

Analysis & Research

COVID-19- Gwent Police Response

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Purpose

This report is intended to provide a summary of how Gwent Police responded to the Covid19 Pandemic throughout March, April and May 2020.

Resources

The force prepared for COVID by instigating a new, force wide Gold/ Silver/ Bronze command structure prior to 'lockdown', on March 18, 2020. It established a daily Gold meeting to manage the force, chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable (ACC). It also established two daily Silver meetings to ensure continuity of Operational Policing and Business Support functions. Each of these meetings is chaired by a Chief Superintendent or police staff equivalent and is attended by representatives from all operational and business support functions across the force, along with the Staff Associations. Gold and Silver meetings have run 7 days a week to this point.

Business continuity plans were requested from all departments across the Force in early March 2020, to help plan for staff absences and any shortages of supplies and equipment. These are kept up to date and constantly reviewed by Heads of Department. They proved effective in ensuring the force was able to continue providing its full range of services to communities throughout the pandemic.

The plans were supported by the force mobile IT capability which ensured staff were already well equipped with mobile phones and laptop devices. This ensured non-operational staff had the ability to work from home without a loss of capability. Meetings and communications were uninterrupted as the force adopted an online solution provided by Microsoft 'TEAMS' in place of face to face contact. The use of TEAMS was shared with our partners, which ensured multi agency meetings and work, including safeguarding of the vulnerable, was able to continue.

Staff from the Continuous Improvement Department were utilised to quickly and efficiently introduce a Logistics Cell. This cell co-ordinated allocation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), reviewed daily absence, allocated additional laptops to self-isolating staff and arranged COVID 19 testing appointments with the Public Health testing Centres. It began to produce a new, daily performance report for the Gold Meeting. This report contains up-to-date daily data about Crime, ASB, hate incidents, domestic abuse, and other areas of work so the organisation can respond to threat, risk or harm trends. The document keeps staff up to date by summarising the latest updates from national and regional governments and policing bodies. It also contains the results of force horizon scans to ensure it is sighted on potential future developments and able to put appropriate plans in place.

The Force responded to the initial outbreak by providing all available PPE to officers and staff. Due to initial shortages suffered by all agencies across the country, 'COVID Cars' (vehicles crewed by officers who had immediate access to enhanced PPE equipment) were used to deploy to incidents where the presence of the virus was suspected. This was recognised as best practice nationally and some Forces still use this approach. Gwent's approach was subsequently enhanced so that every response vehicle

was equipped with two enhanced PPE kits, thereby, turning every vehicle into a 'COVID Car'. PPE was successfully sourced through both local and national channels to ensure there was sufficient supply within a short period of time.

The force did not experience the anticipated spike in absence as a result of COVID. This was facilitated by robust daily management, clear guidance issued through an internal communications strategy and regular contact with officers who were unwell or experiencing symptoms. A new, central reporting line was established for offices to phone into if they were unwell, which streamlined the process and made absence reporting more efficient and effective.

University accommodation was sourced for officers and staff who were concerned about residing at home during the COVID 19 outbreak, due to living with vulnerable family members. This provision enabled officers and staff to continue to work during the pandemic, whilst providing a level of protection to their family members.

Welfare support for officers has been prioritised by the Occupational Health Unit who have worked closely with the force logistics cell and the Gwent Strategic Co-ordination Group (a multi-agency forum that directs the partnership response to the crisis and which is chaired by the ACC). There has been a focus on arranging the COVID testing of officers and providing clear guidance about self-isolation and shielding. Staff Associations are involved in the process and dial into Gold/ Silver Business Support each day to provide additional support.

To maximise operational capability, officers and staff who are self-isolating but have the ability to work from home are provided with a laptop (if they do not already have access to one) and tasked with organisationally important work. The force implemented a structured process to ensure these officers were both properly supported and effectively tasked. This involved personal telephone contact from a supervisor, which provided opportunity for wellbeing check-ins and a skills and abilities assessment.

An example of the work completed is the use of shielding Custody Detention Officers to complete outstanding tasks in the force record management system. Where officers, such as schools liaison officers, are unable to carry out their roles as a result of COVID, they have been deployed to other areas of work, such as the Force Control Room.

Staff from across the force were tasked using this process, including community support officers, interview transcript clerks, station enquiry officers, business support officers and front-line officers. Examples of the work achieved because of this initiative include:

- A review of custody records
- Improved data quality in our NICHE records management system
- Processing of central ticket office backlogs
- Completion of taped interview transcripts
- Reviews of open investigations.

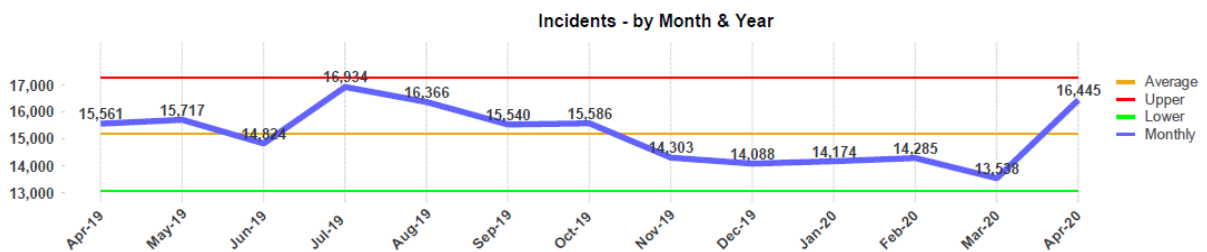
Our First Point of Contact centre (Control Room) has continued to operate normally, after being redesigned and relocated to three separate sites to ensure the safety of staff.

There has been a substantial increase in demand on the Social Media Desk. This provision has helped ensure that call demand remains manageable.

With regards to officer training, the Learning & Development Dept introduced online, 'virtual learning' for the January intake of new student officers. Where classroom-based learning is still required, social distancing measures have been introduced, and classes are split into smaller 'pods' to provide a safer environment. Online 'Skype' interviews have also been arranged for the next set of potential Gwent Police recruits.

Operational Policing

Overall demand upon Gwent Police increased during the COVID period, although the nature of that demand changed. The number of reported incidents increased in April 2020 (as can be seen in the chart below), although the number of reported crimes fell.



In company with the rest of the country, crime in Gwent has fallen through the COVID period. Table 1 (below) shows the difference in reported crime for the 47-day COVID period from the 26th March to 11th May in 2020 compared to the same period in 2018 and 2019.

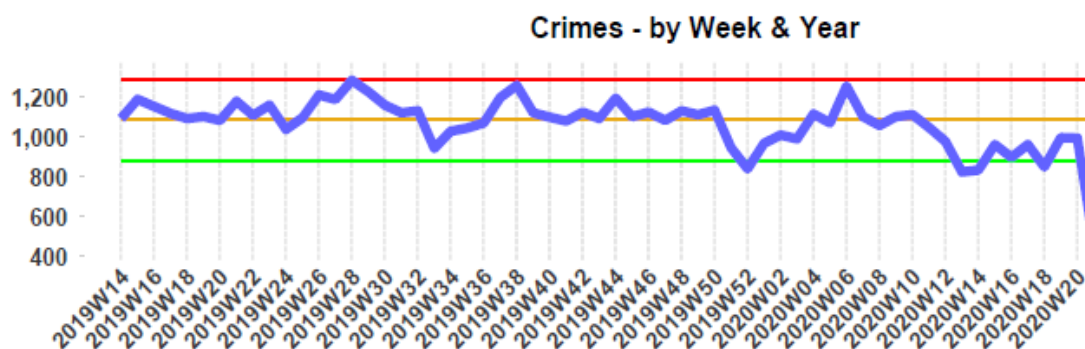
During this period in 2020, there were a total of 6221 crimes recorded. This was a decrease of 19% on the same timeframe in 2019, when 7679 crimes were recorded. It is a 16% reduction on the same period in 2018.

The biggest volume reductions in crime rates were seen in Criminal Damage & Arson, which fell by 549 (39.4%), Shoplifting, which fell by 218 offences (48.9%) and Violence With Injury, which fell by 196 (26.2%). The largest increases are in drugs and weapons offences, which is likely to be driven by increased police proactivity during the period.

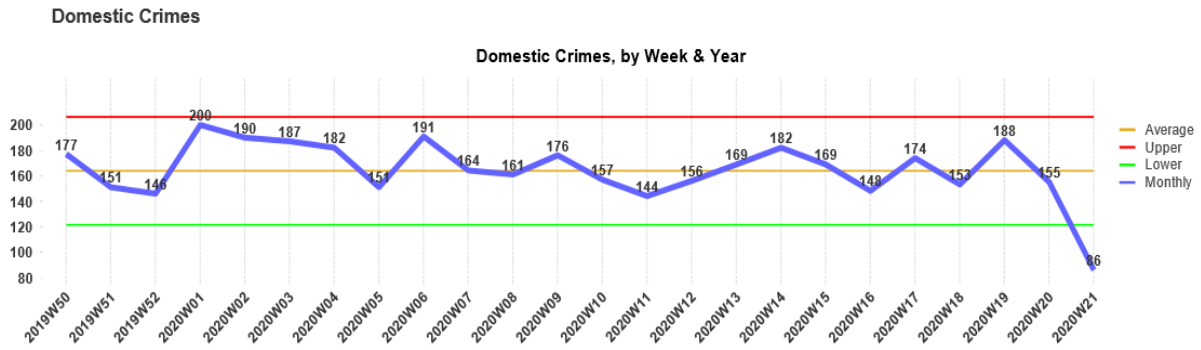
| Force Wide | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Crime Type | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | % Change 19 to 20 |
| All Other Theft | 625 | 614 | 337 | -45.1% |
| Bicycle Theft | 57 | 64 | 32 | -50.0% |
| Burglary Dwelling | 354 | 331 | 285 | -13.9% |
| Burglary Non-Dwelling | 162 | 151 | 114 | -24.5% |
| Criminal Damage & Arson | 1096 | 1394 | 845 | -39.4% |
| Drug Offences | 157 | 195 | 238 | 22.1% |
| Miscellaneous Crimes | 208 | 195 | 217 | 11.3% |
| Non-Notifiable Offences | 10 | 11 | 8 | -27.3% |
| Other Sexual Offences | 107 | 120 | 110 | -8.3% |
| Possession of Weapons | 24 | 27 | 46 | 70.4% |
| Public Order Offences | 1027 | 1057 | 987 | -6.6% |
| Rape | 54 | 64 | 46 | -28.1% |
| Robbery | 31 | 37 | 26 | -29.7% |
| Shoplifting | 535 | 446 | 228 | -48.9% |
| Theft From Person | 48 | 39 | 24 | -38.5% |
| Vehicle Crime | 494 | 407 | 345 | -15.2% |
| Violence With Injury | 736 | 749 | 553 | -26.2% |
| Violence Without Injury | 1683 | 1778 | 1780 | 0.1% |
| Total | 7408 | 7679 | 6221 | -19.0% |

