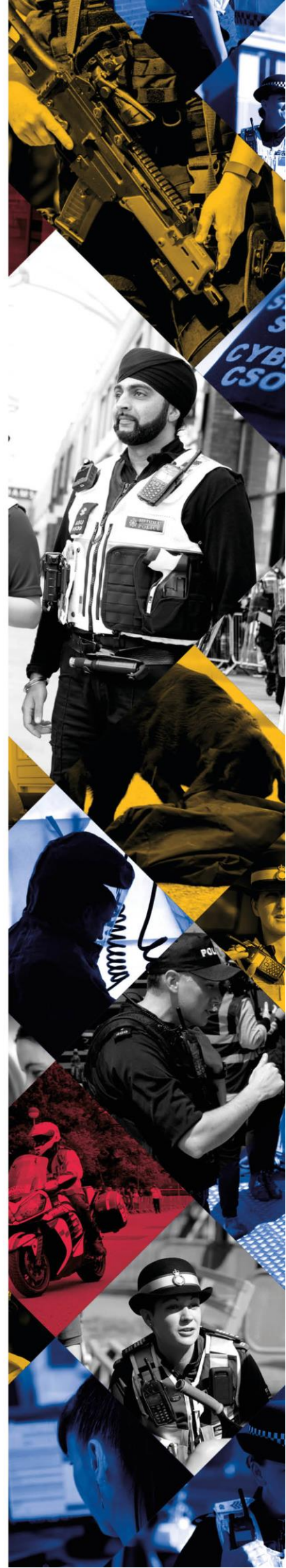




COVID19 UPDATE REPORT

Report to Strategy and
Performance Board

1st September 2021



1. PURPOSE AND RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information for monitoring purposes and OPCC reporting.
- 1.2 There are no recommendations made requiring a decision.

2. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

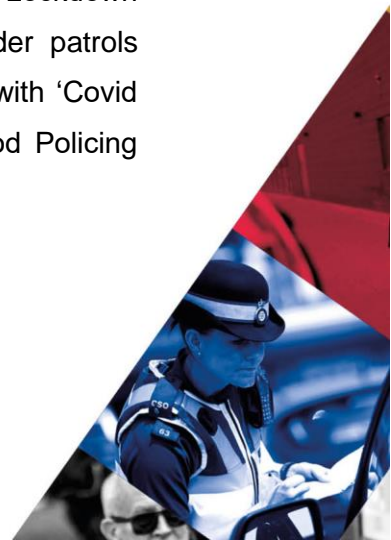
- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the OPCC with an update as to Force planning and activity in the recovery phase of COVID-19.

3. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Resourcing

The Gwent Police Response to Covid is currently led by Chief Superintendent Mark Hobrough, who is the Gold Commander. From April 2020 to April 2021 The Force held daily Covid Gold Meetings. He currently chairs 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. He 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 absences 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.

3.2 Covid Demand

Gwent Police has had 18,321 calls for service related to Covid issues since March 2020. At its peak in April 2020 the Force was receiving 1,200 Covid calls per week, on top of 'regular' demand. This obviously impacted upon the Force's capacity to respond to other incidents, but due to the Covid regulations put in place at the time there was a significant reduction nationally in Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime during 2020/21. All notifiable offences across the UK reduced by 29% to year end 2021, compared to the previous year, and this is reflected locally. Covid linked incidents have gradually reduced during 2021 as regulations have relaxed. We received 1,387 such calls during January this year and only 163 in June.

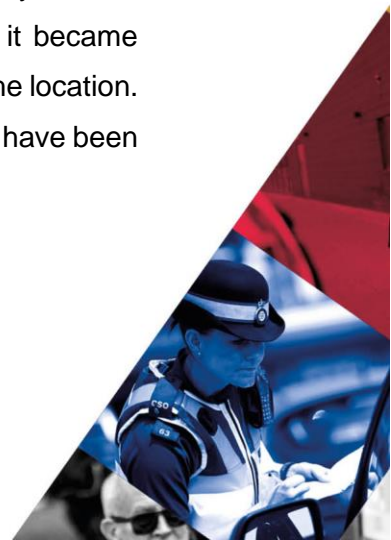
3.3 Covid Enforcement



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.

3.4 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. Recent relaxation of, and frequent changes to, regulations combined with 'Covid fatigue' has led to an element of complacency with regard to the wearing of masks and social distancing within the workplace. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is no different to the experiences in other Regional and UK forces. Communication campaigns have been instigated to address this with some success.

The Health & Safety Team also continue to work closely with the Covid Hub to ensure arrangements are suitably risk assessed and respond to any identified workplace transmission of the virus. They provide immediate response to any such incidents and advise on additional mitigation required or changes to workplace practices that should be undertaken. As the Force is required to report any such workplace transmission to the Health & Safety Executive, the Team also lead on this for the Force and work closely with the Departmental Head to address any issues raised.

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 (GPHQ) and in providing recommendations in relation to forthcoming changes to pandemic Alert levels. In this context they liaise closely with the Estates



Department who will be undertaking 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.

3.5 **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.

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) and the numbers of staff undertaking testing each week has remained disappointingly low despite internal communications campaigns and encouragement from senior management. This is not an unusual position and is reflected in police forces across the UK. There have been a number of 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.

Since January 2021 Gwent Police has worked closely with South Wales Police on a pilot for the Daily Contact Testing (DCT) of staff as an alternative to self-isolation in order to keep staff in work and support critical functions of the Force. However, full role out of this capability has been delayed on a number of occasions at Welsh Government and Public Health Wales levels. DCT involves the directly supervised testing of those staff identified by contact tracing processes to be defined as 'close contacts' of an infected person over seven consecutive days via an Asymptomatic Testing Site (ATS). The aim of this testing process is to protect our staff from infection and to keep staff in work who would otherwise need to self-isolate. Both the Police Federation and Unison are very supportive of the introduction of these testing processes. As soon as ministerial sign-off is received Gwent Police will go live with this process.

Across Wales there has been increasing concern over the impact of compulsory Self-Isolation of Police staff who are either contacted by the Local Authority Test Trace & Protect Hubs (TTP Hubs) and informed that they are a close-contact of an infected person or, are 'pinged' on the NHS Covid Mobile Application as a close contact. As infection rates rise and restrictions end this could have a significant impact on the ability of the Force to provide front-line services. Chief Officers from the four Welsh Forces have



met with Welsh Government representatives to impress upon them the need for Policing services to be protected and enabled to keep their staff in work. Both the DCT Process and Isolation Exemptions were identified as potential solutions. Welsh Government is currently considering this issue.

Some 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.

3.6 **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. The Wellbeing Lead has commenced a programme of support to both LPA's and once the Wellbeing Specialist commences work this will be rolled out to other areas within the Force to discuss wellbeing in general, to provide updates on initiatives and to undertake any additional support where needed.

3.7 **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.

3.8 **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.

Any local lessons learned are registered within Continuous Improvement and mitigating processes put in place. Standard Operating Procedures have been developed and are embedded to cover specific areas of policing such as the



response to 'Covid Confirmed' calls for service, Test, Trace Protect (TTP) procedures for our own staff and the correct use of Personal Protective Equipment.

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.

3.9 **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 13.7: 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.

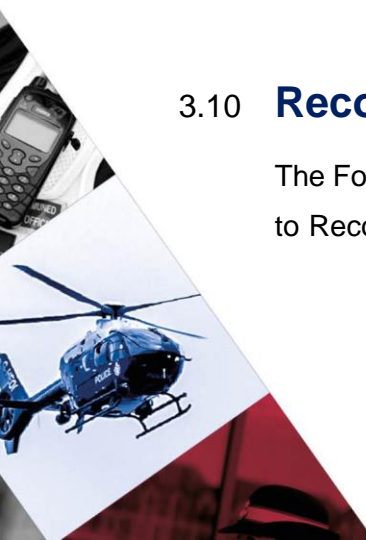
4. Custody Records: Forces must immediately make sure that they clearly and consistently record on custody records information about how/when/if detainees are informed of the temporary changes to how they can exercise their rights to legal advice and representation. The record must make clear how any 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.

3.10 **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 Chief Superintendent Mark Hobrough. 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 seeing the relaxation of Covid Regulations towards an Alert Level Zero in Wales, to fall 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. The removal of social distancing restrictions alongside increasing infection rates provides the prospect of the UK acting as an incubator for new variants, so the Recovery team will continue to work closely with Local Authorities and the Health Board to monitor and respond where appropriate.



4. 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 Chief Superintendent Mark Hobrough 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.

5. 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.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Covid19 lockdown 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 £1.4m has been matched with specific Covid related expenditure of £1.2m, leaving approximately £216k of Covid related funding available at 30 June 2021. Going forward the Force may be required to procure PPE kit locally rather than through the NHS framework, although in the short to medium term Operation Talla will continue to manage expenditure in this area. The capital programme is still affected to varying degrees from Covid restrictions, partly due to global supply chain issues, although the new HQ build continues and is expected to be handed over in October 2021.

7. PERSONNEL CONSIDERATIONS

See sections 3.5 and 3.6 above.

8. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

See section 3.3 above.

9. 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.

10. RISK

As documented in the Force Risk Register.

11. PUBLIC INTEREST

- 11.1 In producing this report, has consideration been given to 'public confidence'? **Yes**
- 11.2 Are the contents of this report, observations and appendices necessary and suitable for the public domain? **Yes**
- 11.3 If you consider this report to be exempt from the public domain, please state the reasons: **N/A**

12. LEAD CHIEF OFFICER

- 12.1 ACC Ian Roberts

13. ANNEXES

- 13.1 COVID 19 Incidents & Enforcement March 2020 – July 2021



Covid19 Incidents
and Enforcement M:

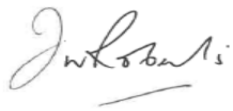
- 13.2 Policing in the Pandemic HMICFRS Report



Policing the
Pandemic HMICFRS

14. CHIEF OFFICER APPROVAL

- 14.1 I confirm this report has been discussed and approved at a formal Chief Officers' meeting.
- 14.2 I confirm this report is suitable for the public domain.



Signature:

Date: 20.08.2021

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:

