

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
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5th September 2022

Dear Home Secretary

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the criminal justice system – a progress report

As required by statute, I am writing to you to respond to the Criminal Justice joint inspection entitled, 'The Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the criminal justice system – a progress report'.

Policing and its partners in the criminal justice system have worked extremely hard during the pandemic to maintain the best service possible to the public. As I have previously stated it is a situation that one had never seen before and indeed could never have prepared for.

I was pleased with the way policing across Wales responded to the pandemic; I believe this is as a result of the strong relationships that exist on a national basis as well as locally between neighbouring forces. As I have mentioned before, the leadership by Gwent Police through the Strategic Co-ordination Group which ensured an integrated and effective response by all our public services.

Despite the best efforts of our criminal justice partners, the Chief Constable and I remain concerned about victims of abuse, violence and exploitation whose cases have been delayed due to the pandemic.

I have previously informed you that the Criminal Justice in Wales board had implemented an all Wales Criminal Justice Steering Group to resolve the evolving challenges faced collectively and individually by organisations across Wales. The Group has recently published a report, a copy of which was provided to the Secretary of State for Justice that provides examples of the positive work achieved in Wales during the pandemic to ensure victims had access to justice. This work included the implementation of thirteen new video link sites for victims.

As well as the work undertaken nationally that resulted in there being no increased delays for youth justice trials, and in Wales, Magistrates Courts disposing of more cases than they were *Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg, a phan ddaw i law, byddwn yn ateb yn y Gymraeg – ni fydd hyn yn gohirio ein hymateb. Os hoffech dderbyn gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg o hyn ymlaen, neu os ydych wedi cael eich gwahodd i gyfweiliad neu gyfarfod ac yr hoffech ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg, anfonwch e-bost at: Commissioner@gwent.pnn.police.uk. Darperir gwasanaethau cyfieithu.*

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and where received, we will reply in Welsh - this will not delay our response. If you wish to receive correspondence in Welsh hereafter or if you have been invited to an interview or meeting and you wish to use Welsh, send email to: Commissioner@gwent.pnn.police.uk. Translation services will be provided.

receiving, there are still concerns relating to the backlog of trials in Crown Courts. I have specific concerns relating to delays in rape and sexual offence trials which will only be further impacted by the Bar action.

I want to acknowledge that in Wales we have not experienced the extent of the problems that some other policing areas have which is a result of robust partnership work and the close working relationship between Police, CPS, HMCTS and HMPPS in Wales. However, there remain delays in the length of time it takes to get a case to trial which leads to anxiety and stress for victims and witnesses and may lead to some victims removing their support for prosecution. I include a comment from the Chief Constable below:

“I welcome this joint inspection report from Her Majesty’s Chief Inspectors of Police, CPS, Probation and Prisons regarding the progress made by criminal justice agencies over the course of 2021, as recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic continued. The report highlights the changing demands on policing as a result of the pandemic, such as higher levels of online crime, as well as the additional challenges faced by all forces to achieve the targets set by the government under Operation Uplift. I am proud of the hard work and dedication shown by police officers, staff, and volunteers throughout the pandemic and for policing, I am pleased that the inspectorate concluded that “practice is back to normal”.

I remain concerned by the Crown Court backlogs highlighted within the report. Since the start of the pandemic, my criminal justice leads have held meetings with colleagues in the other Welsh forces and partners in CPS, HM Courts and Tribunal Service, Prisoner Escort and Custody Services, Youth Justice Board and Electronic Monitoring Service to provide updates on working challenges and good practice. I am committed to continue to work closely with criminal justice partners as victims and their families are at the heart of everything we do.”

As mentioned by the Chief Constable, I am glad that there has been recognition that overall during the pandemic policing maintained its service to the public and that generally practice is back to normal.


We must all learn to live with Covid 19, it will remain with us for the foreseeable future. We need to be prepared to deal with the peaks and trough of infections that have become associated with the illness and learn to resource our services to be able to deal with the impact of staff absences. This will continue to pose a challenge, not only in policing, but across the criminal justice sector.

This illness will continue to impact on the already significant workloads of staff, and therefore it is imperative that wellbeing remains a key priority. In Gwent, the Chief Constable recently held a Summer Wellbeing Event with guest speakers covering a range of welfare, financial and stress-related matters. I’m pleased to say it was such a success that the Chief Constable will also be offering a Winter Wellbeing Event

My office also Chairs the multi-agency out of court disposal (O OCD) scrutiny panel which meets quarterly and each time reviews 20 randomly selected cases where out of court disposals were issued to adults and youths. The panel assesses the suitability and appropriateness of the disposal and identifies learning to be fed back to Gwent Police. In general, the vast majority of disposals are considered appropriate, with questions raised about a small number of cases where a court-based disposal or none at all may have been more appropriate. The subjective nature of O OCDs always leads to an interesting debate and highlights the difficult decisions officers have to make in determining what is the most appropriate course of action for both victim and offender.

I am pleased to say that work continues across all criminal justice agencies in Wales to continue to reduce the impact of the pressures being faced as much as possible for the public. I give my commitment to support the Chief Constable and our partner agencies in any way I am able to, in order to ensure the people of Gwent continue to receive the service they expect.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Cuthbert', written in a cursive style.

Jeff Cuthbert B.Sc., MCIPD
Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent