

Service Inspectorate, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.

The Criminal Justice System is an ecosystem, in which all parts play their significant role. If one part of the system is overwhelmed, it will have an impact on the whole system, therefore it is important that all the partners work very closely to ensure that the system provides the best service for our communities. In my role as the chair of the Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board, I play a pivotal role in supporting local justice partners to work together to address both local and national priorities for improvement. In this regard, we agreed to provide an effective and efficient Criminal Justice System in Wiltshire.

Since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we have been working very closely to prioritise responding to this crisis and focused on returning of the capacity as a matter of urgency. The report draws together some very useful insights and as it rightly states the full impact on the pandemic is yet to be fully understood, and therefore it is crucial that we continue to work closely to enable the system to recover and become even more resilient than it was before the pandemic. It is well-known that the system had some challenges before the outbreak of this deadly virus.

As part of the response, Criminal Justice partners from across Wiltshire, Hampshire and Dorset came together to form the Wessex Criminal Justice Recovery Group to work through local capacity challenges with a focus on reducing outstanding cases and delays, including the delivery of the National Court Recovery Plan. The group, which is jointly chaired by my Deputy Chief Executive Naji Darwish and Hampshire Constabulary ACC Stuart Murray, has been instrumental in bringing partners together to manage the Criminal Justice System response to COVID-19. The group has worked tirelessly together to manage challenges in court capacity, ensure vulnerable victims and witnesses receive the priority in the justice system and implementing the complex challenges of delivering justice during a pandemic. The partners and I have agreed that COVID -19 has exposed the challenges faced by the Criminal Justice System prior to March 2020 and the response presents an excellent opportunity to transform and modernise justice for all. Criminal Justice System relationships have been firmly embedded across the CJS in Wiltshire and across Wessex and I am pleased about how partners across Wessex responded to address a significant backlog of magistrate and crown cases in Wiltshire during October 2020 by mobilising resource across the area. This issue is almost resolved, and I would like to highlight that the focus placed by Wessex recovery has meant this received ongoing performance oversight and partnership collaboration to do so as a CJS.

To ensure that this ecosystem can function as effectively and efficiently as possible, the pace of recovery will always be at the speed at which partners can move together and any attempt to push one part of the system needs to be considered on this basis. This position is also captured in the report which states that: *"All agencies need to take stock individually and together and review the changes they've made and the learnings from them. This will help ensure those innovations they wish to retain (or further expand) can be properly evaluated, and the resources and training needed to sustain them can be worked out and factored in."* In this regard, I would welcome further national drive to better understand the current demand modelling, timeliness and resources which will be required as we emerge from the pandemic.

I also share the key concern, highlighted in the report, that the impact of the pandemic will prove deleterious to victims, witnesses and defendants alike. In my Police and Crime Plan, I have clearly stated my priorities and one of them is to "put victims, witnesses and communities at the heart of everything we do". In my role as the Police and Crime Commissioner, I continue to commission Horizon Victims Services to ensure quality services for both victims and

witnesses. I also commission additional and specialist services to support vulnerable victims including those who have experienced very serious crime. Since the beginning of the global pandemic, my Office has been working tirelessly to successfully secure additional funding of £180,000 in November 2020 and £200,000 in February 2021 from the Ministry of Justice to provide further support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wiltshire and Swindon. It is undeniable that lockdown makes it even harder for victims to come forward and report crime.

As the country moves along the government roadmap, COVID's impact will continue to cast a long shadow and, in many parts, the real work is beginning now. This includes issues of addressing the inevitably long delays in timeliness with CJS partners in tandem with each other, victims and witnesses and judiciary and defence community. The response planned in Wessex hopes to continue building on existing work but requires support from both local and national agencies. There is a need for realistic and shared local modelling of demand, jointly agreed resource plans to ensure each part of the system can dial up to additional court capacity as well as increases in crime demand. Whilst not able to mitigate the challenges, Wessex's relatively good performance is due to the strong relationships, constructive challenge and a willingness from all partners to use technology, modernise practice and put the victim at the centre.

In closing, I would also like to echo the report's formal thanks and admiration for all staff working in the criminal justice system, whether in policing, the CPS, the courts, prisons, probation services and youth justice, who have shown great commitment and dedication during this time of national emergency.

HMI Williams comments/support;

HMI's comments in support