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| |  | | --- | | COVID19 UPDATE REPORT | |  | | 24 November 2021 | | 1. PURPOSE AND RECOMMENDATION    1. The purpose of this report is to provide information for monitoring purposes and OPCC reporting.    2. There are no recommendations made requiring a decision. 2. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND    1. The purpose of this report is to provide the OPCC with an update as to Force planning and activity in the recovery phase of COVID-19. 3. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION    1. Resourcing   The Gwent Police Response to Covid is currently led by a Chief Superintendent who is the Gold Commander. From April 2020 to April 2021 The Force held daily Covid Gold Meetings. They currently chair a weekly meeting that addresses issues related to the Force’s Covid response. It is attended by representatives of both Local Policing areas, Crime Investigation, Business Support Functions, Legal Services, Finance and other key senior staff. The Force has also dedicated the Civil Contingencies Chief Inspector to its Covid Response. The Gold Commander is supported by staff from Continuous Improvement and the Force Planning Unit and liaises with the LPA Response and Neighbourhood Leads.  From April 2020 the Force undertook weekly dedicated Covid Patrols within both LPAs and across all five Local Authority areas. With Wales’ move out of Lockdown these patrols were replaced by less frequent but larger public order patrols focussed on weekends and then became part of business as usual with ‘Covid Incidents’ now being tasked to Response Teams and Neighbourhood Policing Teams.  From December 2020 the Force implemented a ‘Covid Hub’ to manage all queries on infection from Force Staff and to undertake internal Contact Tracing in order to identify and respond to workplace transmission of the virus. The Hub plan has established a supervisor and 7 operators, but that staffing level has never been achieved due to difficulties in resourcing the posts and currently the Hub is covered 8am to 8pm 7 days a week on a rota by five members of staff.  Looking ahead the resourcing of the response to and recovery from the pandemic will need to be commensurate with the pressures that policing is likely to face over the coming months:   * Potentially high abstractions from the workplace due to infection or required isolation; * Variances in approach between the Governments of the UK and Wales; * Demand placed upon Occupational Health and Health & Safety teams to respond to reported cases and workplace transmission of the virus; * Health & Safety Executive requirements and possible action resulting from any workplace transmission; * High demand across key organisations (Police, Welsh Ambulance Service Trust (WAST), Health & Local Authorities); * Staff fatigue and apathy towards further control measures.   1. Covid Demand   Demand related to Covid Enforcement significantly reduced following the relaxation of Covid Regulations to ‘Alert Level Zero’ in August 2021. With the removal of restrictions on gatherings in public, the re-opening of the Night-time Economy and the removal of the requirement to Self-Isolate for most Close Contacts of positive individuals the specific Covid related demand on policing has fallen away. However, the consequence of these changes has been a huge increase in all forms of demand for Gwent Police as a level of ‘normality’ has returned and suppressed demand has re-surfaced. The re-opening of pubs and clubs across the Force area is just one aspect of the relaxation of the Covid restrictions that has put pressure on Gwent Police.  At the time of writing Welsh Policing is awaiting the outcome of the proposed introduction of ‘Covid Passes’ as a condition of entry to certain nightclubs, venues and events. It is unclear at this time what responsibilities will fall upon Policing and what will lie elsewhere, or what demand burden this will place upon Gwent Police. But we continue to work closely with partners to seek clarity and to explain the current situation within policing.   * 1. Covid Enforcement   Gwent Police remains committed to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) Covid strategy and the sequential and proportionate approach to engage, explain and encourage public cooperation, with enforcement being the last resort. As mentioned above, specific ‘Covid Patrols’ have been stood down as regulations restricting gatherings etc have been relaxed. The majority of enforcement since that time has related to referrals from Local Authority teams dealing with Returning International Travellers who fail to Self-Isolate as required when they return home to Gwent. Whilst ownership of enquiries with the individuals and provision of advice and information is owned by the Local Authorities and Public Health, enforcement of any breaches of these regulations are the responsibility of Policing. This similarly applies to those who have tested positive for Covid and fail to Self-Isolate as directed, as these are also referred to Gwent Police via our internal Covid Hub. The Hub reviews the referral, provides initial intelligence checks and identifies any risk issues prior to forwarding the task to the Force Control Room (FCR) for allocation to an officer.  The Force also has a level of demand from members of the public reporting others for failing to Self-Isolate. The Covid Hub has developed a process with the Welsh Government Covid Surge Team to provide accurate information on such allegations allowing us to identify which allegations do in fact relate to persons who should be isolating and those that are spurious and do not require police attendance.  