Table 1 – All Crime Force Wide

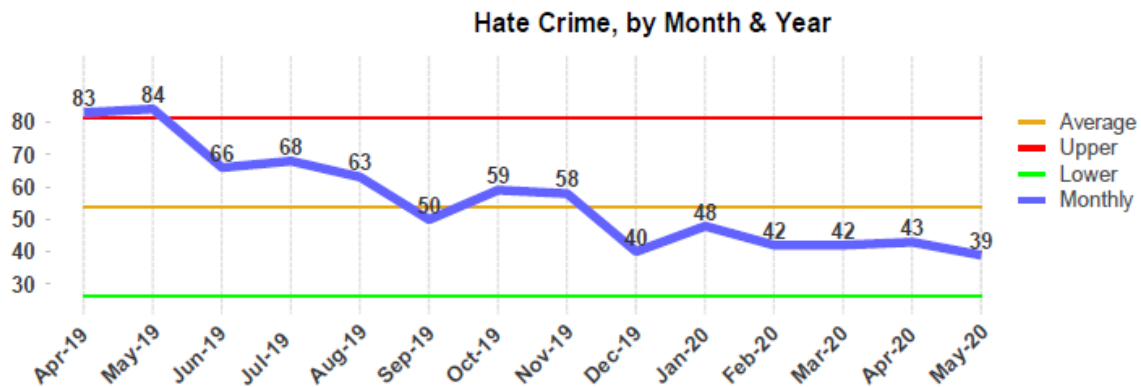
The weekly fall in crime can also be illustrated in the below chart, which shows the number of reported crimes against weeks of the year. Lockdown began in week 13 of 2020.



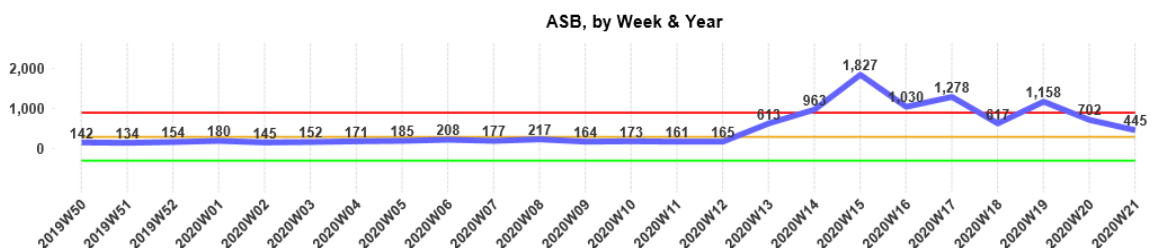
The number of domestic related crimes remained relatively stable, despite concerns that lockdown would lead to a fall as victims may lose the opportunities to report. This is illustrated in the below chart, which shows the number of reported domestic crimes against the week of the year. Lockdown began in week 13 of 2020.



The numbers of hate crimes has remained low through the COVID period, as illustrated in the below chart which shows the number of reported hate crimes against time. To encourage reporting, monitor community tensions and support BAME communities the force has established a Community Tension Forum to engage with community representatives to identify and address potential COVID related tensions. The Forum has been well received and representation is high. There is discussion about the forum continuing on a long term basis, supported by the Independent Advisory Group. The force has also completed an Equality Impact Assessment in relation to the crisis to ensure that our COVID response does not discriminate against any disadvantaged or vulnerable people.



Anti- social behaviour has risen during the COVID period, although it is difficult to obtain an accurate reflection of ASB incidents due to the huge rise in reports linked to Covid-19 and the lockdown (such as reports of groups of people outside). This is illustrated in the below chart, which shows the number of reported incidents of ASB against the week of the year. Lockdown began in week 13 of 2020.



The table below breaks down incidents by 'Normal ASB' (pre-COVID types of ASB) and COVID related ASB for the aforementioned 47-day period (26th March to 11th May), and shows the difference between the periods of 2018, 2019 and 2020.

| ASB Force Wide | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Crime Type | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | % Change 19 to 20 |
| Normal ASB | 1072 | 1284 | 767 | -40.3% |
| Covid Related ASB | 0 | 0 | 6611 | N/A |
| Total | 1072 | 1284 | 7378 | 474.6% |

The force continued to make arrests during the COVID period, and the numbers of people arrested were higher for the 47 day COVID period in 2020 (26th March to 11th May) than for the same period in the previous year (1257 arrests in 2020, compared to 1090 in 2019).

To manage this demand, both Gwent Custody units introduced hand washing facilities and glass screens in the interview rooms to increase hygiene and provide extra protection against COVID 19 for detainees, solicitors and officers. The Gwent Law Society were appreciative and grateful for the force approach.

COVID pressures in other areas of the Criminal Justice system have contributed to the force being restricted in the number of people it can charge with offences from the custody unit. However, there has been a daily focus on improving criminal justice outcomes, and this has resulted in a steady improvement in the force Criminal Justice Outcome rate to 8.4%.

The use of new COVID legislation is tracked and reviewed through the Force's Silver Meetings to ensure the Forces approach is consistent. The Joint Legal Services team are present in the Daily Gold meeting and have been integral to the forces ability to interpret and disseminate the legislation swiftly. In common with national guidance, the Force strategy has been to Engage, Explain and Encourage, with Enforcement being the last option. A COVID 19 Fixed Penalty Notice application was developed quickly and made available to officers on their mobile devices. 91 FPN's have been issued to date.

Business Support

The introduction of a Silver Business Support function allowed the force to focus on and continue to deliver key functions such as Fleet, Payroll, IT functionality, Procurement, HR and Continuous Improvement during the disruption caused by Covid19. As a result of agile working capabilities, performance has not been noticeably affected by the pandemic. For example, the Finance Department was able to work toward closing the

annual accounts in the usual manner and with the exception of face to face support, victim support services have continued through agile working of Connect Gwent staff.

Fleet services had to identify alternative suppliers for parts and supplies at short notice due to business closures and lack of available products. This was managed efficiently and effectively with no disruption to front line services.

An Electronic time sheets project was prioritised as a result of COVID and introduced ahead of the planned implementation date. Police Staff members working from home are now able to complete and submit their time sheets online, making efficiency savings at all stages.

A waste management system was introduced to deal with the safe disposal of used PPE. This was undertaken and implemented by the Estates Department and saved an estimated £7000 for the Force when compared to using the services of an external supplier.

The Corporate Communications team has worked hard to make sure that our communities have been clear about the role of Gwent Police in policing the pandemic. There has been a developing conversation as the force gains clarity around the regulations and amendments that have been introduced and differences between regions have emerged. Our approach has been to:

- recognise the efforts of the many who are diligently following the restrictions
- reassure them that we are supporting them by tackling the behaviour of the few who are not following the guidance
- send a clear message to those breaching the guidelines that we will take action if they do not comply.
- instil confidence that we continue to police as normal to tackle non-Covid related issues.

This has been achieved through working with national, regional and local broadcast and print media, and a greatly improved use of social media.

In addition the team has both initiated and supported campaigns to tackle issues that have been key during the pandemic including domestic abuse (Read between the lines), mental health, appropriate use of 999/101 (Think before you dial), cyber-crime and stalking. We have worked on engagement activities such as a colouring pack for young children and next weekend we run our virtual open day. We have also worked closely with our partners to ensure strong support for our Gwent-wide messaging.

Internally, the team have kept staff and officers up to date by instigating daily updates channelled to a dedicated intranet page. They also developed a direct email for officers to ensure that they can target operational, wellbeing and mental health messaging directly to them in a timely way. Messages of appreciation from the public have been collated and passed to officers through the force intranet.

The force was forced to cancel its annual awards ceremony in March, and is seeking to deliver a virtual awards ceremony as part of our Reward and Recognition approach to ensure that the good work carried out before the health crisis is not forgotten.

The Business Support Silver group is now tasked with managing the recovery of the force. Each department has been tasked with developing plans that will lead to:

- a resumption of business as usual
- anticipating and planning for a new normal
- delivering improved and transformed operating processes and procedures building on lessons learnt and capturing and embedding good practice.
- an appreciation of the cost of COVID to the force.

For OPCC use only

Office of the Chief Constable

I confirm that **COVID Performance report** has been discussed and approved at a formal Chief Officers' meeting.

It is now forwarded to the OPCC for **approval / information / monitoring purposes.**



Signature:

Date: 28/05/2020

Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent

I confirm that I have considered whether or not I have any personal or prejudicial interest in this matter and take the proposed decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct.

The above request has my approval.

Signature:

Date: