

# Police, Fire & Crime Panel Report

January 2021



## Coronavirus Response

This report summarises for the Panel the ways in which the Commissioner continues to respond to the Coronavirus (Covid19) crisis following the full update report provided in August 2020. The Commissioner continues to ensure that both North Yorkshire Police and North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service are responding appropriately and engaging nationally on key issues, making sure the voice and needs of North Yorkshire are heard and understood.

### Victims and domestic abuse

The Commissioner and her team continue to work hard to understand and scrutinise the statistical data which comes from weekly trends, caseload and reported data including domestic abuse crimes, victim entitlement ratings and domestic abuse support service referrals, Helpline Calls and Live Chats, and sexual offences and referrals into ISVA services and adult and child sexual assault referral centres. This helps drive the work the Commissioner and her team deliver to ensure services are meeting the needs of those requiring the support during this crisis and helps provide real-world examples to central Government, the Victims Commissioner and the Ministry of Justice.

Trends similar to the first lockdown were seen in November, with a significant decrease in reported crimes whilst referrals and Helpline calls and Live Chats rose although not with the same dramatic increase that was seen immediately following the first National Lockdown in March. It is believed that the extensive joint communications activities since then had ensured greater awareness of support services available during the ongoing pandemic. Working with the police, local authorities and support services, the Commissioner ensured clear and widespread communications went out across North Yorkshire highlighting the support our local provider IDAS could give and that they were still open and ready to help.

The Commissioner also continued to lobby with government to ensure further funding to enhance support was provided. Following on from the £345,000 the Commissioner previously won, in November, she was successful with a further bid securing an additional £76,500 to enable five of these local providers to continue to provide increased support services to victims and survivors in North Yorkshire until March 2021.

In October, the Commissioner and her team were successful in their application to the new Home Office Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Interventions Fund and have been awarded £445,892 until March 2021 to develop a whole system approach with partners. This will improve the overall accessibility of immediate advice to and triage of perpetrators to access the right support at an earlier stage to address their abusive behaviour, alongside any health and social care needs which may otherwise be a barrier to effective behaviour change. The Commissioner has committed a further £446,245 from April 2021 onwards to fully embed this approach throughout North Yorkshire and the City of York. This will include multi-agency training packages ensuring that local organisations have appropriate tools at their disposal beyond the initial 12-month delivery period to tackle abusive behaviours around perpetrators, stalking and multi-agency safeguarding.

## Policing response

The Commissioner wholeheartedly supports the sustained response that North Yorkshire Police has provided throughout the crisis. She has closely monitored both the operational and the internal business continuity measures NYP have put in place to ensure that the needs of the community are being met. She continues to closely engage with Government to ensure the correct resources are in place and that there is a co-ordinated response to key concerns as they arise. She has communicated regularly with the public, particularly at key moments as rules or the situation changes, to make sure that awareness of the police response is high, and to try and prevent visitors from travelling to North Yorkshire, which has been of concern to many residents.

NYP's Superintendent, Mike Walker, has maintained his role as Gold Commander for the response with the support of Chief Inspector Charlotte Bloxham who coordinates work at a tactical level. Superintendent Walker chairs the Local Resilience Forum's Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) and Chief Inspector Bloxham chairs the Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) to continue the close partnership response which includes the Military Assistance to Civil Communities (MACC) group.

The Commissioner is very pleased with the protection North Yorkshire Police have offered to our communities which has had to adapt to meet the varying tier restrictions across the policing area and the more recent lockdown measures. The 4E approach of 'Engage, Explain, Encourage and Enforce' has been incorporated into the neighbourhood policing approach to maintain a consistent and familiar presence and method. Significant communications have been undertaken to inform and educate communities and keep them engaged.

Throughout the crisis the Commissioner has been adamant that NYP should continue to run business as usual as far as possible alongside the additional requirements, and she is pleased that this has largely been managed. Operation Talla (the national operation in response to Covid19) has been run effectively locally at Gold, Silver and Bronze levels to manage the policing operation and the internal business continuity arrangements necessary to keep the service running. The Commissioner's Office continue to attend meetings at each level.

Sickness rates have continued to be low, with new ways of working speedily adopted to enable those needing to shield or who are quarantining but not ill to continue working. Previous technological investments have allowed staff to continue working from home, negating the need for them to attend an office environment despite being key workers. The use of interactive technology facilitates the continuation of business in a safe and smooth manner. Those officers requiring to shield or quarantine have continued to be placed on a 'response desk', picking up scheduled appointments where appropriate and engaging with callers where interaction with an officer is required to help manage the risk both to public and officers by minimising the need to conduct visits. Video software continues to be maximised to engage with the public and NYP are building on their learning to improve efficiency in the future.