A further area of demand for Gwent Police requiring Enforcement during the course of the pandemic has been reports of Unlicensed Music Events (UMEs), colloquially referred to as ‘Raves’. The UK as a whole has seen very large gatherings of young people at such events in both rural areas and in vacant industrial units. Once established these are very difficult to disrupt and disperse, with officers having to confront dense crowds in locations unsuitable for such an event and where the attendees are often under the influence of drugs. Within Gwent intelligence regarding the establishment of such UMEs has been responded to swiftly and we have been able to disperse those trying to attend the event, prior to it became unmanageable and to seize the sound systems intended to be used at the location. As a result, we have not had problems to the same extent with UMEs as have been experienced in neighbouring forces.  One of the most challenging areas of Covid Enforcement for Gwent Police has been the often fast-paced changes in legislation and the fact that as a Wales/England Border Force we have had to deal with public confusion or misunderstanding about which Regulations apply at a particular time and in a particular geographic locations. There has often been an identifiable lag between what the Governments have said, what the police understood and what the public believed, was permissible. Gwent Police often found itself in the position of not only upholding the law that applied at that time, but also, through social media and communication channels, explaining the regulations to the public.   * 1. Health and Safety   The Health and Safety Team continue to develop and implement processes to ensure ‘Covid Secure Workplaces’. In this context risk assessments and regular checks are undertaken to monitor compliance with requirements and to ensure controls are both fit for purpose and being implemented effectively. Communication campaigns have been routinely deployed in order to maintained awareness and mitigate ‘COVID fatigue’.  A campaign to maintain COVID secure arrangements within the workplace against a backdrop of the relaxation of regulations in the wider community has played its part in ensuring that instances of workplace transmission of the virus has mercifully recently been minimal. The Health and Safety Team remain active in providing guidance and support in the interpretation and application of risk controls and regular checks continue to be undertaken to monitor compliance with requirements.  The H&S team are closely involved in determining any necessary COVID risk controls that might be necessary for implementation in the new Gwent Police Head Quarters and in providing recommendations in relation to forthcoming changes to pandemic Alert levels. In this context they have been liaising closely with the Estates Department in conducting a review of ventilation arrangements force-wide with a view to informing the required controls moving forward.  The National Police Coordination Centre (NPCC) took control of National Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies for policing from the early days of the pandemic. The Health and Safety team within Force continues to ensure that national standards of PPE use is maintained within Gwent Police and attend weekly Force Gold level meetings and monthly All Wales meetings where COVID matters are discussed.   * 1. Workforce Resilience   Absence, including Covid19 related absence, remains low compared to other forces and is tracked each day at the Force Daily Management Meeting. As a Force have remained well below the National staff absence averages for the duration of the pandemic and officers and staff have exhibited a clear determination to continue working even when their wellbeing and health was deemed to be at risk.  The actual number of Gwent Police staff that tested positive for Covid over the course of the pandemic is shown on the chart below *(see Figure 1: ‘Gwent Police Staff Infections by Month’).* Number peaked in December 2020, but the most recent wave saw high numbers of infections (and related absences) in August and September 2021.  **Figure 1: Gwent Police Staff Infections by Month**  Ongoing processes operating alongside Public Health Wales have evolved to ensure that testing can take place for all Gwent Police staff at testing centres, with 400 places reserved for prioritised testing of blue light services should it be required. If officers come into contact with a suspected or diagnosed case of Covid-19 an information sharing agreement has been established with Public Health Wales to allow Occupational Health staff and Medical staff within Custody to access medical records for the person who is infected, to establish their medical status. This has been a positive inclusion in our working practices providing reductions in time where staff and officers are potentially absent from work.  The Covid Hub was put into operation in December 2020 in response to demand being placed upon the Occupational Health Unit and other Force resources to respond effectively to Covid-19 infections and workplace transmission. It quickly became established as an effective team and continues to respond swiftly to outbreaks and isolated infections within the Force.  Since April 2021 Gwent Police have provided Covid Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) kits to all staff to allow home/self-testing for antibodies of the virus. This is a purely voluntary process (in line with legal advice and Public Health guidance). There have been several positive tests returned which have then been followed up by positive NHS Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests to confirm infection. This has led to earlier isolation of individuals and prevented further spread of the virus.  With the relaxation of Covid Regulations on the 7th of August 2021 Gwent Police staff who were ‘Close Contacts’ of positive people were no longer required to Self-Isolate by law if they were double-vaccinated. Whilst this was welcomed by the Force as it removed the absences that were increasing due to staff being ‘pinged’ on the NHS Covid Application or had minimal contact with infected persons, it did present an increased risk of infected staff coming into the workplace and infecting their colleagues. This would then mean that staff were at risk of serious illness, or at very least would have to legally Self-Isolate if they tested positive.  In order to address this and to reduce the risk of Work-place Transmission of the virus (which remains reportable to the Health & Safety Executive) Gwent Police introduced new procedures for staff which involve Risk Based Assessments of all Close Contacts in order to safely return staff to work wherever possible and to limit infection spreading within the Force and increasing absences *(see Appendix 13.1: ‘Covid Internal TTP Aug 2021 v3’)*. These procedures provide clear guidelines for the Covid Hub staff to gather all relevant information to pass to ‘Decision Makers’ at the rank of Inspector or Chief Inspector who have devolved responsibility to make policy decisions on individual cases on behalf of the Covid Gold Commander. If it is deemed too high a risk that the individual has or will be infected with Covid (for instance, where the member of staff is living in the same house as a covid positive relative) then they are directed to work from home and to undergo additional testing for a defined period. Where the member of staff is in a critical role within the Force and need to be in the workplace additional controls (enhanced PPE, enhanced testing, physical barriers etc.) can be applied to allow them to return to work.  Some Gwent Police staff who have received vaccinations have reported side-effects including nausea and flu-like symptoms lasting 24-48 hours. This has resulted in short term sickness absence increases that appear to impact upon younger members of staff more significantly than older, and the effects are more strongly associated with the Astra-Zeneca vaccine. ABUHB have recognised this impact and intend to offer alternative brands of vaccine to those under 30 years old to mitigate against it.  Earlier in the pandemic all training courses delivered both within Force and externally were suspended. Gradually more essential courses were reintroduced and now all courses are again being delivered, albeit often with reduced numbers of students and with strict social distancing in place. Gwent Police is in a good position with regard to compulsory development training compared to Forces nationally. Of note is the fact that we have been able to maintain our national commitment to Public Order capacity and capability through maintaining the refresher training of PSU Officers. Many Forces across the country have been unable to meet their commitments in this area.   * 1. Wellbeing   The wellbeing provision for Gwent Police is continually developing and adapting to the changing demands and restrictions placed upon us by the Covid Pandemic. The All Wales Risk Assessment tool is regularly reviewed to ensure it provides the right level of support and advice to those who may be vulnerable until the restrictions are lowered. The Force Wellbeing Lead has been instrumental in developing various initiatives to drive the Wellbeing Strategy and will continue to do so when the new ‘Wellbeing Specialist’ starts work with Gwent Police. The weekly Wellbeing Teams Call will resume once the Wellbeing Specialist begins work and they will be accompanied by the Force Counsellor and Occupational Health Advisor who will develop a revitalised Wellbeing programme to support Officers and Staff in all areas of the Force.  The Force Counsellors continue to develop the psychological provision to staff and are actively linking in with the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Teams to expand the service and ensure that the correct level of support is provided. The Wellbeing Team have provided a great deal of support throughout the Covid Pandemic with the development of various pieces of literature, drop-in sessions and bespoke support where required for those concerned or directly affected by Covid.   * 1. Community Cohesion   The Gwent Police Diversity and Inclusion Lead continues to chair a weekly ‘Covid Community Dial-In’ with representatives of Faith groups, Cultural Organisations, Support Workers, and other representatives of Gwent’s diverse communities. This provides an opportunity for these disparate groups to ask questions on policing and health issues during the pandemic and for Gwent Police to allay concerns and to understand the views of our communities. The Civil Contingencies Chief Inspector takes part in these meetings and is able to gain a first-hand understanding of the impact of Covid Enforcement and messaging on the communities of Gwent.   * 1. Lessons Learned   Lessons Learned processes are in place aligned to the College of Policing and NPCC Guidance and branded as ‘Operation Talla’. There are established reporting lines in place and regular national meetings to provide a platform for discussion and regular links with police liaison in the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that lessons from all Forces are brought together.  The Civil Contingencies Chief Inspector, Health & Safety Lead, Occupational Health Manager and other key staff regular dial in to Regional and National meetings in order to capture best practice. Alongside the Strategic Coordination Group, Incident Management Teams and Tactical Coordination Groups there are also functional meetings such as the Police (Wales) TTP & Covid Working Group and The National PPE Group.  The team is also working closely with specific Lessons Learned Forums such as the College of Policing Operational Learning Groups. These are workshops for all Forces in England and Wales which are thematic and relate to core areas of policing and how they have been affected by the pandemic. Contributors identify best practice and what has worked well for them and share information and documentation relating to these. The Civil Contingencies Chief Inspector is also a member of the ‘Covid19 All Wales Organisational Learning Group’ hosted by Dyfed Powys Police. This group reviews practices across the four Welsh Forces and allows members to bring forward local challenges and offers examples of good practice.   * 1. Inspection   Gwent Police was selected by HMICFRS in December 2020 to take part in a Covid-19 inspection which examined: how policing is responding to the Covid crisis; what is working well and what is being learnt; how the sector is dealing with the problems it faces and; opportunities to make sustainable improvements to the service. The inspection examined three distinct themes: Preparedness, Partnerships and Strategic Leadership; Policing Themes (Vulnerability, Investigations, Reporting, Enforcement and Wellbeing) and; Police Custody.  This inspection resulted in the report: ‘Policing in the Pandemic: The police response to the coronavirus pandemic during 2020’ which was published in April 2021 *(see Annex 13.2: Policing in the Pandemic HMICFRS Report).* The report makes five recommendations for forces. Gwent Police will be required to provide an update to the OPCC to allow the PCC to compile his statutory response to the Home Secretary on the report. These recommendations are as follows:  *1. 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.*  *2. 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.*  *3. 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.*  *4. 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.*  *5. 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.*  Each of these recommendations have a Force owner allocated and responsible for implementing the necessary change. Additionally, the Report also identified learning points for all Forces to consider and implement where relevant to their circumstances. These are in the areas of: Demand & Pressures; Technology; Training; Workforce Wellbeing; Data and; Learning. The Force is reviewing these areas through its Assurance Officers.   * 1. Recovery   The Force is in the process of moving from Incident Management of the Pandemic to Recovery. Within the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) the Strategic Coordination Group chaired by Chief Superintendent McLain was stood down in April 2021. There is an LRF Recovery Group now chaired by the Chief Executive of Newport City Council, but this does not intend meeting again until December 2021.  Within Force the Covid Gold Group still sits weekly, chaired by COVID Gold Commander for Gwent. A proposal has been made to Chief Officers that a Recovery Structure is established with a Chief Officer Team lead overseeing a Recovery Board. Board representation would be drawn from senior members of critical departments and policing teams across the Force and would manage the recovery from the pandemic and the identification of practices developed during Covid that have long term benefits for the Force. This would mirror the structures in place within the other three Welsh Forces which each have Covid Recovery Teams in place with a dedicated Superintendent reporting to the Chief Officer lead. The funding for this ‘Recovery Superintendent’ post has been provided by the Welsh Government to assist Forces to move forward.  We are currently in the ‘Third Wave’ of Covid infections whilst at the same time we have seen the relaxation of Covid Regulations to Alert Level Zero in Wales, in line with other parts of the UK.  Whilst it is clear that vaccination has seen a big reduction in illness severity and had an impact on infection rates, there is still expected to be a significant impact on policing due to greater community transmission and infection levels amongst our staff. So, a key area for the Recovery programme will be the ongoing management of workplace transmission and workforce resilience.  Public Health Wales and Public Health England remain concerned about ‘new’ and emerging variants of Coronavirus, or ‘Variants of Concern’ (VOCs). As each variant is identified they are assessed for relative infection rates, severity of illness and resistance to the current vaccination programme. It is strongly believed that these VOCs will result in increased transmission within our communities and therefore, within policing.  There are a number of significant challenges to recovery on the horizon. This is particularly true as we approach the winter, which is always a difficult period for the health service and other public bodies, but this year we anticipate that the challenges will be exacerbated for a number of reasons. Including a potential resurgence of other respiratory diseases outside of Covid, such as seasonal influenza. Gwent Police continues to work closely with both the other three Welsh Forces and the Welsh Government within the Coronavirus Control Plan. The Welsh Government is also introducing a strategic Winter Operations Task Group at Chief Officer/Chief Executive Level and supported by a Winter Pressures Civil Contingencies Group (CCG). The Winter Operations Task Group will be: “a small core group including external partners with representation from Police, Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust (WAST), Fire & Rescue Service, NHS, Social Care and Welsh Government to provide a sharp focus in considering how regions and individual organisations could adjust their operating practices to better respond to service pressures”. Gwent Police will engage fully with these groups with appropriate representation on them.   1. COLLABORATION   Throughout the initial 12 months of the pandemic the four Welsh Forces held Weekly ‘All Wales Gold’ Meetings between the Four Organisational Gold Commanders (represented by force COVID Gold Commander for Gwent) and the Police Liaison Unit at the Welsh Assembly Government. This allowed the Forces to provide consistency of response across Wales and to identify and promulgate best practice. This mirrored the approach taken by Chief Officers across Wales and ensured that the particular structure of policing in Wales under a devolved Governmental system was considered alongside UK wide approaches to policing the pandemic. This meeting was stood down in May 2021 as Forces moved towards a Recovery position, but Forces retain the ability for it to be stood up again in quick time if necessary.  Since May an ‘All Wales Recovery Golds’ Meeting has been held formally fortnightly but has also operated as a support group for the four Forces, meeting as required less formally and ensuring a consistent approach to policing. Representation from the other three Welsh Forces is through their Recovery Superintendents. Whilst the Head of the Police Liaison Unit at the Welsh Government also sits on this group. Gwent Police is currently represented by the Civil Contingencies Chief Inspector.  On a more tactical level the Civil Contingencies Leads of the Four Welsh Forces and the BTP Operational Lead for Wales, also meet fortnightly. This group is entitled ‘The Police (Wales) TTP & Covid Working Group’. The group allowed those dealing with the policies and procedures concerning Covid Demand, Covid Enforcement and Infection Prevention Control to learn from each other and provide practical support where appropriate.   1. NEXT STEPS   As detailed above an effective Recovery Programme is required in order to return Gwent Police to a new state of normality, to embrace innovative and new ways of working developed during the pandemic and to position the Force to enable it to effectively respond to similar future challenges. The establishment of a Recovery Board is seen as essential to manage the move to the ‘new normal’ and to meet the requirements of national inspection processes and to fall in line with other Welsh and UK Forces.   1. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS   The Covid pandemic continues to affect the phasing of expenditure in 2021/22 but to a lesser extent than in the previous financial year. Some variances in non-pay expenditure categories are still expected due to the uncertainty of the timing of some expenditure, and as officers and staff continue to work agilely in response to Force and Government Covid guidance. Funding from the UK Government, Welsh government and Local Government partners totalling approximately £1.42m has been matched with specific Covid related expenditure of £1.26m, leaving approximately £164k of Covid related funding available at 30 September 2021. Going forward the Force may be required to procure PPE kit locally rather than through the NHS framework, and elements of the non-ring fenced funding may be required for covid related general revenue and capital expenditure. The capital programme is still affected to varying degrees from Covid restrictions, partly due to global supply chain issues, and has affected the timetable for the handover of the new HQ build and delivery times for key assets such as replacement vehicles.   1. PERSONNEL CONSIDERATIONS   See sections 3.5 and 3.6 above.   1. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS   See section 3.3 above.   1. EQUALITIES & HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS   This report has been considered against the general duty to promote equality, as stipulated under the Joint Strategic Equality Plan and has been assessed not to discriminate against any particular group.  In preparing this report, consideration has been given to requirements of the Articles contained in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998.   1. RISK   As documented in the Force Risk Register.   1. PUBLIC INTEREST    1. In producing this report, has consideration been given to ‘public confidence’? Yes    2. Are the contents of this report, observations and appendices necessary and suitable for the public domain? Yes    3. If you consider this report to be exempt from the public domain, please state the reasons: N/A 2. LEAD CHIEF OFFICER    1. ACC Ian Roberts 3. ANNEXES    1. Covid Internal TTP Aug 2021 v3      * 1. Policing in the Pandemic HMICFRS Report      1. CHIEF OFFICER APPROVAL    1. I confirm this report has been discussed and approved at a formal Chief Officers’ meeting.    2. I confirm this report is suitable for the public domain.   Signature:  Date: 10.11.2021 | | | |  | | | |
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