In September NYP managed to re-start a number of functions that had been put on hold, for example, Officer Safety Training which is now delivered in a different way to ensure officers gain the training required but remain Covid19 safe.

The autumn period proved challenging with the overall national increase in Covid19 cases and some of the yearly events such as Remembrance Sunday, Halloween and Bonfire Night to contend with in a very different way than previous years but close working with LRF partners and communities meant that these events passed without significant incidents. NYP have also been

heavily involved in the planning around the EU Exit and the worst-case scenarios for mutual aid and national requirements.

The Commissioner continues to focus on the impact this crisis has on rural and BAME communities as was highlighted in the previous Panel report, in particular from continued visitor access, and she works closely with the Chief Constable to make sure this is properly managed. The second lockdown saw an increase in NYP's Covid19 compliance patrol plans across all areas of North Yorkshire, which was based on feedback from rural communities who were concerned about people travelling into North Yorkshire from other parts of the country. Robust management of resources within policing command areas and joined up working with partner agencies has maintained an effective and responsive approach to the pandemic during a period of uncertainty and NYP continue with this approach into the New Year and the challenges now of a third lockdown and the vaccine roll out.

North Yorkshire Police were allocated £291,986.81 in October from the Home Office surge funding for increased Covid19 enforcement which has been used to increase Covid19 patrols. The Commissioner receives and monitors the weekly National Police Coordination Centre (NPOCC) returns from NYP which includes updates on all activity relating to Community Engagement, Unlicensed Music Events, Protests, Multi-Agency Working, Specific Operations and Media and Communications.

As NYP enters the third national lockdown, the Commissioner remains confident that NYP is able to change and adapt at very short notice with a healthy level of resource across all areas of the business whilst also preparing for what is expected to be a very busy "post-Covid" environment when life becomes more normal. NYP anticipate a very busy 2021 and are now planning its response to the increased demands this may potentially bring and the Commissioner will continue to monitor the plans in place.

## Fire and Rescue response

The Commissioner is very pleased with the way in which the Fire and Rescue Service continue to respond to the crisis, taking leading roles within the LRF, tackling new areas of responsibility, and pushing their ability to improve the capacity of partners to support and help the most vulnerable.

Since August 2020, the Service continues to adapt to the frequent government changes to lockdown rules, as this does affect the routine ability to perform normal prevention and protection activities. The ability to respond to emergency incidents remains the priority. Staff sickness since August has been low but over the past month there has been a rapid increase in staff testing positive for Covid19, in alignment with increased infection rates across North Yorkshire. The Service is seeking to minimise staff movements between stations to prevent infection transmissions and the subsequent need for self-isolation.

NYFRS has completed a Covid Secure Risk Assessment and the Covid Secure Statement was signed by the Commissioner on 4 January, a legal requirement for all employers with more than fifty staff. Risk assessments, procedures and measures are in place and kept under regular review.

The potential demand for fire and rescue services to support the vaccine roll out and Lateral Flow testing has not come to North Yorkshire and it is unclear if it will. The Service have made the offer to the LRF to be involved, but as yet has not been asked. If and when the Service is asked to assist, it will assess the requirement and look at how best they can support.

Spend against the Covid19 grant remains healthy. The Service will be making some adjustments in the new year based upon the Harrogate Nightingale Hospital being placed back into suspended animation (5 days' notice to stand up with NYFRS ambulance drivers ready and trained). The Service would need to undertake an impact assessment on budget should it be required to help with vaccinations, but it's hard to predict what that may look like at the moment.

During Autumn 2020, the HMICFRS undertook an inspection of all fire and rescue services on their response to Covid19. The inspection report for NYFRS is due to be published mid-January 2021 which can be circulated to Panel members in due course.

## Criminal Justice

The Commissioner continues to play a key role in leading the Local Criminal Justice Partnership's (LCJP) response to the crisis. Prior to the recent resurgence in cases, the fortnightly emergency meetings were reverted to business as usual quarterly meetings, with additional meetings focused on efforts to reduce the court backlogs that were exacerbated by the closure of the courts during the first lockdown in 2020. Analysis of both local and national data provided by NYP, HMCTS and CPS continues to be used to estimate the extent of the backlog and predicted timescales to resolve it to at least pre-Covid levels. Local and national efforts have been successful in reducing the backlog and at the last meeting it was reported that there are more cases being dealt with in the Magistrates Courts than are entering the system, and all cases have now been listed for first hearing when they were previously sitting in holding courts. There are still challenges in the Crown Court, particularly around multi-hander trials which cannot be safely heard in York Crown Court, therefore the Commissioner has requested that victims involved in these trials who have given permission should be proactively contacted to offer support.

At the onset of the crisis the Commissioner was particularly concerned about the impact that the backlog would have on victims and witnesses and, as such, a task and finish group was set up to coordinate a response to the needs of victims and witnesses due to attend court. This group has since disbanded, with work continued through the Victims and Witnesses LCJP sub-group. This group has particularly focused on remote options for witnesses to give evidence and balancing the need to maximise the number of cases that can be heard in court whilst maintaining safe waiting areas for witnesses and those who support them. The Witness Care Unit within NYP is under a lot of pressure with an increased number of witnesses waiting for their case to be heard but are working hard to ensure that witnesses remain engaged and have had very few retractions thus far.

Prior to Covid19, the Commissioner was exploring the possibility of introducing mobile live links for vulnerable victims and witnesses to give evidence in court. Following partnership discussions, it was agreed that the initial priority should be to focus on the fixed link at Northallerton that was retained following the closure of Northallerton Magistrates Court. This link has not been used since the court closed, therefore a working group has been set up to explore this further.

The Commissioner has assigned precept funding to introduce greater diversion options in North Yorkshire, which is expected to both reduce crime and reoffending and reduce demand on the courts. This service is currently out to tender and will go live in spring 2021.

## Public and political engagement

Following on from the overview of communications provided to the Panel in the August report, the Commissioner has continued to engage with media locally and regionally to ensure the coronavirus restrictions and her view, reinforcing the rules nationally and NYP's approach, are

communicated both to residents and businesses across York and North Yorkshire and those further afield across the region who may be considering coming to York and North Yorkshire. This has been particularly important at a time when one of the challenges NYP has faced is from those coming to the area from areas in lower tiers or those with guidelines that advise against travel. This has included appearances on BBC Look North, BBC Radio York and in the Yorkshire Post and Northern Echo plus continued ongoing engagement with local papers across the county. She has also spoken directly about the challenges faced by rural communities, including on BBC Farming Today on Radio 4. These messages and information related to the guidance is included in a dedicated section on the Commissioner's website.

Ahead of the funding announcement in October for policing and local authorities (LA) response to the crisis, the Commissioner met each LA Chief Executive to discuss local needs and explore any additional support requirements. Work continues with those LA's who expressed an interest in support funding from the Commissioner to finalise details and put the measures in place, which include Covid Ambassador and Marshalling roles and enhanced local communications where footfall is more prevalent. A Decision Notice will be published in due course detailing the funding to be distributed to LA's from the Commissioner's Community Fund.

The Commissioners Customer Service Team, who provide first line response to police complaints, have continued to provide extensive reassurance to correspondents regarding the police response to Covid19. As part of the Commissioners engagement with the public, MPs and Councillors, the team monitor and report trends and hotspots locations which assist the police in identifying areas requiring additional attention.

From January, the Commissioner will commence virtual surgeries inviting members of the public to engage with her on personal and local issues via video call. This provides an additional platform for the public to engage with the Commissioner during the crisis in a safe manner and will resume to physical surgeries as and when it is safe to do so.

The Commissioner continued to chair the Covid19 Live Public Updates until the end of July, which brought together North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue and the Chair of the North Yorkshire and York Local Resilience Forum. As the crisis moved to a Public Health led response, it was determined that PH would take this responsibility. The Commissioner now attends both the Outbreak Management Boards for North Yorkshire and the City of York, as well as regular calls with council leaders and local MPs in the City and County.

The Commissioner's livestreamed Public Accountability Meetings continue to focus on providing regular Covid updates from both North Yorkshire Police and North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Commissioner continues to engage with local leaders and Government to ensure that the needs of North Yorkshire communities have been met, and to raise and deal with national issues, throughout the crisis. Her involvement includes regular Policing Minister and Secretary of State for Justice meetings, MPs and Council Leaders update meetings, regular calls with the Victims Minister and Victims Commissioner and, update meetings with officials from the Ministry of Justice and Home Office, but also with MHCLG and DEFRA.