Policing the pandemic

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About Crest Advisory

We are crime and justice specialists - equal parts research, strategy and communication. From police forces to public inquiries, from tech companies to devolved authorities, we believe all these organisations (and more) have their own part to play in building a safer, more secure society. As the UK's only consultancy with this focus, we are as much of a blend as the crime and justice sector itself.

About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is the only independent think tank focused exclusively on improving policing and developing knowledge and understanding of policing and crime reduction. Its mission is to generate evidence and develop ideas which deliver better policing and a safer society. It does this by producing trusted, impartial research and by working with the police and their partners to create change.

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Executive Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented the police with unprecedented challenges: enforcing previously unthinkable restrictions on the public; protecting its own officers and staff from a potentially deadly virus; and continuing to meet regular demands even as other public services drastically scaled back their own delivery. There were concerns that the legitimacy, health and effectiveness of policing would suffer significantly as a result of the public health role the service was required to perform. At the same time, there was a recognition that policing would have to adapt in order to give itself the opportunity to overcome these challenges and potentially learn from the experience of doing so.

This report, co-authored and jointly published by the Police Foundation and Crest Advisory, sets out how UK policing responded to these challenges, principally during the first 12 months of the pandemic from March 2020 to April 2021.

Overall, the report finds that the pandemic illuminated both the strengths and weaknesses of the current policing model.

On the positive side, the police responded well to the operational challenge, managing to keep core services running at a time when other public services often struggled. Despite coming under considerable pressure, the consent-based approach, the cornerstone of British policing, held firm. Indeed, the police's determined efforts to explain and communicate their approach, at a time when public consent was likely to be tested, appears to have bolstered public confidence.

Less positively, the pandemic has reinforced the limits of the existing 43-force structure. While national policing organisations generally performed an important role in coordinating the overall response, the need for a strong strategic centre has never been more apparent. More broadly, the pandemic has accelerated shifts in demand (as well as ways of working) that will require different policing skills and capabilities. There is, as yet, little evidence that the 20,000 officer uplift is geared up to respond to that challenge.

Key findings

Public consent and legitimacy in a pandemic

- Support for the police approach to enforcing the Covid-19 regulations has held up, albeit becoming more qualified over time. The public has tended to sympathise with the police believing they have been put in a difficult position due to the constant changes in the law and have insufficient resources to enforce public health restrictions while tackling other forms of crime and disorder.

- However, there is worrying evidence from London, in particular, that levels of trust and confidence in the Metropolitan Police have declined in the last twelve months. We can only speculate as to the causes of this but policing in London has been at the centre of a number of controversies in recent months, including the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer, the policing of protest and an increased focus on the impact of policing on Black communities.
- There is evidence that explaining its '4 Es' approach (engage, explain, encourage and enforce) helped police to maintain (and even strengthen) goodwill from the public. There is potential to use this model of managing expectations through better explanation of how officers will use particular powers in other contentious areas of policing e.g. stop and search and counter terrorism.

Police demand during the pandemic

- While overall recorded crime fell sharply in the earliest stages of the first lockdown it returned to pre-pandemic levels after 12 weeks. There is little evidence that the police got more time to proactively investigate more serious offences as a result because increases in non-crime demand, often associated with Covid-19, off-set reductions in crime.
- Overall, it appears that the pandemic has accelerated pre-existing trends of crime moving online and becoming more complex, higher harm and harder to solve e.g. shoplifting declined sharply while stalking increased significantly.
- This has significant implications for the service at a time it is recruiting an unprecedented number of new officers through the uplift programme to deliver an additional 20,000 officers in total by March 2023. The focus of this programme has been on capacity, but there is an urgent need to focus now on capability.

The effectiveness of the police's response

- Policing demonstrated considerable resilience by continuing to provide core services and stepping into gaps left by other agencies during lockdown.
- Central coordination of the police operation around the pandemic was essential and proved effective in relation to the sourcing and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) for officers and staff, to working with government, issuing guidance and collating and analysing data.
- Frontline officers credited the 4Es approach with helping them to maintain relationships with communities and preserving the model of policing by consent.
- There were limited productivity gains through the use of technology to enable more agile working which could provide the basis for greater innovation in the future.
- Overall, the pandemic illuminated the limits of the 43-force model, albeit a stronger strategic centre delivered in terms of data analysis, procurement and communication.

The UK experience in international context

- Police in England and Wales issued significantly fewer fines per person than forces in southern Europe. In Spain, police issued one million fines during the first lockdown

period peaking at a rate of 133 per 10,000 people compared to 2 fines per 10,000 people in England and Wales. In France, the figure was 136 fines per 10,000 people and in Italy it was 51 fines per 10,000 people.
- In contrast, police in other northern European countries were closer to forces in England and Wales with, for example, the Dutch authorities issuing 7 per 10,000 people.
- This most likely reflects the UK's model of policing by consent as much as differences in Covid-19 restrictions between countries.
- Disproportionate enforcement on particular socio-economic or ethnic groups was a feature of pandemic policing in all European countries, including the UK where young black males were twice as likely to be fined as young white males.

Key recommendations

The report identifies five key lessons which can be taken from how the Covid-19 pandemic has been policed and makes a series of recommendations based upon them.

1. Crime prevention

Changes in the physical, social and economic environment can have a major impact on crime levels. Restricting people's freedom to move and gather reduced the opportunity to commit certain offences. Of course, no one wants Covid-style restrictions on liberty to control crime on an on-going basis. However, to a degree, the pandemic represented a real-world test of the theory that crime is the product of motivated offenders coming into contact with opportunities in their local environment. There is still too little public policy focus on what we can do to design out crime.

Recommendation 1: The Home Office should commission research exploring the crime prevention lessons to be learned from the experience of the pandemic. They should use this analysis as a launch pad for a more systemic cross-government approach to crime prevention.

2. Managing demand and workforce reform

The pandemic accelerated pre-existing changes in the pattern of police demand, with a rise in the proportion of crimes taking place in private spaces or online, often involving complex social needs. At the same time, it also led to major shifts in ways of working, in line with other parts of the economy, with many back office staff moving to remote working. The current focus on increasing capacity via the uplift programme, while welcome, does not address these capability and workforce reform challenges.

Recommendation 2: The College of Policing should take on a workforce planning function on behalf of the police service. It should assess what the future workforce needs are likely to be and should require forces to develop recruitment and core training plans to meet identified gaps such as in relation to financial and online crime.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) should under its annual PEEL assessment process determine how well a force's recruitment and training plan addresses anticipated future demand set out in its Force Management Statement.

Recommendation 3: The College of Policing should develop an assessment of where police forces ought to focus their resources if they want to reduce the most harm, subject to available resources. Police forces should be required to justify their resourcing decisions with reference to this framework and their locally-produced force management statement.

Recommendation 4: Police and crime commissioners ought to involve the public in a conversation about the prioritisation of finite resources. They should stimulate this conversation by producing an annual public-facing report which shows the demand, their activities and available resources during that period. The conversation should be supported by in-depth deliberative work with members of the public, such as citizens' juries or citizens' assemblies.

3. Clarity around the rules

If the police are to perform their role effectively in a national crisis, there must be a stable framework of rules for them to enforce and this should be clearly communicated by the government. While we found that the police service benefited from improved coordination during the pandemic, the grey area between the law and government guidance caused difficulties. It is inevitable that law and guidance will have to change during a pandemic. Nevertheless, the frequency of changes made it difficult for the police to enforce the law.

Recommendation 5: The government should instigate a review of how it responded to the coronavirus pandemic in order to learn lessons for future such events. Such a review should cover any lessons that ought to be learned regarding the clarity of the law, the distinction between law and guidance, how the rules were communicated, the impact of local variation in the rules and the frequency with which the rules changed.

4. Communication and engagement

Despite concerns at the start of the pandemic around the impact enforcing public health rules would have on police legitimacy, the '4 Es' approach was successful in avoiding any major breakdown in the relationship between the public and the police. This likely reflects the determination of chief officers to remain true to the principles of policing by consent and use enforcement only as the last resort. The emphasis on explaining how public health powers would be applied, rather than using the threat posed by Covid-19 as a justification appears to have been well received by the public. During the pandemic the service was generally able to draw upon public support that had been built up during the previous years. It is therefore important that before the next crisis the police service does what it can to reinvest in the

community relationships that are the bedrock of our policing model and without which the '4 Es' approach simply would not have worked.

Recommendation 6: The police should consider what lessons can be learned from the use of the '4 Es' approach for police work more generally, in particular in areas where police use of power is highly contested, such as use of stop and search. They should consider whether high profile and consistent messaging explaining how and in what circumstances officers will use these powers, would have an impact on trust and legitimacy.

Recommendation 7: Police forces should use the increased capacity made available through Operation Uplift to reinvest in neighbourhood policing, which in the past helped to improve public confidence in the police. There should be a particular focus on those neighbourhoods where trust and confidence are low.

5. The importance of a strong strategic centre

The pandemic demonstrated clear benefits of having greater central coordination in some areas. The creation of a national data centre in the National Police Coordination Centre helped to identify areas under pressure operationally and to present credible information to the public about how powers were being used. We also saw the acceleration of investment in new technologies to enable remote working and to reduce the need for face-to-face contact with members of the public. Some of these innovations such as remote resolution of calls and virtual interviews and hearings, hold great promise for the future. However, while there is plenty of local innovation, police IT strategy remains fragmented and adoption of new technologies uneven.

Recommendation 8: The police service should strengthen national capabilities to collect and make use of police data, to coordinate workforce planning and to procure equipment and technology.

Recommendation 9: The NPCC should review how new technology helped to deliver services to the public and provide for more agile working during the pandemic. It should share good practice from around the country and make recommendations to ensure that lessons are learned and improvements sustained.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has posed a major challenge for the state and public services and the police are no exception. Indeed, they have been tasked with being the primary agency for enforcing unprecedented restrictions on civil liberties in the name of public health. This has at times placed the police at the centre of controversy. They have had to take on this new public health role while at the same time managing their traditional demand and having to adapt their ways of working to the conditions of the pandemic which have themselves changed through the emergence of new variants such as Omicron.

This report is the result of a research project, jointly undertaken by the Police Foundation and Crest Advisory, which aimed to answer the question: how well did the police service police the pandemic?

This introduction does three things: first, it provides important context for the rest of the report by describing how the police role evolved during the pandemic; second, it describes how the research was undertaken; and finally it outlines how the report is organised.

How the response to the pandemic developed

Legislation and guidance

The World Health Organisation declared Covid-19 a global health emergency on 30th January and the first known case in the UK was confirmed that same week. Cases rapidly increased throughout the early part of 2020: within seven weeks cases had grown from 2 to 6488[1]. As of 15th October 2021 the UK had recorded a total of 8,455,245 cases[2], and 163,515 people have died from contracting Covid-19. At the two highest peaks of the pandemic (April 2020 and January 2021), the UK was recording 9000 deaths of people affected with Covid-19 in a week.[3]

The government responded to the growing infection numbers in March by enacting emergency procedures under Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984, to halt the spread of the virus, allowing for fast-tracked legislation. The Coronavirus Act 2020 came into force on 25th March, having journeyed through parliament to Royal Assent in four sitting days. The new regulations aimed to slow down the dramatic spread of the virus, limit the loss of life and reduce strain on the National Healthcare Service (NHS). This legislation resulted in unprecedented legal restrictions on the freedoms of the public and potential criminalisation of what had previously been considered 'normal' everyday activity. Responsibility to encourage and compel the public

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[1] Data taken from https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases. Period of cases encompasses first recorded cases on 30th January 2020 to 19th March 2020, the day the Coronavirus Bill 2020 was introduced as emergency legislation.

[2] Figures take from government data. This will include all those who have recorded a positive test, it may include where a single person has had Covid-19 more than once in this period. Note that true infection figures are not known, estimations are often considerably higher of those who have not taken tests or recorded tests.

[3] https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/deaths

to follow these public health regulations was primarily given to the police. In doing so the government deemed it fitting to grant an unprecedented extension of police powers.

Within the Coronavirus Act[4], the UK government made the provision for a 'public health response period', allowing the prohibition of any event or gathering, and to close or restrict access to any premises; police were given the powers to issue direction to those breaching restrictions, to entreat and enforce the public to desist from rule-breaking.

Legal public health measures changed during the course of the pandemic. At the outset, in March 2020, it was not written into law that the public were not allowed to leave their homes but merely advised in guidance. This changed in September 2020 for people in England, where an exception was provisioned under self-isolation requirements. There have been over 65 legislative changes in England since March 2020 - they included:

- mandatory mask wearing in designated public spaces;
- 'stay at home' orders
- restrictions on travel; and
- limits on social gathering between 'households' (see table below)

Further to public health regulations written in law, the government issued guidance to the public on social distancing (the '2m rule'), limits on travel outside local areas, limits on essential trips and exercise. The distinction between legal obligation and guidance was at times ambiguous and presented a challenge for anyone not versed in the law, especially those designated with enforcing it (see Chapter 3).

Under Article 2 of European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) the state has an obligation to take appropriate steps to safeguard the lives of people residing in its jurisdiction[5]. Several of the legal changes were in direct conflict to other articles of ECHR such as the Right to Private and Family Life (Article 8) - this was deemed to be lawful only if it was proportionate to the threat to Article 2. There has been substantial discourse over the use of restrictions and laws and their impact on human rights, whilst this report does not deem to pass judgement over the legality of government action throughout the pandemic thus far, it is helpful to note the human rights context in which the police were being asked to act.

Law enforcement were permitted to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs), with the maximum fine being raised from £3,200 to £10,000 in late 2020 for repeated infringements or large gatherings [6]. FPNs were recorded by the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) as being issued for large gatherings (more than 30 people), participating in gatherings of more than 15 people, businesses not adhering to rules e.g. refusing to close during emergency period or during restricted hours, international travel regulation breaches, failing to self-isolate and failure to wear face coverings[7]. Police were also given license to powers for protection of other people or for the maintenance of public health. Such powers were given to allow a Secretary of State designated person to 'take such action as is necessary to enforce compliance'. In Wales the police were specifically given the power to use reasonable force if necessary and enter people's

[4] Coronavirus Act 2020. March 25th 2020. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/7/contents/enacted
[5] https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide_Art_2_ENG.pdf
[6] Fine amounts are specific to England. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52674192
[7] Update on Coronavirus FPNs issued by Police – April 2021.
https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/update-on-coronavirus-fpns-issued-by-police-april-2021-embargoed-until-0001-thursday-29-april-2021

homes to enforce restrictions, this could be without permission if certain circumstances applied [8].

Policing across borders

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland took similar approaches to lockdowns in the first instance. The focus of this research project was on England and Wales. Initially, Wales followed similar lockdown rules to England. However, these rules diverged following the first lockdown, sometimes confusing both the police and the public in border areas about which guidelines and laws applied where. For example, restrictions in Wales began to ease on 29 May 2020 with a 'stay local' phase, while people in England were able to travel unrestricted distances with members of their household from 13 May[9]. This presented an unenviable challenge for the forces that policed the Welsh/English border during times when restrictions differed greatly.

England experienced three national lockdowns: March 2020 – May 2020, November 2020 and January 2021 – March 2021. Each lockdown presented sets of different rules and exemptions to restrictions from the last, and many local lockdowns and tiered systems created borders between force areas that had not been seen or managed prior to the pandemic (see timeline below).

England	Wales
31 January 2020 – First known cases of Covid-19 in UK confirmed	
10 February - Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020	**10 February** – Health Protection Regulations
	28 Feb – first case in Wales
18 March – School closures	**18 March** – Health protection regulations for Wales, schools in Wales close
23 March – First lockdown begins	**23 March** – Lockdown begins

[8] Coronavirus: Enforcing restrictions. July 2021. Parliament Research Briefings.
https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9024/CBP-9024.pdf
[9] Senedd Research.
https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/coronavirus-timeline-welsh-and-uk-governments-response/

13 May – Lockdown begins to ease

29 May – Lockdown easing begins with 'stay local' message. Two households can meet outdoors, "five mile as a guide"

15 June – face covering become mandatory on public transports

29 June – First local lockdown in Leicester.

13 July – Face covering mandatory on public transport

8 August – Mandatory face mask settings extended other indoor settings e.g. cinemas, places of worship, galleries

11 September – tightening of rules on meetings to 'rule of six' and compulsory face coverings in indoor public spaces

14 September – People are not allowed to meet with other households in groups of more than 6 (both indoors and outdoors)

16 September – Local restrictions in certain areas begin (areas in local restrictions increase throughout September)

24 September – New social distancing measures with 10pm closing time for hospitality

14 October – Tiered local lockdowns determined by Covid alert levels

16 October – Travel restrictions for those in high-prevalence areas not permitted to travel to Wales

23 October – 'firebreak' lockdown for an initial 17-day period

5 November – Beginning of second lockdown

2 December – National lockdown lifts and areas go into local tier restrictions

4 December – Travel between Wales and UK in English Tier three or four areas and in Scotland and NI where high prevalence not permitted to travel into Wales, restrictions on hospitality and leisure sectors now in force

20 December – Tier 4 'stay at home' restrictions come into place for part of England

19 December – Alert level 4 lockdown comes into force

6 January 2021 – Third lockdown begins

8 March – First step in easing lockdown

13 March – Lockdown begins to ease

Virtually every country in the world imposed some public health restrictions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there was considerable variation in both the laws and sanctions and how strictly these were enforced. For example, all non-essential movements in France were banned in the period of national lockdown, and all those leaving their houses were required to carry a Covid-19 travel certificate. Spain under its state of national emergency introduced a nationwide curfew. Some of these variations reflected differences in policing approach, along with different policy choices about how best to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

The UK police model is firmly rooted in the principle of public consent. In the context of the pandemic, the effectiveness of police was only possible with a wide public acceptance of the necessity of restrictions and their purpose in reducing public health risks. The 'success' of policing in Covid-19 is given towards absence of arrests, use of force and hard enforcement, or any militarised authoritarian lockdown[10]. Thus the success would be the absence of any damage to legitimacy or further negative feeling towards police, and potential ingratiation through community engaged policing. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The police's response to government issued restrictions attempted to go with the grain of the consent principle. Guidance issued by the NPCC and the College of Policing in March 2020 encouraged police officers to 'engage, explain, encourage and enforce' in relation to public health regulations and became known as "the 4Es". This gave individual officers the basis on which to exercise their discretion when dealing with members of the public suspected of breaching restrictions[11]. Officers were guided to 'engage' with the public by opening a dialogue around the suspected breach and question why, aiming to seek out voluntary compliance. Secondly to 'explain' the regulations and risks to public health and the strain to the NHS, educating the public on the wider social context and impact of their actions. They were then asked to 'encourage' the public to follow the regulations and comply. Lastly, if voluntary compliance was not reached, officers should 'enforce' the public to comply by directing individuals to adhere to restrictions and use reasonable force and proportionate means of ensuring compliance. The latter could entail instruction, fixed penalty notices and as a last resort, where deemed appropriate, arresting individuals for acting unlawfully.

Methodology

The research undertaken for this report involved a mixed-methods approach that included both quantitative and qualitative data, which provide both a national and local perspective on police effectiveness and response during the coronavirus crisis. In light of restrictions on movement and socialising, all qualitative methods were conducted online using video-streaming applications. Each of the data sources included in this report are described below:

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups

Thirty-two semi-structured interviews were completed with senior national (n=18) and local stakeholders in the police (n=6) and partner agencies (n=5) with responsibility for managing

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[10] Stott, C., West, O., & Harrison, M. (2020). A Turning Point, Securitization, and Policing in the Context of Covid-19: Building a New Social Contract Between State and Nation? Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice
[11] NPPC, CoP 2020

public services and the response during the coronavirus crisis. These included representatives from the NPCC, College of Policing, local forces, fire and rescue, local authorities and criminal justice agencies. These interviews were completed in two separate phases; 24 interviews were completed between August 2020 and September 2020 following the first national lockdown period and 8 follow-up interviews were completed between February 2021 and March 2021. The interviews were completed in two separate time-periods to capture the changed circumstances and experiences during the different stages of the pandemic. Three stakeholders completed a second follow-up interview in the summer of 2021.

Five focus groups were completed with frontline police constables or sergeants (n=20) in response or neighbourhood teams in four different police forces areas. Participants were enlisted with help from personnel in each police force who communicated a request for volunteers.

The questions covered several topics related to policing during the coronavirus crisis; the systems and structures in place to manage the demands from the pandemic, the approach and challenges to enforcing the public health regulations, the challenges and adaptations to organisational structures, resources and ways of working and the changes and key lessons learned for a more effective police service in the future.

Survey of the Police Superintendents' Association

A survey was disseminated to all members of the Police Superintendents' Association from English and Welsh police forces in October 2020 with 73 surveys completed and returned. The surveys were anonymous and the distribution of respondents from across the 43 police forces is not known. The key topics covered in the questions were similar to those in the interviews and focus groups.

Analysis of police recorded crime and incident data

Crime and incident data was collected from twelve forces that agreed to share data covering the period from March 2019 to March 2021. These forces represented a mix of both urban and rural areas from all regions of England and Wales. The data was then aggregated to the lowest level allowing for cross-force comparison.

Three primary methods were used to compare data over time:

- 4 week rolling average of data to smooth out the line and to observe volume
- Indexing trends to a two year average e.g. theft offences over the pandemic are shown against the average theft figures across the two years to observe changes
- Comparison of the equivalent period in 2019 to try to minimise seasonality

Analysis of national England and Wales and international Covid-19 law enforcement data

Data was collated from an open-source internet search of law enforcement data published for England and Wales, Scotland, the Netherlands, France, Greece and Spain. This data was integrated as far as possible into a comparative analysis on the approach to enforcing legislation to control the movements, social, business and other activities to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The data was collected from a range of sources that included government websites, academic journal articles and mainstream media news articles. There was limited

consistency in the format and time-periods covered by the different sources therefore integration relied considerably on approximating the equivalence between them.

For the same list of countries, public opinion data was collected from a similar open-source search to examine patterns in public support for the Covid-19 restrictions and police activity for the duration of the pandemic.

Focus groups and survey of members of the public

Eighteen focus groups were completed with members of the public from eight police force areas. A purposive sampling design was used to ensure sufficient representation of individuals from younger age groups, black and minority ethnic groups, women and multiple diverse police force areas (including those that represented larger and more urban areas and also those more rural). Each focus group comprised individuals living in the same police force area, and two groups comprised only individuals from black and other minority ethnic groups. Two groups comprised women only and four comprised only individuals aged 24 and under. A market research company was contracted to source volunteers to participate in these groups.

The groups were conducted in three separate time-periods, September 2020, February 2021 and April 2021, to capture the changed circumstances and experiences during the different stages of the pandemic. The six focus groups in February 2021 represented follow-up sessions with individuals who had taken part in focus groups in September 2020. These groups explored a number of themes such as experiences and perceptions of the police and their approach to enforcing the public health regulations, trust and confidence in the regulations, police conduct and policing overall, and changes to patterns in crime and wider demands on police during the crisis. The data was entered into a specialist software package (NVivo) for thematic analysis.

Public opinion poll

An opinion poll was conducted across two weeks between July 2021 and August 2021 with responses from 3,693 members of the public across the UK (not including N.Ireland). A minimum of 170 people from each region responded and the sample covered ages from 18 to 65+ and multiple ethnicity groups.

The questions focused on several subjects around trust, fairness and support for the police during the pandemic, pre-pandemic and related to several high profile incidents during 2020/21 including Black Lives Matter protests and the policing of a vigil for Sarah Everard at Clapham Common, south London.

Report structure

The report is composed of five chapters:

- **Chapter 1** looks at the policing of the pandemic impacted on public consent and legitimacy in relation to policing
- **Chapter 2** describes how the pandemic affected demand on the police and law enforcement
- **Chapter 3** sets out how effectively the police responded to the pandemic

Chapter 1: Public consent and legitimacy in a pandemic

Key findings

- Support for the police approach to enforcing the Covid-19 regulations held up, albeit becoming more qualified over time. There are signs of a deterioration of trust and confidence in London

- The public tended to sympathise with the predicament of the police, whom were forced to react to constant changes in laws and guidance and limited resources

- The pandemic has not damaged the police-public relationship, rather it has illuminated its pre-existing weaknesses with some groups e.g. black and younger people being less likely to be supportive of the police's approach

- There is some evidence that the police's efforts to clearly explain its approach to policing Covid laws paid dividends, with an increase in trust over the course of the pandemic. There may be lessons for other areas of policing e.g. stop and search

In March 2020, police in England and Wales were given unprecedented powers in order to perform an unprecedented role - enforcing restrictions on the movement and gathering of people, even within their own homes, in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus. While the police service has always responded to demands outside the scope of the prevention and detection of crime, the provisions of the Coronavirus Act (2020) represented a seismic shift in their responsibilities. How officers would deliver public health policing in practice and what the implications were for the UK's consent-based model became pressing questions.

Our interviews with police stakeholders suggest that at the start of the pandemic, all levels of the service were concerned that by being asked to enforce restrictions of basic freedoms, such as the right of people to meet, their relationship with communities would be strained, perhaps severely, undermining public consent. Understandably, the public was also uncertain about how widely and rigorously the police would enforce previously unthinkable restrictions on their everyday lives.

Early on in the pandemic, these concerns appeared justified. Use of a drone by police in Derbyshire to record footage of people travelling to beauty spots was condemned as disproportionately heavy-handed by MPs. Comments by one chief constable about the potential for officers to search shopping baskets prompted significant criticism. Individual

officers who misinterpreted guidance either in person or on social media found their actions scrutinised by a former Supreme Court Judge. These incidents led some to speculate whether the police's new public health role might change or harm how the service was viewed or trusted by the public.

The role of the police and the 4 Es approach

In the Spring of 2020, the police were faced with having to enforce public health regulations with unprecedented reach into our everyday lives. Following the Prime Minister's announcement of a first national lockdown on 23 March, guidance was released to the public outlining a limited number of circumstances in which people were allowed to leave home:

- Shopping for basic necessities
- One form of exercise a day
- Any medical need, or to avoid the risk of injury or harm
- Travelling for work purposes

However, the list of "reasonable excuses" for leaving home provided for in law was more extensive than that contained within the guidance. This led to concerns that some police forces were enforcing government advice rather than the letter of the law. Examples included one force reporting that it had reprimanded individuals for shopping for non-essential foods, despite there being no definition in law of which foods were not essential[12.]. Over the first weekend that the new laws were in place, 27–29 March, some forces issued over 100 enforcement notices and others issued none, raising questions about how consistently the law was being applied.[13]

The scope of the regulations made potential offenders out of large numbers of otherwise law-abiding people who were willing to bend or flout the rules. At the height of lockdown one survey found that a quarter (25%) of adults were not adhering to the rules for restricted movement and three quarters (75%) were not adhering to the social isolation rules.[14]

In tackling such rule-breaking, the police had to balance the need to enforce the law with a desire not to stray too far from the tradition of policing by consent. The police have long exercised discretion in their enforcement of laws, often by weighing up their resources, public expectations and the severity of harm. However, during a pandemic, the principle of consent is arguably even more crucial, as a mechanism for promoting widespread adherence to the new regulations. Many senior policing leaders told us that this was one of their biggest priorities during the early phase of the pandemic.

> *"One of the biggest things that we set out at the beginning - and we agreed this*
> *with the Home Office - was that we didn't want to do something over the period*

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[12] https://twitter.com/PoliceWarr/status/1244163251799195649; Sky News, 'Police backtrack after chief threatened to search shoppers' trolleys', April 10, 2020

[13] The Guardian, Covid-19: ex-supreme court judge lambasts 'disgraceful' policing, 30 March 2020

[14] Smith, L.E., Amlot, R., Lambert, H., Oliver, I., Robin, C., Yardley, L. and Rubin, G.J. (2020) Factors associated with adherence to self-isolation and lockdown measures in the UK; a cross-sectional survey

> *of the pandemic that fundamentally damaged our relationship with the public going forward because we had these draconian new measures."*
> - National Policing Leader

On 31 March, the NPCC and College of Policing published guidance on policing the new powers provided in public health regulations in England.[15] The guidance laid the foundations for the '4 Es' framework, the essence of which was that enforcement should always be a last resort, following engagement, explanation and encouragement to the public to comply with the law. The determination of national policing leaders to uphold the principle of consent was thus established early on and - despite considerable scrutiny and political pressure[16] - has largely held firm throughout the duration of the pandemic.

Below, we analyse public perceptions of the police's strategy, tactics and communication during the pandemic. In order to derive a more granular understanding of public sentiment, Crest undertook a public poll of 3,693 people who were recruited through the Dynata survey panel to be nationally representative of England, Wales, and Scotland in terms of age, gender, and location. Northern Ireland was not included in the polling due to their different policing structure. We also conducted a total of 18 focus groups across the country.

Challenges to legitimacy during the pandemic

Policing during the pandemic threw up several challenges to the police's legitimacy and its relationship with the public:

- Lack of clarity around the rules
- Inconsistency in how the rules were enforced
- Policing protests during a pandemic
- Resource constraints

These are examined in detail below.

Lack of clarity around the rules

The consent-based model of policing relies on both sides (the public and the police) being clearly informed about the rules of the game. An overwhelming finding from our research is that neither side believed that clarity existed during the height of the pandemic. Our poll revealed that around two thirds of the public (65 %) reported feeling that the 'laws were unclear', which had put police officers in an invidious position.

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[15] https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/Covid-19-19-restrictions
[16] Independent, 'Priti Patel defends police crackdown on Covid rulebreakers', June 2021

The laws were unclear, leading to police officers being unsure what was and was not allowed

	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Strongly agree
Total	4%	8%	24%	36%	29%
16-24	5%	10%	32%	27%	25%
25-34	3%	8%	31%	29%	28%
35-44	4%	6%	25%	37%	28%
45-54	4%	6%	22%	38%	29%
55-64	4%	7%	16%	40%	33%
65+	4%	8%	17%	41%	30%
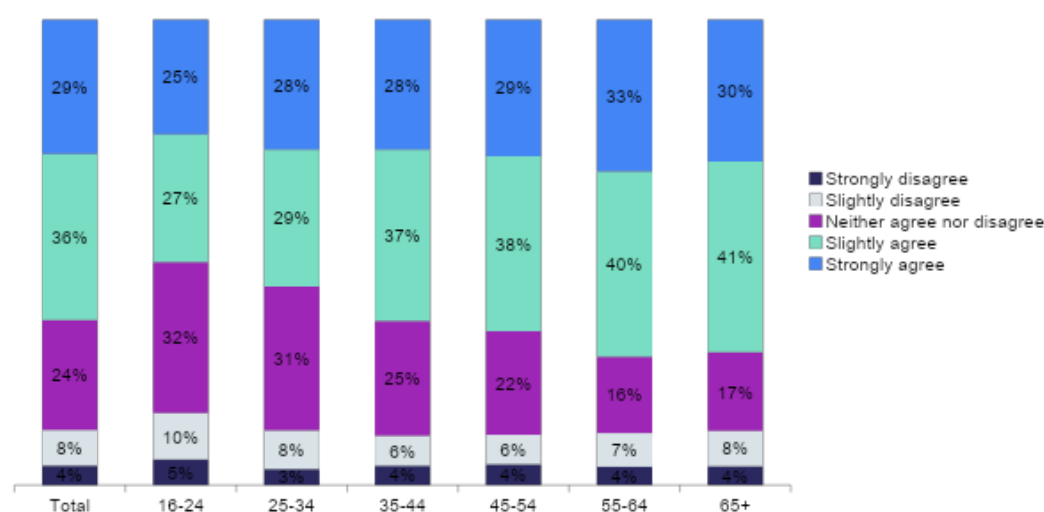
Many focus group participants were conscious of the police role as intermediaries in implementing unprecedented government restrictions on public life, and expressed a degree of sympathy for police on the frontlines of the response.

> *"I feel bad for them... I just think they haven't been strict at all, to be honest. It was kind of [a] free for all and every single week it's changing. No one knows what's going on. So I understand why all the people are just doing what they want with policies changing so often."* Female, 18-24, Manchester, Multiple ethnicity group

> *"I do feel sorry for the police, because the guidance from the government hasn't actually been crystal clear, as it is. So for them to try and enforce that on top of that... I've seen some of the reaction that they're getting."* Male 25-49, Birmingham, All Black-British group

It was recognised that people needed to take more personal responsibility in following the rules, but there was some confusion expressed over what constituted law and what was government guidance. This not only created uncertainty around what was acceptable but likely further diminished the legal deterrent.

> *"Were those illegal raves really breaking the law? Were they actually breaking a law or was it guidelines?"* Male, 50+, London, Multiple ethnicity group

At the same time, many police officers told us that the speed with which new regulations were introduced (and subsequently changed) was the greatest challenge they faced during the pandemic. Frontline officers in our focus groups expressed uncertainty in their knowledge of the laws and guidance and often felt they had to 'wing it' when asked for advice on what was permitted. They were acutely aware of the threat this presented to their legitimacy.

> *"If there was one thing that the government has got fundamentally wrong, and this is just my view, they have changed the rules too often and too quickly.*

Because if cops can't keep track of it, how on earth do you expect the public to?" Senior Policing Stakeholder

As the criminologist Mike Hough wrote in 2021, "to expect the police to interpret and enforce government instructions, requests and guidance that lack statutory backing risks creating a large deficit in their legitimacy … [and] would involve the police acting as an arm of the government, without legal cover …"

Inconsistency of enforcement

The perception of inconsistency and/ or unfairness in the enforcement of the rules was a major theme of our research. Our polling consistently illustrated an age divide in perceptions of how fairly they were treated by the police. For example, 62 per cent of young adults agreed with the statement that 'police officers don't always treat people with the respect they deserve', compared to 49 per cent of those aged over 65.

Police officers don't always treat people with the respect they deserve
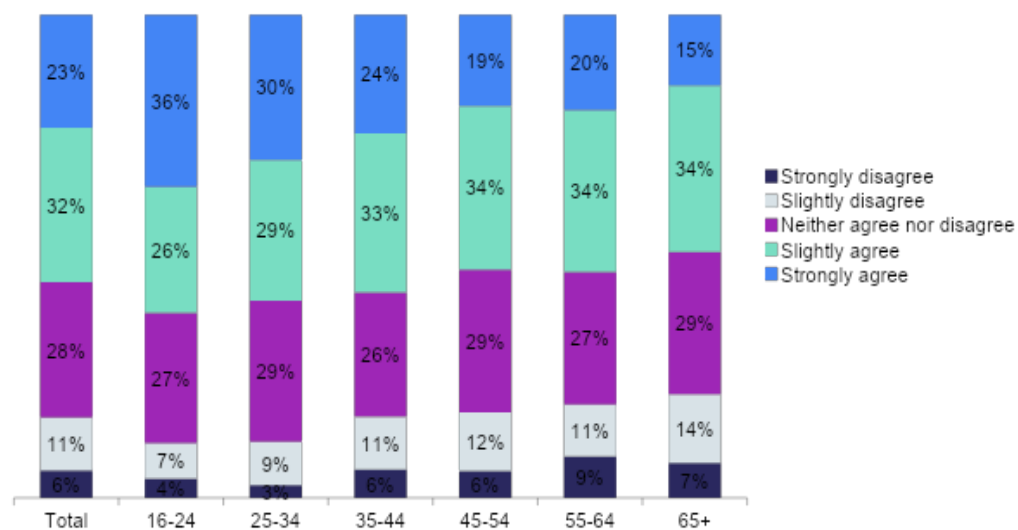
Some of our focus group participants told us they believed that the police simply 'reverted to default', with areas that were more highly policed before the crisis continuing to be highly policed, regardless of the level of rule-breaking. This gave rise to the perception that some communities were unfairly or disproportionately penalised.

"… in some places they were really heavy-handed. In [one borough] there were hordes of police stopping people up there and moving them along. And yet on [another], where it was just like a crazy amount of people, they weren't around. So, I just don't understand how… Whether it's different boroughs, or whatever,

different police forces. It just seemed very uneven." Female, 50+, London, Multiple ethnicity group

A related question, raised repeatedly, was whether certain high-profile individuals flouting the rules were treated differently and/ or whether these cases served to undermine the legitimacy of lockdown rules. Nearly two thirds of the public (62%) agreed that the policing of the pandemic was undermined by government officials and/ or high profile individuals flouting the rules.

Police officers were undermined by government officials or other prominent individuals ignoring the rules
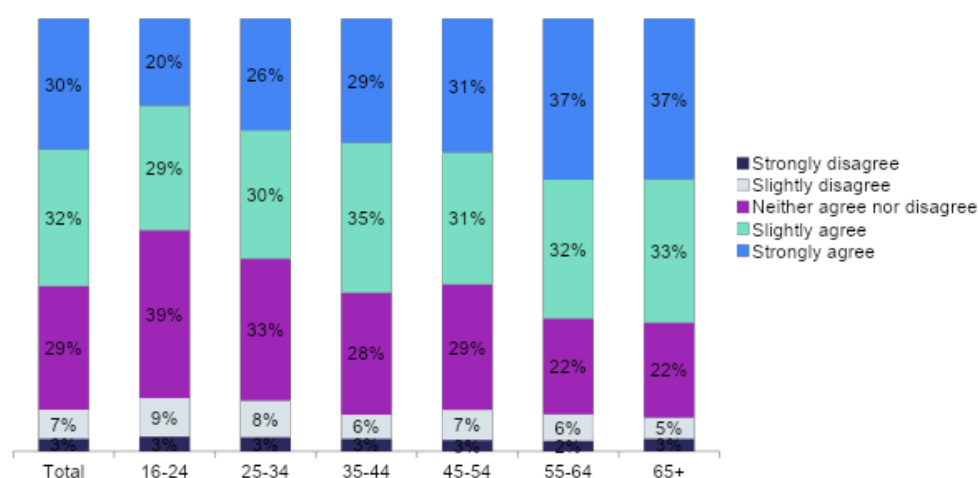
A number of focus group participants cited high profile breaches of the rules, including an incident involving the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff in May 2020, as an impediment to robust enforcement by the police.

> *"It's like the Dominic Cummings thing… Why does he get one set of rules and we get another set? Everybody is in the same boat here…I don't know what the police did. I don't know if they did much in that. But, they probably didn't do that much because he's still living his life, doing what he's doing. There was no punishment or anything. So, it just reinforces the divide."* Female, 18-24, London, All Black-British group

> *"I think we do remember what happened a few months ago with a certain advisor to government .. and I think when people saw how he was treated differently to the general public with regards to adhering to the rules, I'm thinking the government probably felt 'you know what, we can't really be too heavy-handed on the general public with having all these rules when we ourselves aren't managing our own house".* Female, 50+, London, Multiple ethnicity group

Finally, there were persistent concerns about disproportionality. For example, more than half of Black participants (51%) reported seeing the police more often during lockdown, compared to only 28 per cent of White participants. This was reinforced in some of our focus groups.

"I don't think my opinion has changed. It has just confirmed what I already thought. Like, you've just given me the evidence. Now, everyone's on the same platform, we've all got the same rules, don't go out, and you're still treating black people worse". Male, 18-24, London, All Black-British group

These concerns were (partially) borne out by the statistics around fines. For example, males from a Black, Asian or other minority ethnic groups were overrepresented by twice the rate of young white males.[17] The degree of racial disparity varied by police force, and was particularly high in police force areas that 'attract tourists to coastal areas and beauty spots'[18]. The issuing of FPNs to individuals travelling in from outside the area appears to explain some of the racial disparity in comparison to resident demographics.

Many of the police officers we spoke to for this report did not deny there was some disproportionality in the use of fines, but argued that it was more likely the result of underlying social trends, rather than reflective of police discrimination per se.

> *"Some apparent disproportionality by age and ethnicity. [This is] likely to be reflective of a society most likely to notice and report concerns about groups of young people congregating / socialising in urban areas, which tend to [involve] greater youth / BAME populations than [in] other parts of our Force. If reported, [the] police will deploy and there may be enforcement consequences."* Police force superintendent

Policing protests during a pandemic

In an operational context that required a highly discretionary approach from the police, frontline practitioners were faced not only with the challenge of accurately interpreting the legality of public behaviour, but also modulating their response to the different circumstances and social contexts. Strategies and decision-making in local police teams needed to be informed by, and sensitive to the challenges, concerns, and needs of specific communities.

Over the course of a prolonged period of restrictions, the wider social context was subject to change, a point most vividly illustrated by the Black Lives Matter protests across towns and cities in the UK. Some respondents identified this as a moment that marked a change in the trust and relationship between the police and some communities. Police officers in our focus groups described a deterioration in the relationship with Black communities and feeling "awkward" and "uneasy" in balancing heightened racial tensions with a continued need to police the Covid-19 restrictions. One officer acknowledged that these protests had "impacted on our interactions with the community" and that enforcing the social distancing needed to be accompanied by work to "repair those relationships with our communities".

The public health restrictions also stood in conflict with the rights of citizens to engage in protest activity[19]. It was not initially clear whether the restrictions on protest activity conflicted with human rights legislation or whether protest activity could be deemed a "reasonable

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[17] NPCC, 2020
[18] NPCC, 2020
[19] Kampmark, 2020

excuse" for breaching the restrictions on movement and social gatherings.[20] Tensions in managing protest activities were exacerbated when protests were directed at the police themselves. Moreover, without legal clarity, discretionary enforcement could be construed as the police acting as the enforcement arm of government, and thereby erode police independence and legitimacy.

> *"Of course, you add things like the Sarah Everard [vigil], you add things like Black Lives Matter … I think sometimes we're seeing some policing of the state because of legislation, prohibiting protest. So I think there's been an impact on our public confidence or on legitimacy, that will somehow need to come out. And I think, centrally, our relationship with the government has had to be closer than it would normally be…But how do we move back to that more independent space, and that more public space?"* Senior policing stakeholder

The media-led backlash in response to the apparently 'heavy-handed' police response to a vigil in memory of Sarah Everard, murdered by a Metropolitan Police Service officer, demonstrated how the police had become exposed to accusations of engaging in "politicised" enforcement activity.[21] Legislation had been introduced later in 2020 to clarify the position on protest activity, stipulating that protest organisers must complete Covid-19 risk assessments and implement measures to manage risks of transmission. In the case of the Sarah Everard vigil, the protests had not received authorisation from the authorities in London although similar events had been authorised in other areas.

Our polling revealed stark age differences in whether people perceived the police as having acted "too hard" or "too soft" in the way they applied the Covid-19 laws when dealing with protesters . Of those captured in our poll, 16-24 year olds were much more likely to think the police were much too hard (23%) or slightly too hard (24%) on protesters than any other age group. Particularly the 65+ responders who tended to think that the police were much too soft (32%) or slightly too soft (27%) on protesters during the pandemic.

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[20] Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2021
[21] Roberts et al, 2021

Do you think that the police were too hard or too soft in the way they applied the Covid-19 laws when dealing with protesters?
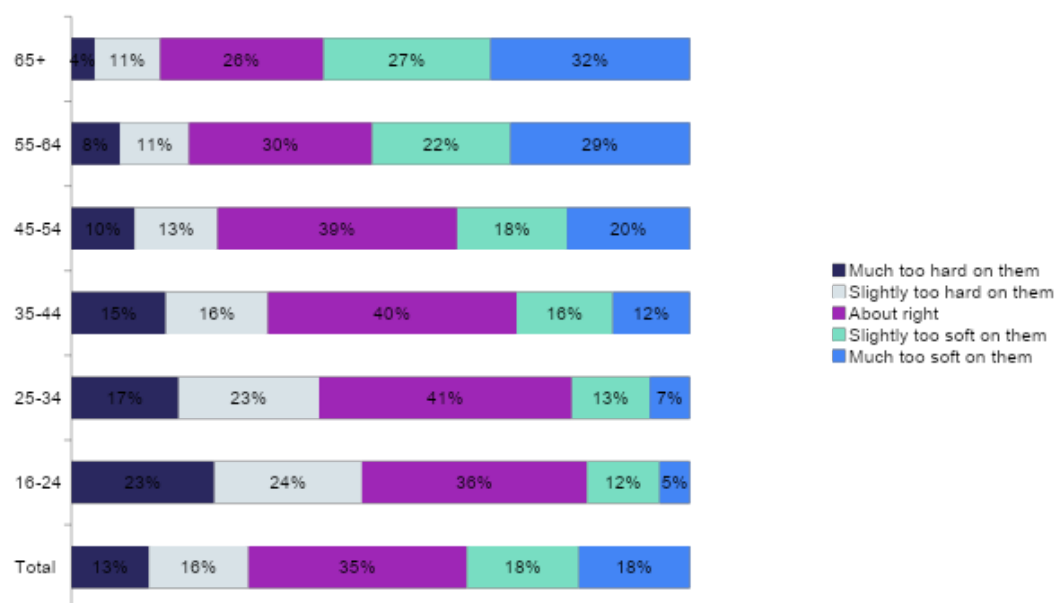
Resource constraints

The public seem to have been acutely aware of the resource pressures facing the police in seeking to respond to the pandemic. 67 per cent of the public said that the police were "already under-resourced" and therefore too busy to deal with the pandemic. On this question of whether the police were under-resourced, the age differentials were considerable: just over half of young adults (53%) agreed compared with over three quarters (77%) of those aged over 65.

The police were already under-resourced and too busy dealing with crime and other incidents to also deal with the pandemic
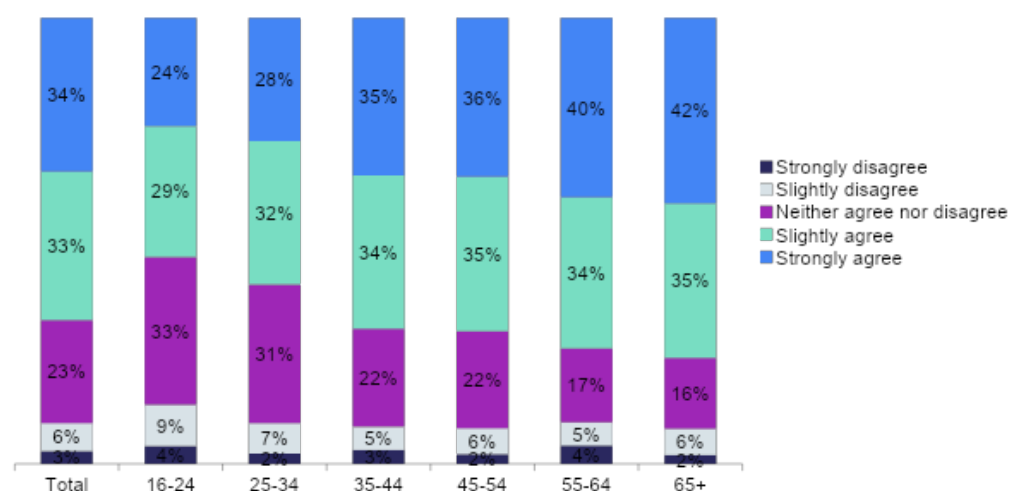
Focus group participants also perceived the tension between the need to impose more extensive enforcement of the restrictions, and the limited resources available to the police. Some participants mentioned how policing resources had been stretched before the Covid-19 pandemic, and that the additional demands of policing the pandemic had made it hard to strike the right balance:

> "I think given how many more limitations [the police have] been dealing with, and they need to be watching group gatherings, household gatherings etc, I think they've been really stretched. I haven't had any direct experiences seeing how well they've responded to some things but it seems like they've had a lot on their hands and they're trying to do the best they can." Female, 25-49, Manchester, Multiple ethnicity group

> "I think the police should play a role in [track and trace], but I just don't think they have enough people to be able to do it. Because from what I've seen, crime is around the same, and the police weren't always able to deal with everything. And now they've added, with all the crime that was already happening… thousands of restaurants to look at, thousands of people going out every day to enforce it." Male, 18-24, Birmingham, Multiple ethnicity group

That said, some focus group participants were sceptical about the additional demands and believed that police should be making better use of the resources that were available during the Covid-19 period, particularly given the likely reduction in everyday demand with people forced to stay at home.

> "I think they should have more [resources] now though in the sense that I know there's a lot going on but there are no sporting events, there are no music events. There are no big massive events in that way that they have to police. So let's say I'm stuck for the afternoon and having to look at a game at home, all those police that should be there, what are they doing now? They're not having to go and worry about it." Male, 25-49, Greater Manchester, Multiple ethnicity group

Public support for the police

Overall levels of support

Despite the many challenges set out above, confidence in the police was generally very strong. Our polling reveals that around two thirds (66%) of the public supported the police approach either fully (37%) or with the caveat that in some cases they went too far (29%). Levels of support increased with age, with people over the age of 65 the most supportive (42%) and young adults aged 16-24 least supportive (28%).

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view of how the police have handled the Covid-19 lockdowns?

Legend: Total | 16-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65+

I fully support the approach taken by the police: 37%, 28%, 39%, 39%, 36%, 36%, 42%

I support the approach taken by the police but in some cases they have gone too far: 29%, 27%, 27%, 28%, 30%, 31%, 29%

The approach taken by the police was too heavy handed: 8%, 13%, 13%, 7%, 7%, 7%, 3%

The police should have taken tougher action to ensure public compliance: 14%, 11%, 9%, 12%, 15%, 16%, 19%

The police should have had no role in enforcing the Covid-19 lockdowns, compliance should have been a matter for individuals: 5%, 6%, 5%, 5%, 5%, 6%, 3%

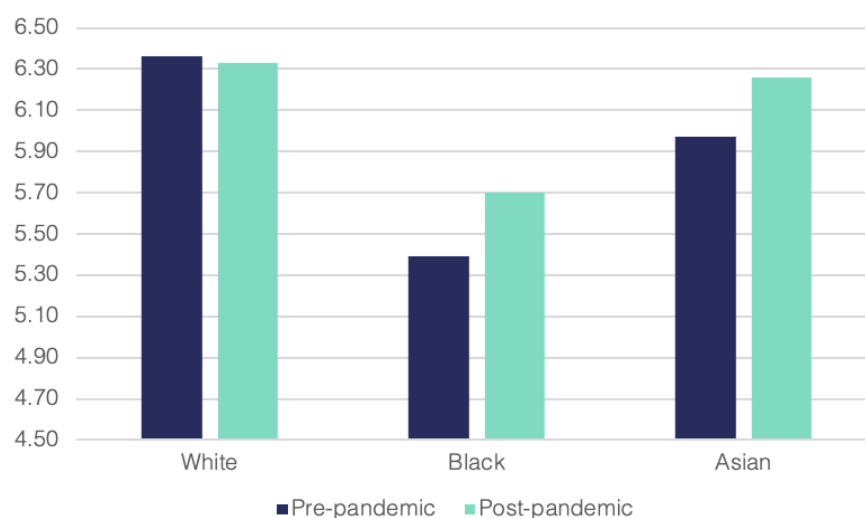None of the above: 7%, 13%, 7%, 8%, 6%, 4%, 3%

These views remained relatively unchanged throughout the pandemic; the proportion of the public who believed the local police were doing a good or excellent job in their local area was 67 percent in the period January to March 2021, only moderately less than in the period May to June 2020 (70%).[22]

Moreover, the fears that were expressed early on in the pandemic, around a public backlash against heavy-handed police tactics, largely failed to materialise. In our public poll, only a small minority (8%) said that they thought the police had gone overboard. In fact, a larger proportion of the public said they felt the police should have been tougher in enforcement against rule-breaking. Additionally, none of our focus groups referenced concerns around police tactics and/ or mentioned incidents where individual officers were criticised for misinterpreting their powers.

It is noteworthy that the pandemic does not appear to have altered how positive or negative people feel towards the police, with our polling showing few significant shifts in any age group. Moreover, despite the challenges around disproportionality set out above, our polling found that on average, Black and Asian people said they felt marginally more positive towards the police at the end of the pandemic than they had done before the pandemic (with no change amongst White people).

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[22] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalescoronavirusandcrimetables

Before/ after the pandemic - how would you rate your feelings generally towards the police?[23]

A clear factor in boosting perceptions of police legitimacy seemed to be a clear separation in public minds between the police as an institution and government, which itself would seem a validation of the police's approach and overall state of police independence.

> *"The government said that people would be stopped and asked where they're going, if they're saying that the police were going to be doing that, then I know it's completely unrealistic but it's not really the police's fault. It's more the government's fault for saying that they're going to implement this law or implement these fines or whatever for people travelling".* - Male, 18-24, Birmingham, Multiple ethnicity group

> *"It's not the police who decide how they go about it [policing the pandemic], it's their authority, our government. Again, I don't think it's a problem with how the police are doing their job. It's how they're being told to do their job."* Male, 18-24, Birmingham, Multiple ethnicity group

Most people observed little change in police visibility

Amongst the general public, many had the impression that police visibility in their local communities was unchanged during the pandemic. 55 per cent of the respondents to our public poll did not notice any difference in police visibility during the lockdowns. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the percentage of those that saw 'a lot or a little more police' during lockdown was higher in younger age groups and decreased across upper age groups (51% of 16-24 years olds saw the police a lot or a little more often during lockdown, compared to 7% in 65+).

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[23] A score of 0 represented "very negative" up to 10 being "very positive".

Did you personally notice any change during lockdowns in how visible the police were in your community?
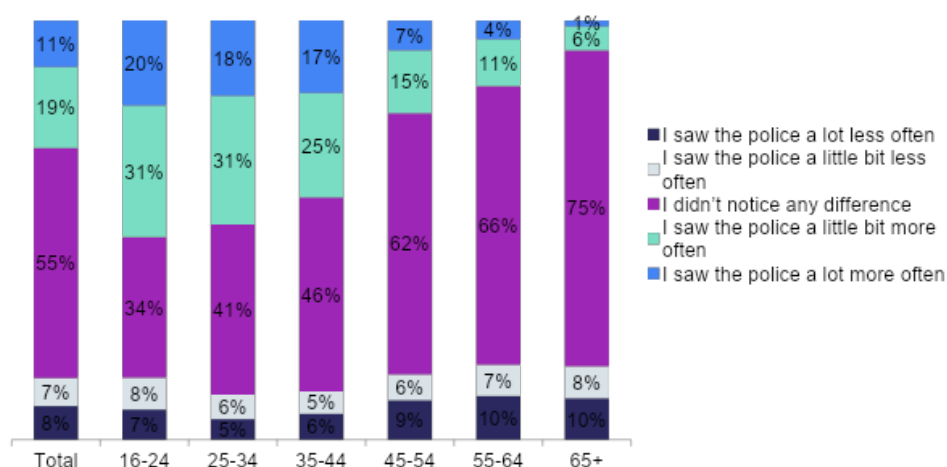

These findings were reinforced by our focus groups, with most people giving the impression that police visibility was unchanged or lower than might have been expected.

> *"I'd say I've probably seen around the same amount of police as before lockdown and before that. But I feel like it should have been more, considering more things need to be enforced right now. Obviously, you can't make [more staff] out of thin air, but I feel like it's been very similar to what it was before. It's just the amount of stuff that needs to be enforced in the current situation has increased quite drastically."* Male, 18-24, Birmingham, Multiple ethnicity group

On the other hand, many people reported feeling they better understood how difficult policing is since the pandemic began, including ethnic minorities.

How far do you agree with the following statements: My understanding of the challenges faced by the police has improved since before the pandemic. I have a better understanding of what police do compared to what I thought before the pandemic.
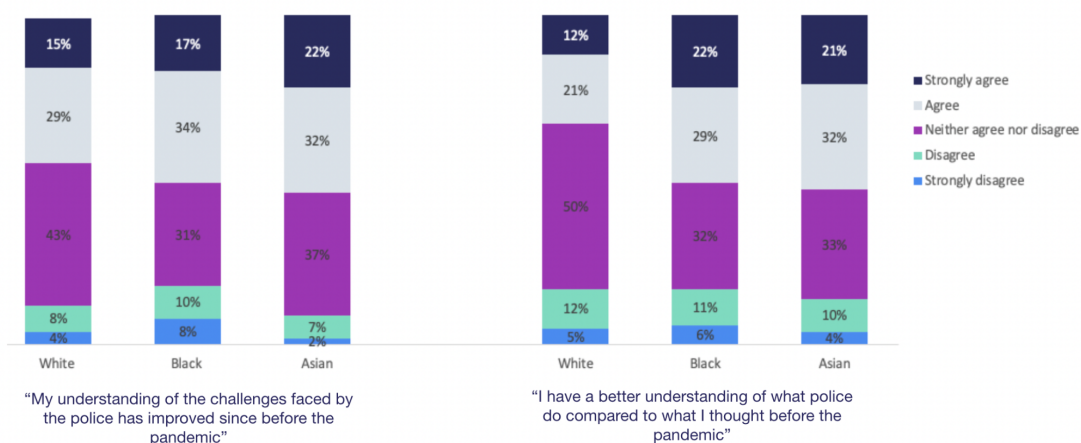
The implications of this are potentially far-reaching, suggesting that the public have a strong appetite for communication which is clear about the challenges and practical realities of modern policing.

Conclusions and recommendations

The police service entered the pandemic with an understandable concern not to 'overreach' and risk undermining public confidence with an enforcement-heavy approach. Given the widespread negative publicity generated by isolated incidents early on in lockdown, the emphasis on the 4Es approach was prudent and proved justified. It ensured that the police's approach was rooted in the principle of consent - the foundation of the British policing model - setting the tone from the outset.

Inevitably, the consent-based approach was put under pressure. In particular, the lack of clarity around the rules, which were introduced (and subsequently changed) too rapidly to be properly understood. This was exacerbated by the fact that policing decisions are largely devolved across 43 forces, which opened up the potential for inconsistency in how the rules were interpreted and enforced.

Inconsistency in how the rules were enforced was a major theme of our research - both in our poll and in the focus groups - and it raised concerns not only on effectiveness but also fairness, with some feeling the rules pressed harder on some communities than others. Fairness and transparency in enforcing the rules is essential for public buy-in and compliance.

However, despite these challenges, it appears that the police successfully navigated the challenges to their legitimacy and maintained public consent. The overwhelming sentiment amongst the public was one of empathy for the challenges they faced and the position they were in. Moreover, public support for the police's approach remained remarkably resilient, with the qualification relating to London already outlined.

Rather than the pandemic undermining the public's relationship with the police it appears to have illuminated its strengths and weaknesses. Those people who went into the pandemic with negative views tended to have those views reinforced; while those people who were previously supportive, largely remained so.

Importantly, the fact that the public reported having a better understanding of the challenges policing faced at the end of the pandemic than was the case at the beginning holds out important lessons for policing. It suggests that in other contentious areas, whether around counter-extremism, stop and search, or the prioritisation of finite resources, the police should communicate as transparently as possible.

Recommendation: The police should consider what lessons can be learned from the use of the 4 Es approach for police work more generally, in particular in areas where police use of power is highly contested, such as use of stop and search. They should consider whether high profile and consistent messaging explaining how and in what circumstances officers will use these powers, would have an impact on trust and legitimacy.

Recommendation: Police forces should use the increased capacity made available through Operation Uplift to reinvest in neighbourhood policing, which in the past helped to improve public confidence in the police. There should be a particular focus on those neighbourhoods where trust and confidence are low.

# Chapter 2: Police demand during the pandemic

Key findings

- Recorded crime fell sharply in the early stages of the March 2020 lockdown but returned to pre-pandemic levels after 12 weeks

- Police did not get more time to proactively investigate serious offences due to a rise in non-crime demand (associated with enforcing Covid restrictions), which largely offset the falls in crime

- The pandemic has accelerated pre-existing trends of crime moving online and becoming more complex and higher harm e.g. falls in shoplifting and rises in stalking

- There is an urgent need to improve and standardise the quality of incident data collection across 43 forces to allow service to understand national picture properly

On 23 March, 2020, the Prime Minister announced the first lockdown in the UK ordering people to stay at home. Two days later the Coronavirus Act received Royal Assent and its measures became legally enforceable the following day.

By the end of March 2020, most forces in England and Wales were experiencing dramatic reductions in recorded crime. Restrictions on movement and gathering, the closing of non-essential shops, and the complete suspension of the night-time economy radically changed the opportunity structures for committing and reporting most offences. As this reality began to unfold, policing leaders spoken to for this report expressed the hope that this could present an unique opportunity to prioritise proactive policing; pursuing leads, furthering investigations, and generating rather than simply responding to demand.

By the time summer arrived and the country had reopened, overall crime levels had returned to pre-pandemic levels. The country however had not returned to business as usual, our patterns of living, working, and socialising were drastically different. How did this shift in social behaviour impact the crimes committed and reported? Did the profile crime and related demand for service show qualitative change? If so, how permanent will this change be?
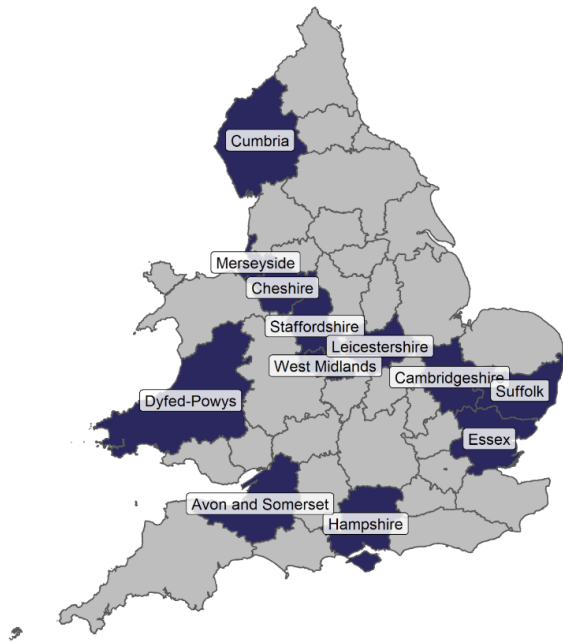
To answer these questions and to understand the impact of the pandemic on crime, we collected 2 years of crime and incident data from 12 forces across England and Wales who agreed to partner with us for the purposes of this research. This chapter sets out the conclusions of that work. We also explore shifts in under reported crime which is less apparent in police data, informed by interviews with practitioners.

What happened to crime?

Most crime types experienced sharp declines after the first national lockdown was announced at the end of March 2020. By week 2 of this first lockdown, the volume of reported crimes across our 12 forces had decreased 36 per cent from 2 weeks prior. However, these falls were short-lived: by week 12 (08/06) total weekly crime had already recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

All recorded crime for all 12 forces from March 2019 - March 2021, rolling 4 weekly crime trend. Dark blue line represents overall indexed trend, light grey lines indicate each of the forces indexed trend.
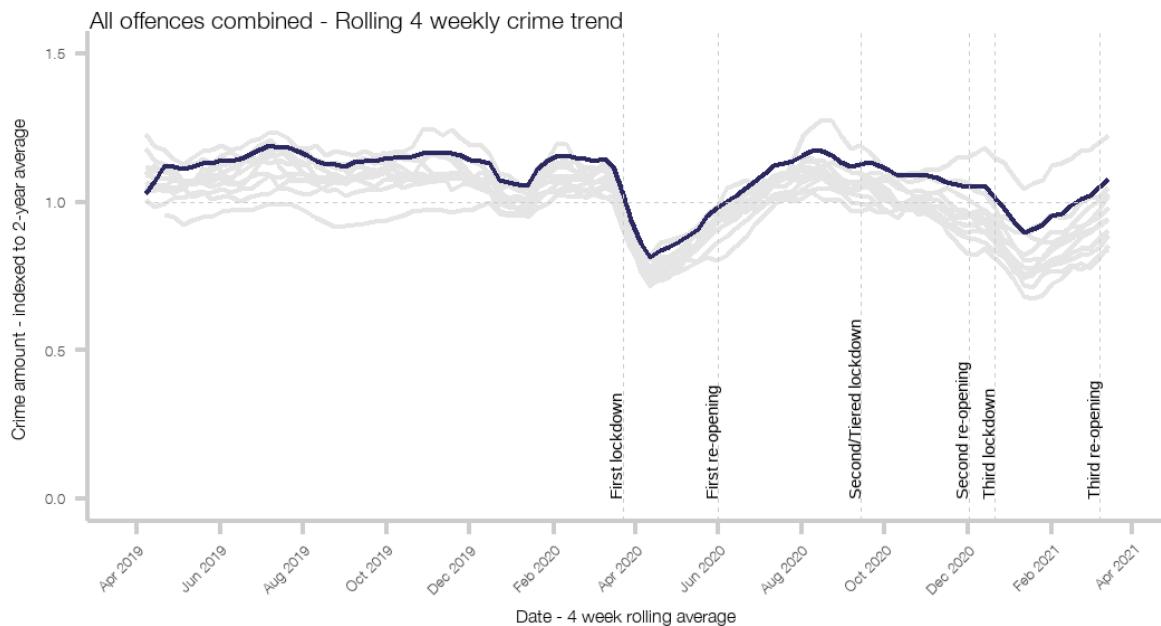
Expectedly, the reduction in crime was particularly pronounced for offence types which typically occur in public spaces or rely on an offender and victim being both physically present: theft (-48%), robbery (-47%), criminal damage (-42%), and sexual offences (-43%) drove the downward trend in recorded crime. The only offence type that did not experience a decline in the first lockdown relative to the pre-lockdown 2020 period was drug offences (+2%).

All recorded crime for all 12 forces from March 2020 - March 2021, rolling 4 weekly crime trend
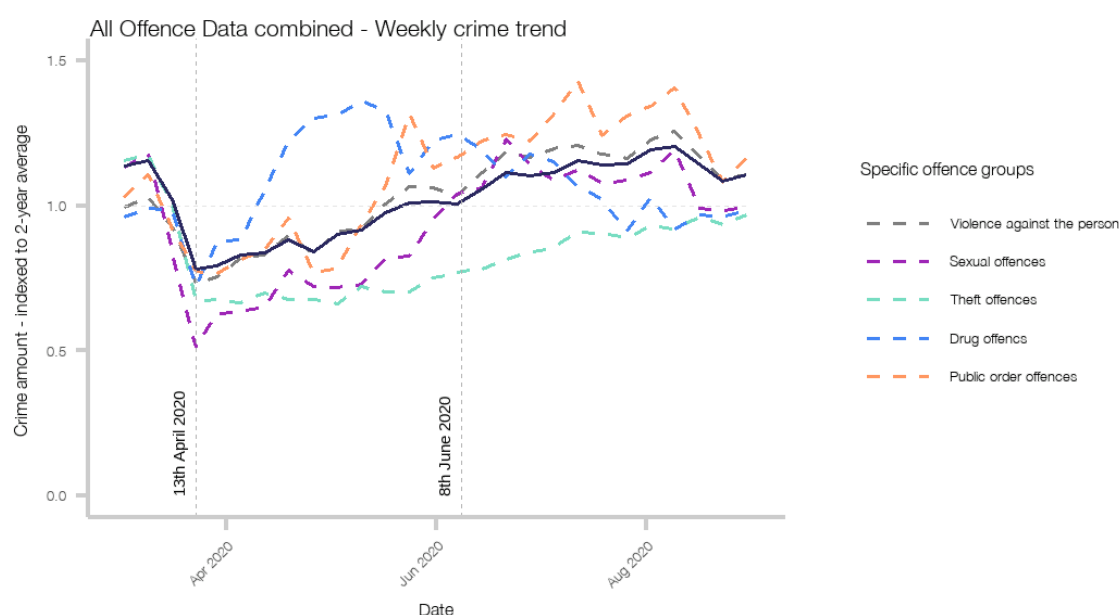
The rapid return to 'normal' (i.e. pre-pandemic) reported crime levels after lockdown 1 was also unevenly distributed across the different crime types. Drugs (+63%), violence (+29%), sexual offences (+55%), and public order (+27%) had the largest effect on the return of crime levels to 'normal'. Whereas, lower harm crimes like criminal damage (-22%) and theft (+5%) typically made up less contribution to the increase in overall crime levels.

Variation between offence types

Drugs offences

Drug offences were the only offence type that increased during the first lockdown (in all but one of our forces) and remained high throughout the pandemic. From the first national lockdown in March 2020 through to April 2021, the average weekly reported drug offences was 9 per cent higher than the same period in 2019.

All recorded drug offences for all 12 forces from March 2019 - March 2021, rolling 4 weekly crime trend

All drug offences combined - Rolling 4 weekly crime trend
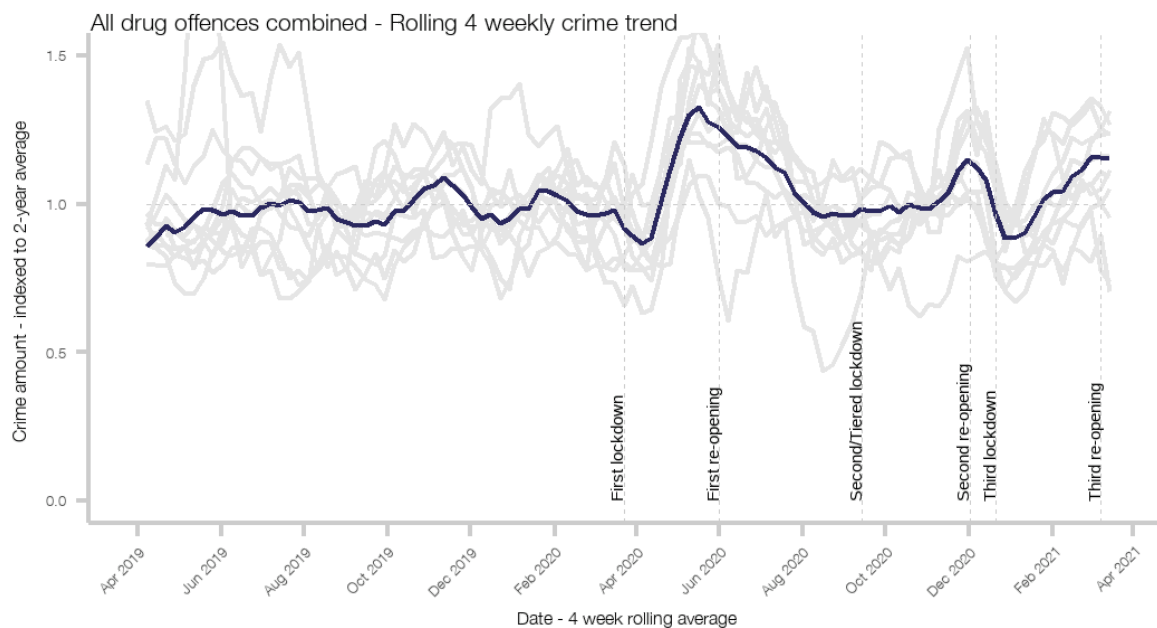
Around last summer, when reflecting on the experience of the first lockdown, stakeholders were optimistic about the impact the pandemic had and would continue to have on policing. There was a consistently articulated theory that the restrictions on gathering and movement had drastically reduced *reactive demand* on policing. In normal times, the majority of workload the police deal with involves responding to emergency calls for service. Under the usual pressures to provide this reactive response to such emergencies, it is often difficult to find the capacity to prioritise the proactive strategies needed to tackle more serious, complex, and / or hidden crimes. With reactive demand in decline, many stakeholders hoped that there would be more capacity for *proactive* policing, generating intelligence, furthering investigations, and interrogating leads. This was particularly expected to impact the policing of drug markets, as these cases often make up a substantial proportion of the open cases on an officer's desk. Indeed this 'Covid-19 dividend' in police demand, where maintained capacity met reduced reactive demand, was initially visible in the figures. This is one explanation for the above trend in drug offences during the pandemic which emerged in the workshops.

> "*The mode of policing changed slightly, probably officers had a little more time on their hands.*" - Police analyst - focus group participant

> "*In terms of drugs, I know that we did make that strategic and conscious decision early on that police officers must be visible in communities. And when demand was going down, we really did push hard in terms of the proactive work.*" - Police officer - focus group participant

Officers spoken to for this report unanimously agreed that the spike in drug offences was *not* primarily driven by detection of the most serious offences, such as trafficking, which typically happens due to proactive drug market policing, but rather by lower-level possession offences. There were also several interviewees who vocally disagreed with the concept of the 'Covid-19

dividend' driving drug offences, and argued that proactive policing of drug markets actually became more difficult during the pandemic.

> "There was certainly less proactive drug warrants being actioned at the time, in lockdowns in particular … we wouldn't be proactively going into all the people who we have the warrant for." - Police officer - focus group participant

Another, complementary explanation for the surge in drug offences during the pandemic was that drug dealers became easier to spot (and therefore catch). The restrictions on movement meant that most people were not in public spaces for the majority of the year, and those who were had no cover.

> "The runners were likely to be easier to identify because they can't blend in anymore. So we actually disrupted quite a few key drug markets" Police officer - focus group participant

Whilst this increased visibility is likely to have contributed to the observed spike in drug offences, particularly in the first lockdown, it would seem insufficient to explain the large and sustained increase we can see in the data. A complementary explanation, which emerged during our field research was the fact that our data might be picking up on one impact of policing the pandemic.

> "We were tasking officers to directly engage with members of the public around social distancing, so we were actively targeting people that weren't distancing in those areas, which are also some of the areas where there was a drug market. So we were coming into contact much more often with people with drugs and generating a lot of offences for possession" Police officer - focus group participant

In other words, the data on drugs offences was an indirect result of increased visibility as the police sought to enforce their new public health role rather than a reflection of a rise in proactive policing. In enforcing social distancing rules, officers increased contact with certain sections of the public, which in turn led to a spike in recorded lower level drug offences.

An understanding of who was committing these drug offences during the pandemic and where they were being recorded is an important piece of the puzzle. A report released by the Scottish Police Authority earlier this year found that Covid fines were more likely to be handed out in areas of higher deprivation, to poorer people, and that geographic distribution of Covid-19 interventions was almost identical to those for stop-and-search in 2019. In July 2020, the NPCC published data which showed that in England and Wales young, Black Asian and minority ethnic men were twice as likely to be fined under Covid legislation[24]. Such statistics will add to fears, frequently expressed over recent years, that increases in visible policing can disproportionately impact certain parts of the population.

The implications of this are twofold. First, the pandemic acted as a type of experiment in rapidly increasing policing visibility. This rise in visibility is likely to have boosted public reassurance but

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[24] https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/independent-analysis-of-coronavirus-fines-published

also had the effect of driving up lower-level drug offences. To understand the impact of this experiment, more work must be done to drill down into the drug offences category at a force level.

Second, the above discussion suggests that the optimistic view of a Covid-19 dividend was never really borne out, at least for drug offences. The remainder of our analysis suggests that this was due to the increased pressures of enforcing the Covid-19 legislation and navigating the new public health role for policing.

Public Order and anti-social behaviour

Another noticeable trend in the offence data was the rapid decline and resurgence of public order offences (those which involve violence, intimidation, or disorder in communal or public spheres). In the first lockdown, the volume of public order offences dropped, but not by much (-17% from the 11 weeks prior and only -6% from the same period in 2019). Then, in the period after the first reopening in summer 2020, public order offences jumped 52 per cent. Compared to the equivalent period in 2019, the 2020 summer reopening period saw 15 per cent higher rates of public order offences, despite unprecedented disruptions to the rules around indoor gatherings and the night time economy. Public order offences then remained notably higher than average until the time of the second national lockdown in December 2020.

All recorded public order offences for all 12 forces from March 2019 - March 2021, rolling 4 weekly crime trend
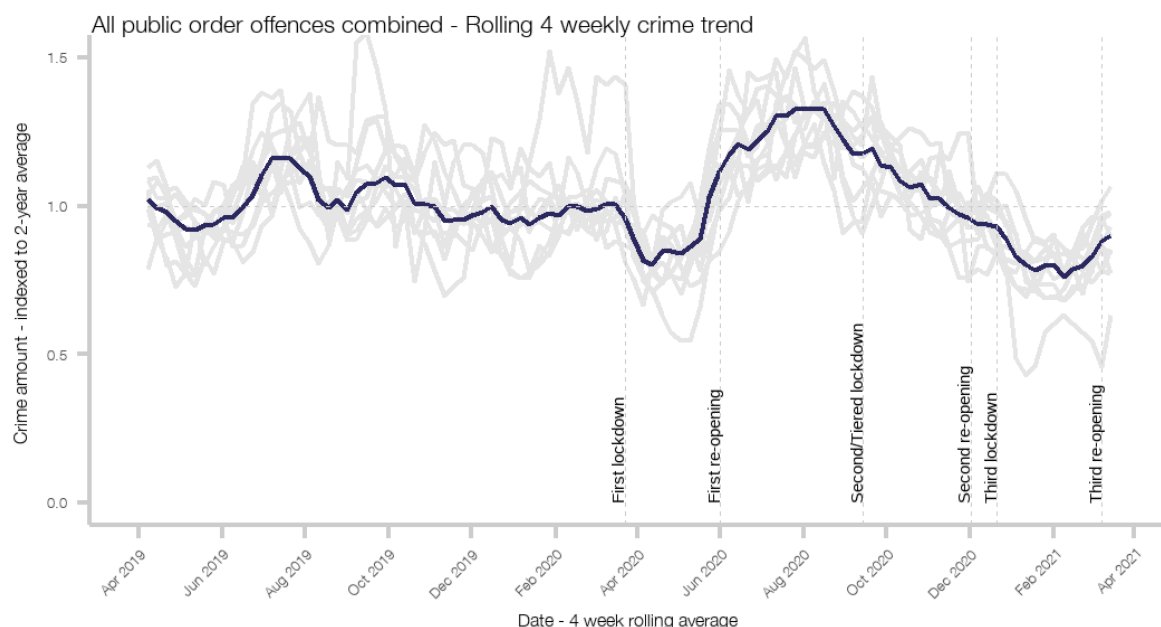
In the wake of an increase in public protests, notably including the Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion protests, one would expect an increase in public order offences. However, this sharp and sustained increase was observed not just in our urban forces, but practically all

of our 12 forces, many of which were in very rural areas, who experienced very low levels of protest activity. As above, it appears the trend is likely to be linked to the way the pandemic was policed.

We heard from officers that the rise in public order offences was likely a proxy for enforcement of new Covid rules. As a result of the pandemic, police forces were increasingly required to involve themselves in and make judgements on the social interactions of the public in an unprecedented way. It is likely that not all forces or officers felt sufficiently comfortable asserting their new role, and may have fallen back into older ways of working to police the pandemic.

> "*We did have an amount of protest activity in around the city, so there were some pockets of that, but the increase in ASB, particularly was the product of people using Covid-19 reporting as a reason for us to go round, which increases public orde*r" - Police officer - focus group participant

> "*So I think some of [the increase in public order offences] will be Covid-19 calls, but we've fallen back on the public order offences because that is usually what is used by officers in those sorts of calls. Officers are really comfortable using public order. They weren't very comfortable using the new Covid-19 legislation to act*" Police officer - focus group participant

As well as public order offences, another indication of the pandemic demand on policing which prevented them from capturing the Covid-19 dividend, was the pattern of anti-social behaviour *incidents*.

All recorded ASB incidents for all 12 forces from March 2019 - March 2021, rolling 4 weekly trend
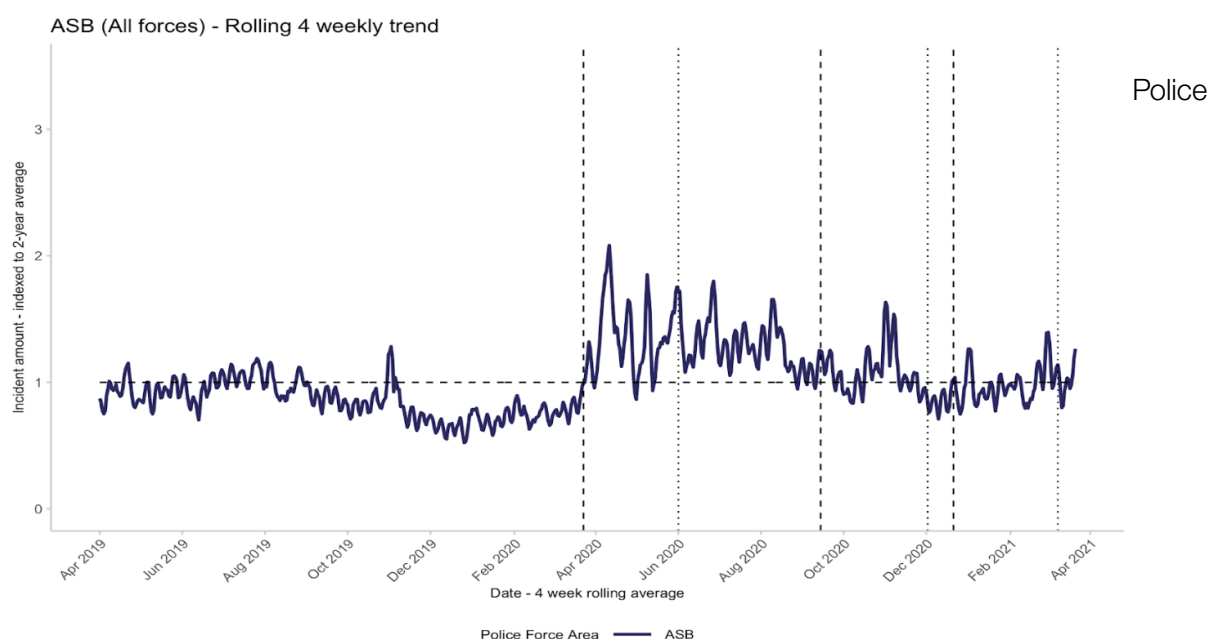
incidents, events recorded by the police in which an offence has not necessarily occurred or been detected, make up a considerable component of total demand on policing. During

'normal' times, ASB typically makes up 8-9 per cent of all incident demand, but during the pandemic period it rose to a peak of 17 per cent. Antisocial behaviour did not dip at all in lockdown 1, it reached a two year peak in week 3 of the pandemic (05/04) and then stayed high until the end of our data in March 2021, only really dipping to pre-pandemic levels around the time of the third lockdown in winter 2020.

Almost all of our interviewees suggested this change in ASB incidents was the strongest proxy in our data for the pandemic demand, and held that most Covid related incidents were being counted as ASB. However, this did not extend to all of our police partners, at least three forces stated that their Covid incidents were not being counted within ASB but in another incident category. What this means is that the above approximation may be close, but has not captured the real extent of the demand placed on policing to enforce their new public health role. The lack of clear national instructions to forces in terms of not just actualising their new role, but recording it, makes meaningful cross-force comparisons of the Covid-19 demand on police exceedingly difficult to achieve.

Theft offences

After the first lockdown, recorded theft offences in our 12 forces plummeted faster than any other offence type. Theft offences then remained considerably lower than the pre-pandemic period until the end of our data in March 2021.

All recorded theft offences for all 12 forces from March 2019 - March 2021, rolling 4 weekly crime trend

All theft offences combined - Rolling 4 weekly crime trend
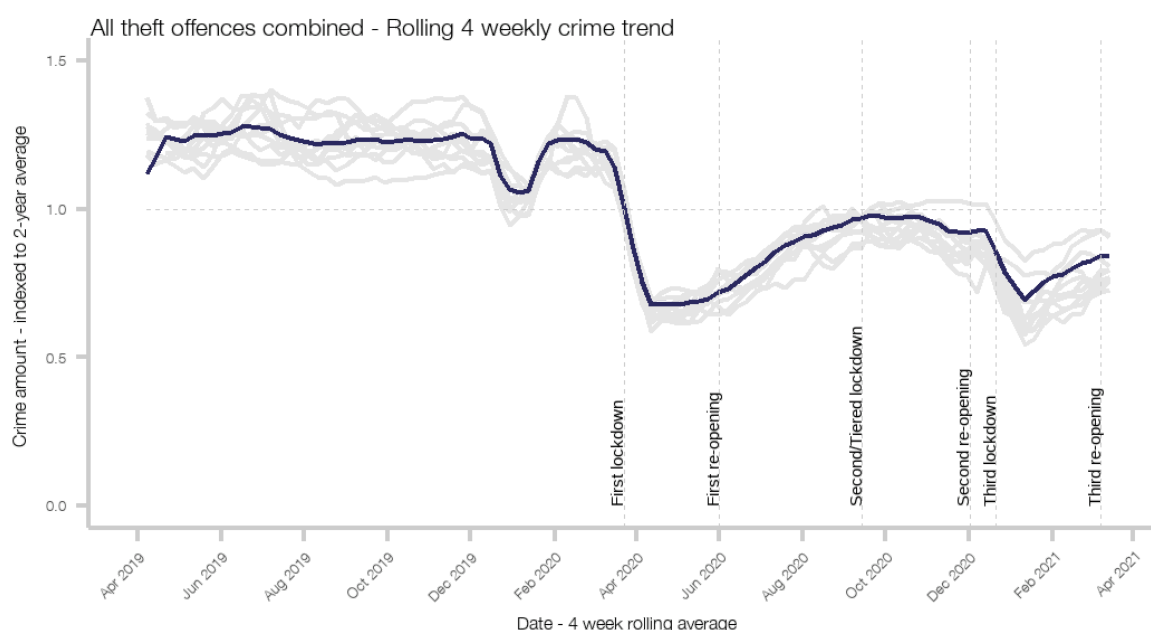
The driving force behind the initial drop in theft is not difficult to comprehend. A large proportion of theft offences are shoplifting offences, and most shops were shut in the lockdowns. But even after the 15th June 2020, when non-essential shops were reopened, we never really saw the return of theft offences to pre-pandemic levels.

> "*Theft reduction was driven by the reduction in shoplifting. So obviously, as shops were closed that explains that, but that hasn't quite got back to similar levels yet. And I put that down to the ongoing restrictions around retail generally, we've got a lot of people on the door now, counting people in and out of the stores and stuff like that.*" - Police analyst - focus group participant

Interestingly, this pattern of fewer theft offences was something that many interviewees raised, citing enhanced enforcement of social distancing rules by businesses rather than the police. So unlike the pattern observed in public order and drug offences, which reflected enhanced police activity, the decline in theft is likely to reflect enhanced business enforcement. The impact of shops hiring security staff, emboldening their current staff to challenge wrongdoing, and generally taking more interest in the people who shop there appears to have prevented theft offences by reducing real and perceived opportunity. Though the sustainability of this is open to question, it indicates the potential value of concerted crime prevention action on some offences.

Another implication of the above trend comes from the fact that whilst theft offences stayed low, the overall recorded crime level did return to pre-pandemic levels. Given that theft offences typically constitute a significant portion of all recorded crime, this means that after lockdown 1, the offence profile the police were dealing with qualitatively changed.

A shift in the offence profile away from relatively straightforward offences like theft has potential implications for the skills needed for this new landscape in the longer term, and the types of crime outcomes we can expect to see in the shorter term.

> "*For shoplifting outcomes, that's our highest outcome pre-pandemic, we've got a 50- 60 per cent positive outcomes [rate]. And now, stalking [and] harassment is now our number one crime type, which has a current positive outcome rate of like 1 per cent... in terms of outcomes, this all just takes your overall numbers down massively*." Police analyst - focus group participant

Violent offences

Among our 12 forces, violence against the person offences dropped 20 per cent during the first lockdown relative to the previous period (Jan-March 2020). But, by mid-June and the summer reopening, violence offences had surpassed pre-pandemic figures, and then continued to stay high until the second lockdown at the end of October.

All recorded violence against the person offences for all 12 forces from March 2019 - March 2021, rolling 4 weekly crime trend

All violence offences combined - Rolling 4 weekly crime trend
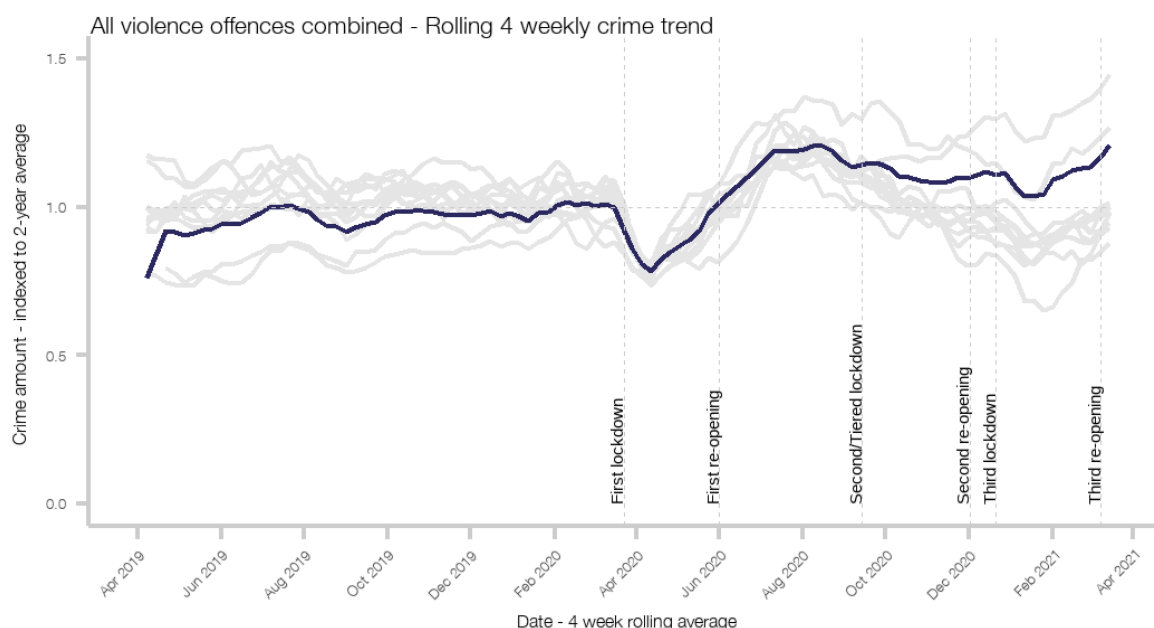
The 12 force trend shows how influential lockdowns were on violence against the person offences, presumably both their occurrence and their detection. This is intuitive; violence against the person is a broad category that encompasses relatively minor offences like common assault all the way up to murder and manslaughter. This means that a large portion of violence offences in most forces are likely to be driven by minor skirmishes which occur in places of public gathering, which were of course empty during the lockdowns.

However, one of the largest growth areas in violence offences are those which occur in the home. By the time of the first lockdown in March 2020, just over one-third (35%) of all violence against the person offences in England and Wales were domestic abuse related[25]. This continues a steady upward trend over the last five years in line with better awareness and reporting practices. When the UK first went into lockdown, experts warned that a drastic increase of domestic abuse was a significant risk.

By looking specifically at domestic-abuse flagged crime in the data from our 12 force partners, we found that in every period of the pandemic under study, there were more domestic abuse offences than the same period in 2019. However, the difference was not as dramatic as some experts had predicted and most forces were only recording small increases.

> *"While there was a reopening after the lockdown, some of those organisations that we rely upon to do third party safeguarding and engagement, kind of the gatekeeping in terms of providing support for those perennial repeat victims, were not necessarily as well-established and up and running. So that meant we saw far less [domestic abuse] reporting."* - Police officer - focus group participant

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[25] ONS, Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2020 [accessed November 22nd 2021]. Available at:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020

Officers and senior police stakeholders told us they found the absence of a surge in domestic abuse demand during the first lockdown unsurprising. Most mentioned the lack of outreach and the retreat of the third-sector as factors preventing a surge in reporting. However, although there was no surge, our 12 forces were still recording higher numbers of domestic abuse-flagged crimes during the lockdowns relative to the previous years. And, notably, they were reporting steep increases of domestic abuse offences during periods of reopening - mirroring the overall trend in violence offences and demonstrating the dampening impact lockdowns had on reporting. In other words, lockdown appears more likely to have suppressed the reporting of domestic abuse rather than such offending itself.

As discussed, the long-term upward trend in police recorded domestic abuse offences will be driving some of the figures during the pandemic. Another external driver which was mentioned in our interviews is the new national recording requirements (April 2020) which expanded the category of stalking and harassment to include controlling and coercing offences. This is combined with the general trend toward recognising and recording more stalking and harassment offences after changes to the category in 2018.

> "*If you look particularly at stalking, which is obviously a crime that falls under the violence category, that absolutely skyrocketed for us from April last year*" Police analyst - focus group participant

So, whilst the evidence suggests there were sustained increases in domestic abuse and stalking and harassment offences during the pandemic, it is likely that our data is also reflecting a macro-level trend. However, the observed dampening impact of the lockdowns and the small spikes in post-lockdown reporting does potentially show the reliance of domestic abuse policing on reporting through charities and other third parties.

Unlike theft or public order, public visibility of policing is unlikely to generate more recorded domestic abuse or stalking and harassment offences. Visibility in the private sphere requires a totally new set of skills, approaches, and partnerships. It can't be the byproduct of overall visibility (like drug offences) and needs to be targeted specifically toward tackling domestic abuse and/or stalking and harassment. To add another layer of complexity, another macro trend accelerated by the pandemic our analysis picked up on is the role of online abuse, stalking, and harassment.

> "*We've got an increasing amount of cyber-enabled domestic abuse offences with the malicious comms element; this was prominent prior to the [pandemic] period. And whilst there was some small dampening [during the pandemic], that has continued and even increased*" - Police officer - focus group participant

In two of the three of our workshops with our partner forces, online stalking and harassment was mentioned as a serious growth area exacerbated by the pandemic. Early on in the pandemic there were concerns that the abuse victims (primarily women) are subjected to by their ex-partners especially, would be transferred into the online sphere. And, further, with less

interpersonal interactions, coercion and controlling behaviour would be made considerably easier via control over a victim's access to technology.

> "*Violence that happened during the lockdown was less interpersonal than prior to the lockdown. We have got crimes like stalking and harassment that are non-physical, they're non-contact, they're happening online. Our ability to solve those is lower than our ability to solve an assault on the street, but they still count as violent crime. The same goes for any crime that was online at the time. And we've seen that increase in online crime, because that's the way that the offenders could operate. And so crimes that previously would have been committed face to face, or certainly in the physical vicinity of each other, were happening online. And they're just much harder to solve*" - Police analyst - focus group participant

As the above quote suggests, the skills needed to investigate online or technologically enabled abuse are very different to more traditional offences, and this has the potential to impact on investigatory outcomes. To keep up with this new demand, traditional policing must evolve. Training needs to stay ahead of an ever-changing landscape of available apps and technologies which each have subtleties of communication and access pivotal to understanding the abuse. Investigations will need to be conducted almost entirely behind a desk rather than in the field to comprehend the massive amount of data tech-enabled abuse can produce.

Looking forward, there may well be opportunities to harness recent investments in technology (necessitated by the pandemic) to improve investigation of crime more broadly.

Fraud and cyber crime

Fraud and cyber crime offences are under-represented in local police data because many remain hidden due to widespread under-reporting by victims. Furthermore, they are absent from local police data because crime recording for fraud and computer misuse crime has been centralised into a single national hub in the City of London Police, responsible for Action Fraud and the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales gives a more accurate picture of some offence types because it captures all crimes that are experienced by the public, not just those reported to the police. A comparison of crime experienced in 2019-20 and 2020-21[26] reveals patterns that mirror the wide scale reductions seen in some recorded crimes, however the increases in fraud and computer misuse crime were described to *'more than offset the reductions seen for other types of crime'* (ONS, 2021). Crime experienced by the public actually showed an overall increase due to a 43 per cent rise in fraud and computer misuse crime.

There were also increases in fraud and computer misuse crime recorded by the City of London Police during the pandemic period, rising seven per cent from nearly 775,000 offences to just over 828,000. This includes crimes reported by the public and the finance sector (Cifas and UK

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[26] The period of comparison was July 2019 to June 2020 and July 2020 to June 2021.

Finance). There was a particularly sharp rise in fraud reported by the public directly to Action Fraud which was 27 per cent higher than in the previous year (rising from 338,000 to over 428,000 offences).

Police recorded crime in April 2019 to March 2020 and April 2020 and March 2021[27]
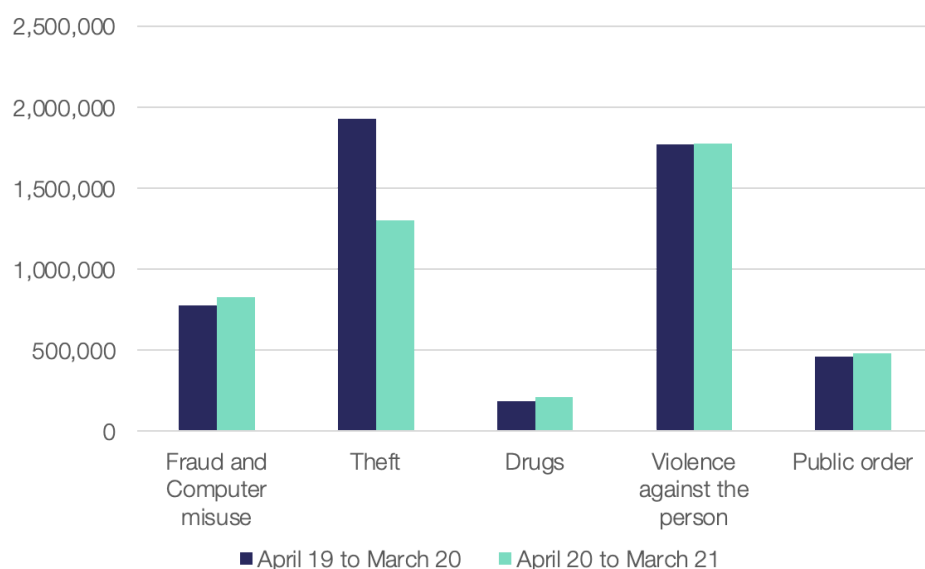
Fraud offenders exploited the conditions and markets that arose during the pandemic (for example, the supply of counterfeit Personal Protective Equipment), and many took advantage of the greater volume of prospective targets on the internet (Europol, 2020a). In an internal assessment, the NCA described increases in high harm categories of fraud including investment (increase of 29%), romance (increase of 42%) and courier fraud (increase of 38%) between March and July 2020. They also reported higher volumes of ransomware attacks targeting organisations.

The increase in home-working and the use of online technology to manage work and many other aspects of life enlarged the attack surface for cyber crime offenders (Europol, 2020b). And another crime-type affected by these conditions was online child sexual abuse (CSA). This includes offenders who view or share indecent images of children and those who groom and exploit children and young people online. The concern in the NCA was that the restriction of opportunities to perpetrate offline abuse would displace motivated offenders to offending in online spaces, and more time online across the whole population heightened the risk that more individuals would be drawn into offending (particularly, viewing indecent images of children). Furthermore, the simultaneous surge in the volume of children and young people in online spaces increased vulnerability to online grooming and exploitation, and the risk of children otherwise sharing self-generated sexual images online (Europol, 2020c).

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[27] ONS, Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables 2021. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesappendixtables. [Accessed December 7th 2021]

During the pandemic period the volume of recorded online CSA increased, which is a continuation of a trend seen over a number of years; the volume of Obscene Publications offences (predominantly comprised of indecent image of children offences) had risen 18 per cent when compared with the previous year (April 2019 to March 2020) and there was a small 3 per cent rise in the volume of sexual grooming offences (comprised largely of online grooming.)[28]

However, much of online CSA offending is hidden, and the identification of these crimes is contingent on proactive measures in the technology sector (such as social media companies), frontline support services and law enforcement. The effect of the pandemic restrictions was to reduce opportunities to proactively identify these crimes. For example, the volume of recorded grooming or exploitation offences was likely inhibited by the reduced contact between children and professionals in education and support services during lockdown periods. The NCA also reported a reduced capacity in companies and bodies in the technology industry to generate and moderate intelligence on indecent images of children offences.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Covid dividend was extremely short-lived, if experienced at all

The data from our 12 forces suggests that the drop in recorded crime experienced in lockdown 1 provided limited opportunities for proactive policing as the public health demand took over. There were some gains made in the time taken to reach an outcome for a recorded crime, which dropped substantially during lockdown 1, but this then increased beyond pre-pandemic levels very soon after. The fact that a drastic reduction in recorded offences did not lead to a fall in demand attests to the well-established fact that most of the reactive demand on policing is not directly related to recorded crime. Whilst this is an often repeated statement, the data required to measure this demand, police *incident* data (rather than crime data), is so unreliable and inconsistently recorded that a 12 force comparison for this research was practically impossible. As the non-crime demand continues to grow, so will an appetite for measuring it and comparing the demand nationally.

Recommendation: The Home Office should require all forces to standardise police incident data collection and reporting.

The pandemic sped up and made clearer a broader shift in crime demand

The patterns of crime during the pandemic which have emerged in our analysis speak to a broader change in the composition of demand on policing. In most instances, the pandemic has only acted to accelerate or emphasise the existing trajectory. Through drastic changes to the opportunity structures available to (potential) offenders, the pandemic has made very visible the move away from traditional acquisitive crime, toward those which occur behind closed doors, involve vulnerable victims and are intrinsically more complex. Combined with the rise of

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[28] Data retrieved from:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesappendixtables - accessed 07.12.2021

technologically enabled abuse and cyber-crime, this raises questions around whether the composition of capabilities and resources in the police workforce are adequately configured to this new demand landscape.

Recommendation: the College of Policing should take on a workforce planning function on behalf of the police service. It should assess what the future workforce needs are likely to be and should require forces to develop recruitment and training plans to meet identified gaps.

There is a tension between the resources and capabilities needed to address those high-harm growth areas of policing demand, which increasingly occur outside of the public sphere, and the additional manpower required to provide the more visible presence the public frequently wants. The story of drug offences during the pandemic is a clear example of how additional visible manpower is unlikely to generate the results needed to disrupt a complex and increasingly online market. Whilst the public order offences showed us the result of a new approach which had not yet been accepted and socialised to all ranks (understandably, given the circumstances).

Recommendation: Police and crime commissioners ought to involve the public in a conversation about the prioritisation of finite resources. They should stimulate this conversation by producing an annual public-facing report which shows the demand, their activities and available resources during that period. The conversation should be supported by in depth deliberative work with members of the public, such as through citizens' juries or citizens' assemblies.

Rising crime isn't inevitable

The lockdown provided an experiment of sorts around the potential for changes in the physical, social and economic environment to drive down crime rates. The evident reduction in crime supports established crime theory, which posits that crime is principally the product of motivated offenders coming into contact with suitable targets (or opportunities) in their local environment. Our workshop participants thought that the continued reductions in theft offences were the product of changes in guardianship in the retail sector – for example, the increase in the number of security officers to ensure customers adhere to the Covid rules. What this suggests is that, whilst the lockdown placed extreme and undesirable restrictions on our liberty, it showed that some crime is not inevitable. Theft offences, specifically shoplifting can be prevented (and seemingly not displaced) by influences outside conventional policing activity. This raises important questions about the prominence of crime prevention as part of the country's strategy for promoting public safety.

Recommendation: The Home Office should commission research exploring the crime prevention lessons to be learned from the experience of the pandemic. They should use this analysis as a launch pad for a more systemic cross government approach to crime prevention.

Chapter 3: The effectiveness of the police's response

Key findings

- Central coordination of a national response to the pandemic was essential and proved effective in areas such as securing PPE, working with government and issuing guidance to forces

- The '4Es' approach was credited by frontline officers with helping them maintain relationships with communities while securing compliance with changing Covid-19 regulations

- Policing demonstrated resilience in continuing to provide core services and stepping into gaps left by other agencies during lockdowns

- There were limited gains in productivity through use of technology to provide a basis for agile-working in the future

Policing was a key tool for the government in controlling the spread of Covid-19. While ministers asked the public to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives, it was the 43 forces in England and Wales which ultimately had to compel people to do so if they chose not to heed the message. Policing had also to ensure it was able to function through a pandemic and that it discharged its responsibilities to its officers and staff to protect their health from the virus. This chapter sets out how policing responded to the unprecedented organisational and operational challenge it faced in March 2020.

Coordinating a consistent national response

Policing in England and Wales is based on a localised model in which 92 per cent of police funding is channelled through 43 Police and Crime Commissioners (or equivalents). PCCs set the local strategic priorities for their forces, based on their interpretation of local voters' priorities and concerns.

However, it was clear from very early on that the pandemic was going to require greater national coordination of police effort from the centre. There was little preparedness on the ground for a crisis of this sort. For example, there was little access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or the right technology to be able to operate remotely.[29] Forces needed support to enable them to respond quickly to a changing threat, to be able to understand and enforce rapidly changing legislation and to ensure there was no erosion of frontline services due to sickness absence.

The National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC) was established in 2013 following the 2011 summer riots to ensure a more effective mobilisation of mutual aid and coordination of

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[29] Davies et al, 2020

resources across the country. It has few operational resources nor formal powers of its own, but through Operation Talla NPoCC (based in the NPCC) became the main interface between government and the rest of the police service during the pandemic.

This was done using an established Gold/Silver/Bronze command structure to streamline the process of sharing information and decisions through the different layers of policing. NPoCC (Gold) supported by a partnership between the NPCC and the College of Policing gave strategic direction to local leaders responsible for more tactical decisions (Silver), who in turn, fed down to the operational teams (Bronze) responsible for delivering frontline services. The same command structure was adopted within local police forces, responding in turn to national decision making.

Police leaders spoken to for this report viewed national coordination as a success story.

> "*When you work in the middle of policing, there are 43 forces in England and Wales. And sometimes to implement anything you have to win 43 different arguments, it can be torture. And what this crisis has allowed us to do is to get through some of that, and the compromise has had to be on both parts to say to chiefs 'look, we all know you want your own thing, but actually, this is what's going to happen'.*" National senior police leader

The central role that NPoCC played through the pandemic suggests the potential for a degree of greater national coordination, in areas such as analytics, communications and procurement. Central coordination of these functions during the pandemic had considerable benefits in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and being able to ensure consistency in the interpretation and implementation of the regulations.

Data-sharing

Early on in the pandemic, NPoCC established data-sharing protocols with all 43 police forces. Data was collated on a daily or weekly basis and included information on workforce (including absence rates), recorded crime, local protest activities and enforcement activity in relation to the Covid restrictions.

There was particular concern that police forces and local public services might be incapacitated by the virus, and thus it was considered critical that the national data centre facilitated real-time monitoring, enabling NPoCC to quickly detect situations in which capacity issues threatened local delivery of core statutory functions, such as 999 calls, firearms response, major incident rooms, public order response, serious crime response and custody functions.

The rapid development of a centralised system for generating management information was a considerable undertaking by NPoCC. It facilitated national strategic decisions and coordination and helped produce more robust and cohesive data-sets and potentially improved data-capture in local police forces.

> "*So initially it was a bit lumpy because they [forces] weren't used to doing it. And because we were asking for it seven days a week, then they needed to gear up capabilities to do that. I'd say probably took us about two, three weeks, but we*

got to a point where it was consistent, reliable data, and we've got a complete data set. They could see the value of it. And I think it's helped them to look at their own absence recording in a different way as well." National Police Coordination Lead

The information requirement initially placed an extra burden on local forces, but soon the systems for channelling data from local police forces to the NPCC and the government became embedded and were heralded a success by national police stakeholders. This data hub facilitated evidence-informed strategic coordination in managing a problem that was national in scope, and presented a template that might be applied in the future.

> "*So as much as we understand things like crime at a national level, the only reason we do it is through a fairly convoluted approach of capturing data after the event … there is no real national datasets around crime or incident recording or anything else. So wherever we've needed data, we've had to engineer a process to come up with that… there is a fairly clear and compelling need … for us to think long and hard about how we could capture data [at the] national level around a number of things.*" National Police Coordination Lead

Sourcing PPE

In the early stages of the pandemic there were challenges in sourcing sufficient volumes of PPE for police personnel, partly as a result of faltering supply lines from the Department of Health and Social Care. NPoCC was able to adapt and establish their own procurement supply chain for PPE. This was done using Blue Light Commercial, which is jointly owned by all PCCs, to act as a central procurement hub for supplying PPE to-order for each police force. It provided a streamlined approach to ensure a consistent supply of PPE that matched the needs of individual police forces. Moreover, it possessed a 'commercial power in the market place' to ensure fair and cost-effective procurement that would have been difficult to emulate in a single police force.[30]

> "*We ended up setting up our own PPE supply process, because the Department of Health one was in chaos, and we set our own one up and we created a national supply chain around policing for PPE for our people.*" National Police Stakeholder

> "*We have never been at a point where we ran out of stock of anything. And we are now in a position and have been for some time, where we've got sufficient national stock, we understand it in granular detail. We track it daily. We know exactly what exists in which for some of these items, and we've got forward orders in place, and we were broadly planning out for the next 12 weeks at any given point …*" National Senior Police leader

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[30] Duckworth, 2021

The public health regulations created extraordinary enforcement powers for the police. National data collection enabled police to monitor the number of penalties being issued and their distribution geographically and across social groups. National data allowed comparative analysis across different police force areas, providing a means to understand discrepancies, though the mechanism for acting on such discrepancies was less clear. For example, national statistics revealed disproportionate numbers of penalties issued to individuals from minority ethnic groups during the first year of the pandemic, but it is not clear how or whether this information was then used to guide decision-making.[31]

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, there was a high degree of transparency in the use of enforcement powers by the English, Welsh and Scottish police compared to police organisations in other European countries. The systematic national collection and publication of enforcement data was the main reason for this.

Consistency in the implementation of the regulations

As the pandemic progressed, the imperative to drive down infection rates led to greater demands from central government for tougher enforcement of the restrictions.[32] Policing leaders were conscious of the need to deliver on the government's priorities, while upholding the principle of operational independence. Martin Hewitt, chair of the NPCC, told the London Policing College:

> *"We have had to assert our independence about the way that we will do what we do, while at the same time playing a really full role to help the country fight the pandemic."*

The adoption of the '4 Es' approach (outlined in Chapter 1) illustrated the commitment of the police service to maintaining good community relations. The emphasis on engagement was thought by many interviewees to have strengthened levels of public support for policing. It set the tone for a national approach which would use enforcement powers as a last resort and gave a clear steer for officers in policing the Covid-19 restrictions. It balanced the necessity of implementing new restrictive measures with maintaining an established consent-based approach that was founded on public support and voluntary compliance.

> *"I think the only thing that was clear from the force all along was the 4 Es. And everything else … has not been clear or was changed along the way."* Police officer, focus group participant

Maintaining consistency in the face of rapidly changing regulations was a continual problem for the police and one that was experienced by police agencies across the globe.[33] One

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[31] NPCC, 2020

[32] For example see - https://news.sky.com/story/Covid-19-19-lockdown-rules-not-boundaries-to-be-pushed-against-as-minister-admits-to-supermarkets-concern-12184783. [Accessed September 29th 2021]

[33] Maskály et al, 2021

Committee of MPs lamented the fact that the police were required to respond to regulations which, in just over a year, had changed at least 65 times.[34] It created an unprecedented situation in which the police needed to formulate guidance retrospectively, once legislation had already been introduced .[35]

> *"I think it has been a huge headache…we will get something at last minute notice. If it will just come out in the media, we might not even know about it. And if we're lucky we might get 24 hours notice or we'll get some indication, but we then need to translate that and get through the whole legal sign-off [procedures], then out to forces to enable them to then actually put things into practice."* National Senior Police leader

In our survey of police superintendents in England and Wales, the greatest challenge during the crisis was considered to have been interpreting and implementing the legislation, policies, and guidance for managing the Covid restrictions (see chart below). This included keeping pace with the changes to policies and regulations (73%), interpreting and applying national guidance (56%) and ensuring clear and consistent enforcement on the ground (51%)[36].

Despite these challenges, 71 per cent of respondents said guidance from the NPCC and College of Policing was clear, and 85 per cent said the corporate communications team or leadership team in their force had been effective in disseminating information or guidance. Some police forces had established a dedicated Covid-19 compliance function to help swiftly interpret and implement new legislation, guidance and regulations.

> *"… we had a sort of a cell at the centre, that digested everything that was coming out of the NPCC … or the College of Policing. And there was a plethora of stuff that was coming out on a daily basis from government, and that cell really was distilling it, making sure we were getting the messages right out to our staff here."*
> - National policing stakeholder

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[34] Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2021
[35] Nickson et al, 2020
[36] Other prominent challenges were managing social distancing within the workforce (62%, n=45) and to a lesser extent, acquiring the required protective equipment (36%, n=26).

The most significant challenges for police during the pandemic

Challenge	Percentage
Keeping pace with changes in policy and regulations	~73%
Managing social distancing within the workforce	~62%
Interpreting and applying national guidance	~56%
Clear and consistent enforcement of the COVID legislation	~51%
Consistent approach to policing the restrictions across the police force	~38%
Acquiring PPE and/or COVID related equipment	~36%
Reconfiguring staff and resource to meet the changing demands during the crisis	~19%
Maintaining a positive relationship with the public	~15%
Coordinating the response with partner organisations	~15%
Insufficient capacity in the workforce	~12%
Staff absence	~11%
Managing high levels of non-compliance in the public	~9%

The speed with which policy and regulations were changed led to confusion amongst frontline officers. This in turn contributed to inconsistency in enforcement, with potentially serious implications for public trust and legitimacy in the police.[37] It also created a barrier to effective service delivery, as illustrated by frontline officers in our focus groups who reported a lack of confidence in their knowledge of the law, and concerns that their authority with the local public might be undermined.

> *"Your general members of the public, when they come up to me asking questions, I just felt like I didn't even know the answer. You know, the majority of the time I just Google it, find out what the restrictions were. How bad is that? The fact of they're coming to me as a police officer expecting me to know the answer and I haven't got a clue… because there's so many mixed messages internally and externally."* Frontline police officer

The experience of communications from local management varied between police forces. Some frontline officers described adequate briefing from senior leaders and having access to up-to-date and easily digestible information on the regulations. Others described internal communications that were 'chaotic and inconsistent' and feeling overwhelmed by the high volume of information.

Encouraging compliance with the rules at a local level

Each police force managed the demands of implementing the Covid rules differently. It was particularly hard to achieve consistency in the early stages of the first lockdown, before the NPCC and College of Policing had issued national guidance, with some police forces

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[37] Roberts et al, 2021

demonstrably more stringent than others in enforcing the restrictions. This variation was evident in the volume of penalties issued in the different police forces.

> *"I think there's a fairly compelling argument to say [the Covid restrictions] haven't been consistently operationalised across forces because you're seeing starkly different levels of enforcement."* Senior policing stakeholder

In interviews, police stakeholders described the following three overarching police strategies for managing the Covid restrictions in their communities: community policing, response policing and proactive policing.

Community policing

Visible police patrols and engagement with communities provided a means to foster public compliance. In a number of force areas, officers were asked to work longer hours over extended periods to offset staff absences elsewhere. Some areas had designated teams to patrol and respond to Covid incidents, but many also drew on their established neighbourhood teams, steering them to focus on Covid policing so as to capitalise on established relationships in local communities.

> *"We basically allocated our normal dedicated neighbourhood teams, took them out of normal day to day business, as it were, and said you will concentrate as our first response to…Covid. So that was trying to get into, you know, using links already within communities to try and get that engagement before we had to enforce…So our focus was on our local sort of cops and PCSOs, trying to work with communities and partners to get that compliance."* Senior police stakeholder

> *"So I spent quite a lot of time out on the beach, [members of the public were] talking to me quite a lot. And at the very beginning, there were a lot of people asking for advice in very particular circumstances."* Police Officer, focus group participant

The purpose of visible patrol was less about the detection and enforcement against breaches and more to provide a visible cue to deter rule-breaking or a 'nudge', to encourage compliance by providing a sense of supervision and oversight.

> *"So the visibility was more just to encourage folks to be sensible, do the right thing, protect each other and take a common sense approach. So it wasn't about hard-line enforcement, it was more that gentle nudge and reassurance, as well as a bit of encouragement to be sensible."* Senior Policing Stakeholder

Response policing

A high volume of calls were received involving reported breaches of the pandemic restrictions, many involving neighbours or others living in close proximity to one another. Public motivations to report included civic duty, concerns for the health risks or a sense of unfairness when

observing others flout the rules, but in some cases the experience of nuisance and anti-social behaviour bred tensions between neighbours confined to their homes for prolonged periods of time.

> *"They had just started doing a get-together with loads of their friends every Friday night. And then they started doing it one or two nights in the week because they weren't working, but other people were, obviously. And it was like three o'clock in the morning, and you couldn't sleep. And the noise was horrendous. And there were a lot of people there. They [the police] never came out, ever [after calling them]."* Public focus group participant

Some practitioners described frequently attending calls-for-service that pertained to long-running disputes between neighbours.

> *"… the amount of neighbour dispute logs that we had that started to flood in, they just went through the roof, that's one of the crime types that I noticed started to go up significantly."* Police officer, focus groups participant

The task of policing the Covid-19 restrictions to protect public health, which encroached on so many aspects of everyday life, became enmeshed with order maintenance policing to tackle nuisance, ASB and protest activity, some of which resulted from the Covid-19 restrictions themselves.

In the period following the first lockdown, in which officers described an overall reduction in the levels of public compliance, some forces took a more targeted approach to deploying resources using criteria such as the number of people involved in an incident. This reflected a perceived need to focus on the most explicit breaches that posed the greatest health risk; such as protest activity or illegal raves.

> *"… since the new year there's been a heavier swing towards enforcement than previously and by that you see a lot more of attending jobs where there's believed to be house parties or more than six people within an address and this sort of stuff … That's largely the Covid-19 demand for us is the house parties and people breaching the conditions that way …"* Police officer, focus group participant

> *"[We had a] mobile group of officers, able to move around the force and deal with sort of larger gatherings or more blatant breaches, because certainly my stance was to deal with that flagrant breach. I looked at what the science was telling me and so I felt like the most effective way was to concentrate on large gatherings of people meeting rather than on [breaches related to travel]."* Local police leader

Practitioners in other force areas indicated that police intervention was more reactive and arbitrarily dictated by reports received from the public or by breaches observed whilst undertaking other police duties.

> *"I think initially there was some people taking it upon themselves, officers, to almost create road stops and pulling people in and asking their reasons for travel and things like that and I think things like that quickly changed to maybe that's not necessarily an appropriate way of doing it and then we generally responded to the jobs that came in".* Police officer, focus group participant

Some police forces adopted surveillance or disruption tactics as a proactive means to identify, address, and deter non-compliance, particularly those who were in breach of restrictions on movement. Examples include the use of ANPR to look for vehicles travelling from outside the area, concentrating police presence[38] or otherwise blockading[39] visitors from accessing identified hot spots (such as beaches).

> *'[In several rural police forces] they have proactively put cops out on major arterial roads into the counties … run ANPR checks. Is it a local car? Yes, fine. If it's not, right, why are you here?'* Senior police stakeholder

The reasons for using these more proactive measures included the identified concerns of some communities over the rates of Covid-19 infection and related to this, specific situational risks (such as people visiting from outside the area), and the relative resilience of public services in these areas to cope in the event of a rise in infections.

> *'[One police force was] seeing on a regular basis, lots of traffic coming in from outside the force area … throughout people [were] wild camping which was clearly breaking the rules ... And that was driving the anxiety of the local population [that] from a relatively early stage was an area that also had been cited as having a slightly higher contagion …that was undoubtedly affecting their strategic decisions at force level and their tactical deployments.'* Senior police stakeholder

Maintaining core policing services during a national crisis

In Chapter 2, we discussed the changed demand profile during the pandemic and showed that the fall in reported crime was short-lived alongside a surge in Covid-related demand. In this context, the police needed to maintain core services and functionality, doing so whilst ensuring frontline personnel and the public were protected from infection, and managing fluctuating absence rates in the workforce due to illness or other protective requirements (for example, to self-isolate).

Police officers and staff were not impervious to the widespread uncertainty and anxiety surrounding the risk of Covid infection, especially personnel involved in frontline service delivery whose role necessitated face-to-face contact with members of the public. In the UK, 89 police officers were reported to have died due to Covid infection by the end of 2020, three quarters of whom were aged over 65.[40]

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[38] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-56236447 - 27.09.2021
[39] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-56229815 - accessed 27.09.2021
[40] ONS, 2021

From the beginning of the first lockdown there was a requirement to develop protocols and supply protective equipment to limit the risk of infection in the workforce, and to give frontline officers the confidence to conduct their duties safely. Many senior practitioners in local police forces reported that the initial delays in the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), were quickly resolved, but with some variation. For example, officers in one area reported inadequate provision for up to 12 months.

There was uncertainty on the appropriate use of PPE, especially when engaging with the community, because face masks impacted on both communication and public image, with some concerns it would make the police appear 'oppressive' and fuel public feelings of unsafety or 'panic'.

> "They all have the equipment [PPE] with them all the time. But ultimately, like any other piece of equipment that police officers have, they would make … [a] risk based decision on whether they needed to be wearing it because we didn't want to get to all the cops walking around all the time with masks on and gloves on and all the rest of it". National police stakeholder

Health and safety guidance was not available at the outset, meaning local managers were left to apply their own discretion, leading to variation in the content and clarity of policies in different police forces. Inconsistent guidance on the use of PPE across blue light services reduced confidence and feelings of safety among frontline officers. While most superintendents in our survey (91%) felt that the leadership in their police force had been at least fairly effective at disseminating information and guidance to the workforce[41], some reported feeling anxious about the inconsistent messaging over the use of PPE. While some forces had clear guidance on when they should wear them, in others, officers reported being directed not to wear them because of concern about how they would look.

Frontline officers were keenly aware of the risks. But the practicalities in following the principles of social distancing and self-isolation (following exposure to someone who is infected) seemed incompatible with a police role that involves day-to-day exposure to members of the public, not to mention colleagues who are themselves exposed in their daily duties. For example, a team in one police force was told not to self-isolate following a "full on face-to-face contact" with someone suspected to be infected with Covid, and others were "scared" because they were having to share computers with potentially infected colleagues.

In our survey, respondents described "widespread anxiety due to policing the unknown" and uncertainty on what protective measures to take to minimise the risk. The concerns were not just for their own personal safety but also family members, particularly where there was a risk of exposing someone vulnerable at home. Added to this, there was uncertainty over when and for whom protective measures such as shielding or self-isolation should be necessary.

> 'Some staff were in a state of 'concealed' panic which was uncovered through dialogue. Visible leadership was key to providing reassurance.' Superintendents survey respondent

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[41] See survey for note on missing data to explain the %

> *'Generally, concerns about how to stay safe at work and the practical application of the workplace guidance i.e. how to stay socially distanced in a contact centre or patrol car environment.'* Superintendents survey respondent

Managing with limited capacity

At the start of the pandemic, there were serious concerns among police leaders that sickness would drastically reduce capacity among officers and staff. While these fears were never realised, staff absences and stretched capacity were constant concerns for some frontline practitioners in our focus groups, who needed to take on extra work if a colleague was absent. There were multiple reasons for Covid-related absence, ranging from staff sickness, staff caring for relatives who were sick, having to self-isolate following contact with an infected individual, and those required to shield due to an underlying health condition. These were outside of police control and put services under significant strain. This was illustrated during the so-called 'pingdemic' in which many police staff were forced to self-isolate due to rising infection rates and rigorous public health track-and-trace controls.[42]

> *'Concerns amongst staff about picking up infection, the number of staff that had to shield in the first wave and now in the second wave managing an increasing number of positive cases amongst staff and staff having to self-isolate due to track and trace measures.'* Superintendents survey respondent

> *'I think at one point there was a considerable amount of people off within the force due to Covid-19 jobs when there was a potential risk of exposure, and really I don't think we could have coped with those levels of staffing [in the] long term.'* Superintendents survey respondent

Conscious of the need to manage with limited capacity, a number of police forces found ways to minimise social contact. These included:

- *Calls-for-service*: several police forces expanded their assessment units for taking calls from the public, so as to screen reports and, where possible, resolve incidents remotely. There was a realisation among some that an effective service need not always be contingent on a face-to face visit by the police
- *Single crewing*: in order to minimise the risk Covid transmission between police colleagues, officers were deployed individually (as opposed to in pairs or groups) to conduct patrols of the area or respond to incidents
- *Arrests*: there was a reduction in the number of arrests for less serious crimes and more suspects were being granted bail from police custody, so as to minimise occupancy and infection risk in police buildings, courts, and wider custodial estate
- *Criminal investigation*: a number of activities critical for gathering physical evidence to progress criminal investigations, such as the issuing of warrants to conduct property

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[42] For example, see -
https://news.sky.com/story/Covid-19-19-police-response-times-under-strain-from-pingdemic-as-expert-says-nhs-app-isnt-that-useful-anymore-12360941 [Accessed August 31st 2021]

searches or conducting interviews with suspects, were postponed in order to minimise infection risk during the pandemic

Addressing wellbeing in the workforce

The consequence of these capacity issues was mounting pressure on some frontline police teams, with longer hours and less rest leading to fatigue and adverse impacts on the mental and physical health of officers.

> *"More recently, demand has returned to normal (across the whole organisation, including Superintendents) and we are struggling to manage [business-as-usual] and Covid. Fatigue is setting in."* Superintendents survey respondent

> *"People are working longer and longer hours, again not sustainable, and incredibly unhealthy. People cannot work like this for much longer, they will break, and we are storing up a whole load of problems for the workforce for the future because of it …"* Superintendents survey respondent

The police workforce was strained on multiple fronts that included health concerns regarding Covid-19, the growing pressures on frontline staff facing growing demands with fewer resources, and also the isolation and loneliness experienced by staff who had worked remotely for a long period of time. In some instances, innovative support services were launched. Some officers described continuous and proactive engagement with staff members working from home (one officer noted a reluctance of some to come forward due to embarrassment) and giving support and reassurance to staff concerned about their own or their families' health. Some ran 'well-being sessions for staff' and others appointed an officer to deliver well-being support.

> *'As a Command, at the start of [the first] Lockdown … we introduced twice weekly 'virtual' coffee mornings, with guest speakers on a range of welfare issues; we made the decision to appoint a full-time wellbeing officer for the Command …'* Superintendents survey respondent

> *'Focused on the essentials and staff wellbeing more than ever. Probably talk more now we are remote than when we were in offices …'* Superintendents survey respondent

The National Police Wellbeing Service offered web-based resources to provide information and emotional support to police staff.[43] In the long-term, there were concerns over the effects of acute fatigue experienced by some police personnel, with backlogs of work spreading into the future and prolonged periods of working overtime to compensate for resourcing strains and Covid demands, without taking rest days or annual leave. The National Police Wellbeing survey

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[43] Durham University (2021) *National Wellbeing Survey 2020.* Oscar Kilo. Available at https://oscarkilo.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/07/National-Wellbeing-Survey-2020-Report.pdf [Accessed August 31st 2021]

reported 29 per cent of police officers and 23.5 per cent of police staff experienced extremely high levels of fatigue.[44]

> *"There is no question in my mind, we have a very tired workforce. We've had a workforce that never really got a proper break last summer, we never got pretty much any break over Christmas and New Year because we still had rising Covid-19 levels plus for those forces that were particularly impacted, we had all the EU exit preparation and living through that. And then we've come back into this year, still working hard at it".* National Senior Policing Stakeholder

Collaboration with partners

In order to maintain order and promote public safety during the pandemic, the police needed to work closely with other services including health and the local authorities. Many respondents to the superintendents survey said that more positive and constructive relationships and arrangements had developed as a result. Furthermore, the requirement to adapt processes and systems to fulfil their regular duties led to some improvements in established partnership arrangements such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, consulting with CPS and the Local Authorities.

Some benefits referred to in the Superintendents survey included:

- A more integrated operational response, including joint "Covid patrols" and licensing visits to ensure businesses were adhering to restrictions.

  > *"We already have a strong partnership, but this has brought us together far more, particularly around public health, licensing and general work with the local authority."*

  > *"Public health England have brought forward and galvanised support for local pilots regarding suicide real-time surveillance data."*

- More understanding and reciprocity between practitioners across partner organisations:

  > *"Regular contact meant a greater understanding of each other's pressures. Better relationships built as it needed a team effort and we were all responding to the same priority and therefore had shared goals."*

  > *"Greater support both ways and more joined up thinking and working between the four local authorities in [the police force area]."*

- More regular and seamless collaboration facilitated by an embrace of technological solutions:

  > *"Use of video conferencing … for meetings with CPS lawyers … [these] used to be universally face-to-face given the sensitivity of our investigations, but now [we are] more able to work remotely."*

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[44] Durham University (2021)

'[The] regular skype calls (weekly) with Children's Services [senior leadership team].'

When asked which agencies had experienced the greatest challenges to sustaining core functions, many in our survey highlighted the court service, offender management partners, and services for delivering out-of-court disposals. In addition, other frontline services outside the CJS such as mental health services (including CAMHS), were also perceived to have displaced demand on to police as the 'service of last resort'.

The views of officers working on the frontline were particularly stark, having experienced first-hand demand displaced from other services. Some also perceived a lack of fairness in certain services withdrawing to minimise the health risks to their workforce while at the same time, increasing the exposure of frontline police officers to those same risks.

> *"So not only do we have police officers who have been ill with Covid-19 and have been off, we've got our own workload and we're also being requested by other departments to do front line enquiries because they're not prepared to make those enquiries because they're at a desk in the safety of their own home and yet they are police officers and their role should include the whole remit of their duties."* Superintendents survey respondent

There were various implications of these strains in partnership working:

Firstly, it led to police resources being diverted. For example, there was an increase in demand for custody officers to facilitate virtual court hearings and increased responsibility for managing welfare and safeguarding concerns for vulnerable members of the community.[45] Some local practitioners described severe limitations in mental health services (who were either restricted to home-working or not working at all), which led to an increase in the volume of calls for service from the police to intervene at the point of crisis.

> *'The courts not sitting and having to go to Virtual Courts via video. Very demanding on resources as this can use up to six officers per day escorting to virtual court rooms rather than private security transporting to the ACTUAL court.'*

> *"Courts' inability to support the most vulnerable, requiring domestic abuse victims to give evidence from home without consideration of whether the perpetrator was present."*

> *"Willingness / ability of social workers to complete home visits and the knock-on impact [with] inappropriate requests [made] to police for welfare checks."*

> *"Lack of organisations being prepared to have face to face contact with service users caused increased safeguarding concerns particularly around children due to the drastically reduced contact with professionals."*

> Superintendents survey respondents

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[45] See also HMICFRS, 2021

Secondly, a lack of capacity across partner agencies impacted the effectiveness of the police's response. Police officers described changes to decision-making and service delivery to adapt to the limited capacity in other organisations.

> *"ASB powers are no longer effective as the courts will only take CPS cases. We have reduced the amount of arrests due to CPS capacity and court space when in a number of cases arrest would have been more appropriate."*

> *"Commissioned services unable to deliver for out of court disposals due to estates capacity for socially distanced group work meant a move away from being able to issue some conditional cautions which we believe reduces harm and reoffending."*

> *'If they're a violent offender or state mandated to be arrested and incarcerated, they are going [to jail]. Otherwise right now, people are being referred or they're going through expanded diversion and deflection programs…. I would say that that's been a positive outcome, we're finding that, at least in the short term, our folks are not re-offending and are being diverted into treatment alternatives and other things that we may not … necessarily have done [before].'*

> Superintendents survey respondents

The considerable reduction in the functionality of the courts during the pandemic was considered likely to have a long-term impact on law enforcement and the capacity to deliver justice.

> *"The inability of the courts to get an effective system going will affect cases for years - victims are disengaging as it is taking so long to get to court."*

> Superintendents survey respondent

Case study: Local Resilience Forums

Prior to the pandemic, Local Resilience Forums were intended to provide focused responses to short-term crises, with a multi-organisational approach to strategically address immediate local needs. Whilst some good examples of their use were mentioned, such as local flooding, it was felt that LRFs had not previously been given enough engagement by key decision makers. The pandemic changed this.

'Some services organisations haven't necessarily played a real active part in the resilience partnership, prior to Covid-19, I think they certainly will be post Covid. Because they've learned how invaluable that partnership is key learning for us as a service' LRF Stakeholder

'I think it's [LRF and Partnership working] been outstanding. I think we've learned and developed lots over that 14,15 month period. So for me, yes, this is stand out, around the strength of partnership and what we can achieve as a collaborative, effective, efficient partnership model.' LRF Stakeholder

Stakeholders we interviewed who were involved in LRFs reported increased understanding of challenges across organisations and more effective resource allocation to respond to multi-agency needs.

One individual gave the example of Fire and Rescue officers delivering prescriptions whilst carrying out welfare and safety checks on elderly or vulnerable individuals, taking strain off healthcare at a time when they were stretched. Some of the joint working initiatives borne out of the pandemic have been seen as good practice and there is a desire not to lose this in a post-pandemic environment.

'I think probably as a system, we probably know more about each other, and each other's challenges than we did previously as well. I think that can only be a good thing.' Superintendents survey respondent

LRFs brought about greater strategic involvement across organisations; the unusually drawn out use of this structure allowed partners to realise the benefits of sustained and longer-term close working.

Using the crisis to innovate in service delivery

In many ways, the pandemic acted as a spur to innovation. To accommodate the restrictions in the public health regulations the police needed to adapt the physical environment, working patterns and protocols, and introduce new technologies to facilitate the reduction in face-to-face interaction.

Cultural barriers

The imperative to adapt to changed conditions during the pandemic was thought by many practitioners to have broken down cultural barriers and reinforced the case for more flexible and remote working and technology enabled service delivery.

> *"The experience of Covid and finding new ways of working have emphasised what can be achieved and expedited when necessary."* Superintendents survey respondent

There were challenges in implementing social distancing rules in a police estate that had over several years been shrinking to save costs[46], but officers reported that over time the management of this got better, partly because of changes in office design and systems in police stations. However, the principal strategy was to adapt the working patterns of staff, especially among back-office personnel, with many working remotely through the adoption of more 'agile technology'.

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[46] Davies et al, 2020

<u>Agile working</u>

The use of networked technologies for remote working created an opportunity to diversify modes of working and to design operating models and resources to be more targeted and efficient, reducing wasted resources. Change was evident in a number of areas including:

- *Staff deployment*: some members of staff were able to fulfil their work duties from home, including frontline practitioners who for health reasons were unable to deliver a frontline service
- *Task management*: specific functions could be undertaken remotely, most notably attendance at meetings (including those with partner organisations) and where mandatory supervisory input is required (for example, decisions over a custody extension)
- *Service delivery*: digital channels were provided for delivering core service functions. For example, there were examples in custody that included the ability for defence solicitors to provide virtual consultations and virtual remand hearings. Another example was taking digital statements from victims and witnesses (rather than seeing them in person) which "helped speed things up and make things a bit easier to deal with"

When asked to describe the single most beneficial change to internal policies or procedures introduced during the Covid crisis, superintendent survey respondents overwhelmingly focused on the adoption of technology to facilitate more flexible working patterns. Importantly, many considered that these changes could and should be sustained in the long-term, and may help shape the future workforce, with the appeal of working for the police widened to encompass a more diverse pool of candidates.

> *"Working from home during shielding and lockdown, IT requirements … meetings online. All of these are feasible in a lesser way going forward. There are benefits from working with a combination of working from home and coming into work and it has enhanced flexible working."*

> *"Home working and agile working are accepted as normal - they should be sustainable moving forward and improve the Police Service as an Employer of Choice."*

> *"Working from home becoming the default position. This took away a significant amount of stress for many team members who no longer feel discriminated against for being parents / carers."*

> Superintendents survey respondents

Of those who responded to the superintendent survey, 41 per cent considered that the changes during the pandemic had led to at least some improvement in the productivity of their local workforce.[47] A minority (19%) held the view that workforce productivity had decreased. At the same time, some frontline officers described a feeling of 'disconnect' and of 'not knowing exactly what [was] going on':

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[47] There were 14 surveys for which there was missing data.

"No teamwork, isolated staff, too many staff not gainfully employed. Too few doing all the work, demand increasing."

"Reduced teamwork as officers and staff are spread across multiple sites to achieve Covid secure status. Supervision and support has also reduced for the same reasons. Direction and control of resources more difficult."

Superintendents survey respondents

Conclusions and recommendations

Central coordination of the national response was essential

In areas such as the procurement of PPE, working in partnership with government and issuing consistent guidance to forces around enforcing complex and changing laws, having central coordination through the NPCC and the College of Policing proved extremely valuable. In fact the service would not have been able to operate effectively without it.

This raises the question as to why such central coordination is not more routine in other dimensions of policing. We have already described how a lack of national workforce planning means that forces have allowed significant skills gaps to develop particularly in the investigation of more complex types of crime. We have also seen how a lack of centrally collected and analysed incident data poses a risk to a service that does not adequately understand the demand it faces.

Recommendation: The police service should strengthen national capabilities to collect and make use of police data, to coordinate workforce planning and to procure equipment and technology.

There were limited gains in productivity through use of technology

There was plenty of innovation in the use of technology during the pandemic, particularly to facilitate more agile working. However it is unclear how consistent this was and whether new ways of working will be sustained in the future.

Recommendation: The NPCC should review how new technology helped to deliver services to the public and provide for more agile working during the pandemic. It should share good practice from around the country and make recommendations to ensure that lessons are learned and improvements sustained.

Chapter 4: Policing Covid across Europe: comparisons with England and Wales

> ## Key findings
>
> - The police in England and Wales issued significantly fewer fines per person than forces in Spain, Italy and Greece, more similar to northern European forces
>
> - This likely reflects the UK model of policing by consent as much as differences in Covid-19 restrictions between countries
>
> - Disproportionality of enforcement on particular socio-economic or ethnic groups was a feature of pandemic policing in several countries
>
> - UK police more transparent than other countries about how it used its Covid-19 powers, publishing data more systematically and regularly

In this section we explore how the approach taken to policing the pandemic in England and Wales compares to that taken in other European countries. This helps to put the response to the pandemic in England and Wales into perspective, although it also makes clear that policing operates in distinctive political, social and cultural contexts, with each country having its own distinct policing traditions. We should note that few countries published data as regularly and systematically as the UK nations, so we focus below on a small number of countries where comparable data is available.

The levels of enforcement activity in different countries

There was a stark contrast in the level of enforcement activity seen between England and Wales and many of its European neighbours (see chart below).[48]

At the peak of the first lockdown (April 2020) English and Welsh police had issued fewer than 2 fines per 10,000 people (1.62), Scottish police had issued 4 fines per 10,000 people (3.91) and the Dutch police just 7 per 10,000 people (7.46). By contrast, the figure in Spain was 133 fines

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[48] Eurostat (2021) Population change - Demographic balance and crude rates at national level. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/DEMO_GIND__custom_1110718/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=39d70859-90b3-4d58-ba1e-5096d89d608d [Accessed September 15th 2021] and ONS (2020) Population estimates for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2020. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2020#population-change-for-uk-countries [Accessed September 15th 2021]

per 10,000 people. [49] By the end of the first lockdown, over one million fines were issued by the Spanish authorities[50], compared to just 22,621 in England and Wales[51].

The Greek figures pertain to the later stages of the pandemic, but here again we can see a north/south contrast.[52] In January 2021, the Hellenic police (and other agencies) in Greece had issued 28 fines per 10,000 individuals (27.61)[53], compared to two fines per 10,000 in England and Wales (1.83), four in Scotland (4.3) and eight in the Netherlands (7.53). In five months, the authorities in Greece had issued a total of 122,055 Covid-19 penalties to individuals (including to business owners), compared to 74,514 in England and Wales in a similar period.

Covid-19 penalties issued per 10,000 in Greece, Netherlands, Scotland, England and Wales, and Spain[54]

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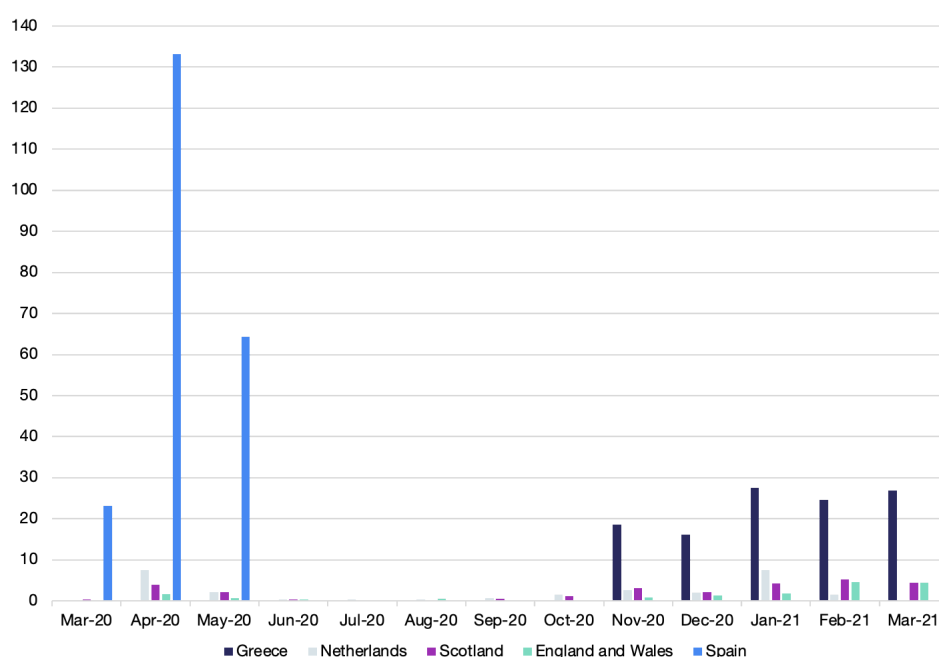
[49] http://www.interior.gob.es/en/prensa/noticias [Accessed September 15th 2021]

[50] The reported number was 1,044,717.

[51] Calculated for the number of fixed penalty notices issued up to 11 May 2020.

[52] https://aead.gr/press/Covid-1919

[53] This represents a considerable underestimate because this data was only available for 20 out of the 31 days in January.

[54] The England and Wales data represents the periodic data releases from the NPCC that do not correspond to each calendar month. The day of publication ranged from 8th to 27th of each month but each was included according to the month of publication, therefore the patterns depicted in this graph will not completely align with the real-time patterns. The police had issued penalties in the period between June to September 2020 but in very low volumes; for example, in England and Wales 0.5 penalties were issued per 10,000 in the population in August 2020. Data was missing for March 2021 in the Netherlands, March 2020 in England and Wales, March to October 2020 in Greece and data was only available up to 23 May 2020 in Spain. Data from Spain did not correspond directly to each month and the data in here represents a best fit. The three months represented here cover the following three periods; 14 March to 8 April; 9 April to 29 April; 30 April to 23 May. Data from Greece was published sporadically and for each month was incomplete, ranging from coverage of just 9 days in November 2020 to 23 days in March 2021. In all cases, this data was accurate at the point of publication and some changes in recorded penalties may have occurred as the administrative data was refined.

This north/south European divide on enforcement action is also apparent when we look at the figures for France and Italy.[55] By 23 April 2020, the French authorities had issued 915,000 fines [56], representing 136 fines per 10,000. By May 2020, Italy had issued 302,484 fines (representing 51 fines per 10,000 (50.72) and a further 115,738 warnings for breach of the regulations.[57]

Number of fines per 10,000 during the first lockdown period, by country[58]*

Country	Rate per 10,000	Total volume
England and Wales	2.38	13,445
Scotland	4.21	2,301
Netherlands	7.68	13,374
Spain	156.37	740,117
France	135.92	915,000
Italy	50.72	302,484

These highly contrasting patterns of enforcement between countries might reflect variation in the nature of the restrictions introduced by their respective governments (the tougher the restrictions the more likelihood of a breach). However, a Covid-19 response tracker compiled by Oxford University shows similar patterns in the stringency of the control measures in each country (see infographic below)[59]. There were slightly more stringent restrictions during the initial lockdown in France, Greece and Spain, but the controls in the UK remained stringent throughout much of the subsequent period up until early 2021.

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[55] These are not included in Figure 1 because the figures were not presented for comparable periods.

[56] Terpstra et al, 2021

[57] https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/report_totale_controlli_11marzo_3maggio.pdf

[58] The initial lockdown period varied in the different countries and this table looks at the period from the beginning in March to the end of April 2020. As in Figure above, there is some variation in the time periods covered in the datasets, so this table gives an approximate depiction of a comparable period. The data in England and Wales covers the period up until 11 May, in Scotland and the Netherlands to the end of April, in Spain to 29 April, France to 23 April and Italy to 3 May.

[59] University of Oxford (2021) COVID-19 GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TRACKER. Available at: https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/Covid-19-19-government-response-tracker [Accessed September 14th 2021]

Covid-19 Stringency Index

COVID-19: Stringency Index

This is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). If policies vary at the subnational level, the index is shown as the response level of the strictest sub-region.

Source: Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford – Last updated 11 September 2021, 19:50 (London time)
OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

The difference in the rate at which sanctions were used more likely reflects a mixture of the following factors:

The degree to which the police traditionally rely on voluntary compliance with the law

Policing traditions vary between countries and can be located on a spectrum, with an enforcement dominated approach at one end, and a 'policing by consent' model at the other where enforcement is used generally as a last resort.[60] The latter more closely resembles the approach taken in England, Wales, Scotland and the Netherlands, and the former is more representative of the approach taken in France, Italy, Spain, and Greece.[61]

In particular, the strategic decision of police in England and Wales to adopt the '4 Es' framework represented an attempt to inhibit the use of the new legal powers, and instead adhere to established traditions of cooperative and consent-based policing. Frontline officers that we spoke to described being actively discouraged by supervisors from issuing fines. This was not uncontroversial with officers, with some experiencing difficulties as 'people were just walking all over' them because they 'didn't think they were going to do anything'.

The use of authorisation documents

From the initial lockdown, the restrictions on movement in France and Greece were accompanied with clear administrative procedures for monitoring compliance, with travel outside of home requiring the completion of a 'self-authorisation form'[62] or 'movement

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[60] Terpstra, 2021

[61] Further examples include the Swedish government which relied singularly on guidelines rather than the police and law enforcement, and in Germany the rules and enforcement were determined by each individual federal state, but six months following the initial lockdown the authorities in the seven largest cities had issued only 35,000 penalties. DW (2020) Coronavirus: German cities issue 35,000 fines to rulebreakers. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-german-cities-issue-35000-fines-to-rulebreakers/a-55150482 [Accessed September 14th 2021]

[62] Terpstra, 2021

certificate'[63]. An inability to produce these documents was an infraction that could be unequivocally enforced by the police.

This stands in contrast to the approach in England and Wales in which the police were required to interpret whether the reasons given for travel constituted a 'reasonable excuse' or a breach of the regulations. This highly discretionary approach called for a firm grasp of newly introduced laws and related procedures. Officers in our focus groups described considerable technical and procedural barriers that added administrative burden and confusion on how to issue a financial penalty notice. Some members of the public were able to exploit the nuance and subjectivity in the regulations which made the job of evidencing rule-breaking difficult.

The use of proactive policing to enforce the rules

There were various tactics the police could adopt to proactively detect rule-breaking behaviour, including street patrols to conduct stop-checks with members of the public, putting check-points on key travel routes (such as roads out of cities), and inspecting businesses for compliance with the operating rules.

Whether to take such an approach is mainly a question of policing style and tradition, but also reflects the availability of staff and resources. A proactive enforcement-led strategy is resource-intensive, requiring a workforce of sufficient size to cover the ground to police the population at large. In France, a workforce in the national police and Gendarmerie which was already 100,000 strong was bolstered with an additional 60,000 and mobilised to conduct 'intense checks'[64].

There were prodigious levels of proactive monitoring for public compliance by police in France and Greece, and while relatively few incidents resulted in a financial penalty, the sheer scale of activity generated a higher volume of visible deterrence and enforcement. The proportion of interventions (or checks) that led to sanctions in Greece and France respectively was just 2 per cent and 5.9 per cent (see Table below). The language used by the authorities in Greece was that of 'audits' or 'inspections', which were completed in high volumes throughout much of the pandemic period, ranging from 731,056 in November 2020 to 1,717,658 in March 2021[65]. In France, the police had recorded 15.5 million Covid-related stops by 22 April 2020[66], and while there is limited data the indications are that this intensity was sustained for some time afterwards.[67]

By contrast, in Scotland, the volume of Covid interventions was comparatively small and most (86%) were resolved by informing, instructing and dispersing the individuals.[68] However, in 12.1

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[63] https://aead.gr/press/Covid-1919 - accessed 14.09.2021

[64] The Guardian (2020) *Coronavirus is not on holiday': France warns citizens against Easter travel.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/03/coronavirus-not-on-holiday-france-warns-citizens-against-easter-travel [Accessed September 15th 2021]

[65] This represents a considerable underestimate because this data was not available for 19 days in November 2020 and 7 days in March 2021.

[66] Terpstra et al, 2021

[67] The Connexion (2021) *Covid lockdown France: 100,000 police checks at weekend, 16,000 fines*. Available at: https://www.connexionfrance.com/French-news/Covid-lockdown-France-100-000-police-checks-at-weekend-16-000-fines

[68] Police Scotland (2021) Enforcement and Response Data. Available at: https://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/Covid-19-19-police-scotland-response/enforcement-and-response-data/

percent of interventions, a fixed penalty notice was issued.[69] The use of penalties was treated by the Scottish authorities as a barometer for the levels of public cooperation or compliance[70] but there is also likely to have been a transition from proactive community-based engagement strategies to more response-based policing over time; to illustrate, in May 2020 just 4 percent of interventions resulted in the police issuing a fixed penalty notice or making an arrest, compared to 24 per cent in March 2021 (alternative outcomes were individuals who were dispersed).

Total number of interventions and penalties recorded by police, Scotland (March 2020 - March 2021), Greece (November 2020 - March 2021), and France (March - April 2020)[71]

Country	Time period	Total no. of Covid-19 interventions	Total no. of penalties	% of Covid interventions a penalty was issued
Scotland	Mar 2020 - Mar 2021	124,624	15,103	12.1%
Greece	Nov 2020 - Mar 2021	6,206,578	122,055	2%
France	Mar 2020 - April 2020	15,500,000	915,000	5.9%

In England and Wales, there was no systematic collection of data on the volume of Covid-related checks. While strategies will have varied by police force, there was indication that in the first lockdown, the information presented in Chapter 3 shows that the police response was mainly about responding to incidents rather than proactive enforcement.

Local authorities had a prominent role in delivering proactive interventions to ensure compliance to the restrictions in England and Wales. Trading Standards estimate they completed nearly 1.3 million 'Covid-19 secure and business and compliance checks' from March 2020 to June 2021.[72] It is not clear how many sanctions were issued but in England, 35,545 non-compliant businesses were identified and in Wales, 3,201 enforcement actions were taken in response to non-compliance. Furthermore, in October 2020, local authorities were given additional funds to recruit so-called 'Covid Marshals', with a role to advise and support the public and businesses in following social distancing restrictions. They had no powers to enforce against Covid breaches, but undertook proactive public engagement to ease the pressure on the police and other agencies[73].

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[69] This data has some limitations because it relied on officers manually recording the Covid-19-related incident and the non-enforcement outcome. Therefore, it most likely underestimates the volume of incidents that did not lead to an enforcement outcome.

[70] For example, see Police Scotland (2021)

[71] This data was not available for England and Wales, the Netherlands or Spain.

[72] Chartered Trading Standards Institute, 2021

[73] For example, see: BBC (2020) *Coronavirus: Who are the Covid marshals and do they have any powers?*. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-54105672 [Accessed September 20th 2021]

The distribution of enforcement activity

So far we have referred to the overall volume of enforcement activity undertaken by the police in different European countries. Although there is limited comparable data across Europe there are indications that Covid enforcement was concentrated on particular social groups.

An analysis in France showed that the police made a similar number of stops in the different districts of Paris, but that the volume of penalties varied depending on the levels of relative deprivation. In a more affluent area, 6 in every 100 stops led to a sanction, compared to 17 in every 100 stops in one of the poorest areas.[74] In Scotland, almost a third of fixed penalty notices had been issued to those living in the 10 per cent most deprived communities and furthermore, 4 out of 5 of all those sanctioned were already known to the police.[75]

In England and Wales, young males from a Black, Asian or other minority ethnic groups were overrepresented by twice the rate of young white males.[76] The degree of racial disparity varied by police force, and was particularly high in police force areas that 'attract tourists to coastal areas and beauty spots'.[77] The issuing of FPNs to individuals travelling in from outside the area appears to explain some of the racial disparity in comparison to resident demographics.

Public attitudes towards the restrictions and the police

The extended period of the Covid crisis meant that public opinion toward the restrictions and their enforcement changed over time. This is certainly evident in relation to the government and their handling of the crisis; for example, polls indicated that the proportion of the public in both the UK and French who had confidence that their governments could deal effectively with coronavirus halved between February 2020 and January 2021, (falling 37 and 36 percentage points respectively).[78]

A reduction in confidence over the 12 months following the initial lockdown was evident throughout Europe, although some countries (such as Germany and Greece) saw a steep decline in confidence from a relatively high point, whereas confidence in the Spanish government reduced more gradually from a much lower starting point.[79] [80] This may in part reflect opinions on competence to implement appropriate social controls, but it will also reflect

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[74] Terpstra, 2021

[75] University of Edinburgh (2020) *Lockdown fines more common in the poorest areas*. Available at: https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/2020/lockdown-fines-more-common-in-the-poorest-areas [Accessed September 20th 2021]

[76] NPCC, 2020

[77] NPCC, 2020

[78] Ipsos (2021) *ONE YEAR WITH COVID-19: HOW INSTITUTIONS FARED*. Available at: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-03/one_year_Covid-1919_institutions_.pdf - accessed [Accessed September 13th 2021]

[79] Confidence in the German government's handling of the coronavirus issues fell from 71% (29 March 2020) to a low point of 21% twelve months later (25 March 2021) and during a similar period in Spain, public confidence had fallen from 36% (1 April 2020) to 33 per cent (3 March 2021). YouGov (2020) COVID-19: government handling and confidence in health authorities. Available at: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2020/03/17/perception-government-handling-Covid-19-19 [Accessed September 13th 2021]

[80] https://prorata.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/%CE%A3%CE%A6%CE%A5%CE%93%CE%9C%CE%9F%CE%A3-%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%A5%CE%9B%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%A5-2021.pdf – access 13.09.2021

views on other key aspects of public policy, particularly the provision of relevant health service and welfare support.

However, reduced confidence in governments did not necessarily tarnish opinions of the police. By November 2020, the Spanish public expressed a *growth* in support for National Police, Local Police and the Civil Guard.[81] Views of the police in England and Wales showed little change over time; the proportion of the public who believed the local police were doing a good or excellent job in their local area was 67 per cent in the period January to March 2021, only moderately less than in the period May to June 2020 (70%)[82].

In France, public confidence in the police fell during 2020, with one poll suggesting that just 37 per cent of the public had confidence in the police. This fall in confidence is very likely linked to a number of incidents of police violence and accusations of racial profiling during this period.[83]

Conclusions: The pandemic and the future of policing

The pandemic has been a transformative moment - politically, economically, socially and culturally. And policing has not been left untouched.

In this final chapter we identify the major lessons for policing arising from the pandemic. Summarised below under four headings, these lessons relate to:

- the shift in police demand that occurred during the pandemic;
- the role the police played in responding to a national crisis;
- the relationship between the public and the police, and finally;
- how the police innovated in the face of an unprecedented challenge

The demand shift

Lesson 1. Changes in the physical, social, and economic environment can have a major impact on crime levels.

The first lockdown led to a big drop in recorded crime. Restricting people's freedom of movement had the effect of reducing the opportunity to commit certain types of criminal offences, and overall we saw a substantial fall in recorded crime. This was not unusual to England and Wales and we saw similar crime drops in countries across the world.

In many ways the pandemic provided radical experimental support for 'routine activity theory', which holds that crime is principally the product of motivated offenders coming into contact with suitable targets (or opportunities) in their local environment.

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[81] https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2020/11/11/5fabf1ebfdddffd8868b4608.html [Accessed September 13th 2021]

[82] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalescoronavirusandcrimetables [Accessed September 13th 2021]

[83] The Guardian (2020) *Emmanuel Macron announces police reform consultation.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/09/emmanuel-macron-announces-police-reform-consultation [Accessed September 13th 2021]

The lesson from this experience is not that we should lock people in their homes in order to cut crime. Rather, it is that we should look more systematically at how the environments in which we live and work can be more safely designed. This includes not just the local physical environment, but also the digital environment. As the opportunity to commit crime in the local environment was closed down (it became harder to deal drugs in the traditional way for example) motivated offenders shifted to the online environment, resulting in a significant increase in fraud and cyber crime.

The lesson for the police and policymakers is not only that we need to give renewed effort to local situational crime prevention, but also that we should look much more systematically at how we can 'design crime out' of digital spaces.

Recommendation 1: The Home Office should commission research exploring the crime prevention lessons to be learned from the experience of the pandemic. They should use this analysis as a launch pad for a more systemic cross government approach to crime prevention.

Lesson 2. The pandemic shone a light on pre-existing changes in the pattern of police demand and to some extent accelerated them.

Demand on the police has been undergoing a radical shift in recent years, characterised by:

- A shift away from traditional volume crime, such as car crime and burglary, and towards hidden harm, which is generally under reported, often takes place in private spaces and often takes the form of male perpetrated violence against women and girls;
- A transition from local crimes committed by local offenders against local victims towards crimes that take place on the internet, crossing local and national borders;
- A shift in demand away from traditional crime towards incidents linked to complex social needs, often involving very vulnerable and multiply disadvantaged people.

The pandemic shone a light on and accelerated these changes that were already underway. We saw, for example, how a drop in recorded crime, much of it made up of traditional volume offences, did not result in a major fall in demand for police services. Partly this was because the police were reacting to Covid related incidents, but we also saw the extent to which police work predominantly involves dealing with non-crime related matters, whether that be anti-social behaviour or mental health related reports. Much of this social demand for policing came as a result of other frontline services withdrawing, with staff working from home for example, leaving the police as the service of last resort to deal with problems and even plug gaps in mainstream provision.

We also saw how the confined living conditions during the pandemic increased the risk of interpersonal crimes such as domestic abuse and online grooming, crimes which remain largely under-reported and which tend to predominantly victimise women and girls.

Reduced geographic mobility led to more virtual mobility, with offending patterns displaced from offline to online crimes such as fraud and child sexual abuse.[84]

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[84] Europol, 2020a; Europol, 2020b; Halford et al, 2020

It is impossible to say with any certainty whether the changes in demand composition we saw during the pandemic will be sustained in the future. It may be that as society has opened back up and traditional opportunities to offend re-emerge we will see a reversion to the mean. Nonetheless, in areas like cyber crime, where offenders have innovated in new ways of committing online offences, it is likely that some of the changes in focus and modus operandi will be sustained.

These changes in demand have two implications for policing in the future, which are not unique to the pandemic, but which are underlined by the experience of the last two years.

First, it is still not clear that policing has the capabilities to tackle these rising forms of demand. For example, during the pandemic the number of frauds reported by the Crime Survey for England and Wales leapt to 4.6 million, making it by far the largest category of crime affecting the public. And yet only 2 per cent of the police workforce is dedicated to economic crime. Operation Uplift, which is focused on recruiting a net 20,000 extra entry level constables does not provide an answer to this lack of specialist capability.

Another example would be in relation to male perpetrated violence against women and girls, where a recent HMICFRS report highlighted inconsistent practice, inadequate data collection and more generally a lack of prioritisation and resource dedicated to tackling the problem.

These skill gaps in the police service are in part a consequence of the fact that the 43 forces do their own workforce planning in the absence of any strategic assessment as to what the system as a whole requires. Failure to develop greater capabilities around male violence against women and girls, online crimes such as fraud and stalking or harassment, risks a further reduction in the detection rate, since these crimes are harder to solve, with the potential negative impact on trust and confidence in the police generally.

Recommendation 2: The College of Policing should take on a workforce planning function on behalf of the police service. It should assess what the future workforce needs are likely to be and should require forces to develop recruitment and core training plans to meet identified gaps such as in relation to financial and online crime. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) should under its annual PEEL assessment process determine how well a force's recruitment and training plan addresses anticipated future demand set out in its Force Management Statement.

Second, one of the major challenges policing faces is how to prioritise resources between competing claims. On the one hand, the public through their police and crime commissioners tend to demand a focus on higher volume but less serious matters such as anti social behaviour and theft. On the other hand, the police based on an assessment of threat, harm and risk tend to favour a focus on higher harm and more serious offences.

There is a way out of this bind. One way of moving the agenda on is to have a much more robust, empirically based assessment of where policing can have the most impact in terms of the harms experienced by the public. In a recent paper, for example, the Institute for Global Change called for a 'NICE for policing' (based on the National Institute of Clinical Excellence), which would help the police ration their resources by identifying those areas of focus that would provide the most harm reduction at the least cost. Whether or not a new organisation is

required, the idea of developing a framework that can support police forces and police and crime commissioners in making decisions about priorities seems to us to be a sensible one.

Recommendation 3: The College of Policing should develop an assessment of where police forces ought to focus their resources if they want to reduce the most harm, subject to available resources. Police forces should be required to justify their resourcing decisions with reference to this framework and their locally-produced force management statement.

Another way out of this bind is to engage in an honest discussion with the public about where the harm lies and what the trade offs are in terms of priorities. Police Foundation research has shown that the public are enthusiastic about engaging in such discussions and do adjust their views on what the police should prioritise when provided with greater information.

Recommendation 4: Police and crime commissioners ought to involve the public in a conversation about the prioritisation of finite resources. They should stimulate this conversation by producing an annual public-facing report which shows the demand, their activities and available resources during that period. The conversation should be supported by in depth deliberative work with members of the public, such as through citizens' juries or citizens' assemblies.[85]

Policing in a national emergency

Lesson 3. If the police are to perform their role effectively in a national crisis, there must be a stable framework of rules for them to enforce and this should be clearly communicated by the government.

While we found that the police service itself benefited from improved coordination and communication during the pandemic, in particular through the roll out of the '4 Es' approach, the police remained in a difficult position because of ambiguity around the difference between the law and government guidance.

It is inevitable that law and guidance will have to change to keep up with an evolving public health threat during a pandemic. Nevertheless, the frequency of changes in legislation and government guidance, their variation in different parts of the country and a lack of clarity over these changes made it difficult for the police to enforce the law.

Recommendation 5: The government should instigate a review of how it responded to the coronavirus pandemic in order to learn lessons for future such events. Such a review should cover any lessons that ought to be learned regarding the clarity of the law, the distinction between law and guidance, how the rules were communicated, the impact of local variation in the rules and the frequency with which the rules changed.

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[85] We note that the production of such a report was one of the recommendations to emerge from the Home Office review of the work of police and crime commissioners.

The relationship between the police and the public

Lesson 4. The 4 Es approach was successful in avoiding any major breakdown in the relationship between the public and the police. However, the police should never take public support for granted and there is a pressing need to secure and renew legitimacy with parts of the community where trust and confidence are low.

The police service was concerned at the start of the pandemic that being put in the position of having to enforce extreme regulations on civic life would bring them into conflict with the majority of the public. In fact, as it turned out, the public were largely supportive of the rules that were introduced and had considerable sympathy with the police in having to enforce them. If anything the majority of the public wanted to see more enforcement, not less.

Nevertheless the police service took the decision to remain true to the essential tenets of a policing by consent model, using enforcement only as a last resort. As we saw this marked England and Wales out at one end of a spectrum compared to other European countries, with our approach contrasting markedly with more enforcement-led strategies in countries such as France, Spain, Italy and Greece. It is yet to be determined whether these choices had much of an impact on compliance with the rules or on public health outcomes.

The '4 Es' framework received support from many of the police leaders and frontline officers we spoke to. It went with the grain of the existing 'British model of policing'. It provided clarity for officers tasked with policing increasingly complex regulations. Those on the frontline reported improved support from communities reassured by increased visibility and engagement; many in our public focus groups wanted to see more of this activity.

Recommendation 6: The police should consider what lessons can be learned from the use of the 4 Es approach for police work more generally, in particular in areas where police use of power is highly contested, such as use of stop and search. They should consider whether high profile and consistent messaging explaining how and in what circumstances officers will use these powers, would have an impact on trust and legitimacy.[86]

Moreover, public trust and confidence is something that the police service should never take for granted. During the pandemic the service was generally able to draw upon public support that had been built up during the previous years. It is therefore important that before the next crisis the police service does what it can to reinvest in the community relationships that are the bedrock of our policing model and without which the '4 Es' approach simply would not have worked.

All of the evidence shows that effective community policing is one of the strongest factors in determining levels of confidence in the police (Higgins 2018). In this context the fact that neighbourhood policing has been in evident decline since the onset of the austerity period is a major cause for concern

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[86] We note that the 4 Es framework was in part based on existing approaches used in public order policing.

Recommendation 7: Police forces should use the increased capacity made available through Operation Uplift to reinvest in neighbourhood policing, with a particular focus on those neighbourhoods where trust and confidence are low.

Modernising policing

Lesson 5. A stronger strategic centre delivered results in terms of data collection and analysis, procurement and communication.

The development of a stronger strategic centre in policing has shown clear benefits during the pandemic. In particular the use of Blue Light Commercial to procure PPE at scale was deemed to be effective and more cost efficient than each police force doing its own thing. Much more money could be saved in policing if more equipment and technology were procured nationally rather than locally in this way.

The creation of a national data centre in NPoCC delivered results. In particular it enabled the identification of areas that were under pressure in terms of demand and capacity, enabling the system as a whole to adjust. It also enabled the service to present regular updates to the public which provided the police response to the pandemic with a creditable degree of transparency. This ought to be something that should be built on in the future. A permanent national data centre for the police service would enable policing to think much more strategically as a system, identifying early trends in crime, enabling comparisons across forces and highlighting gaps in coverage and capability.

Finally the way in which the service communicated on a national basis is also a model for providing a single voice at times when the service as a whole is being judged and where forces need to act together.

Recommendation 8: The police service should strengthen national capabilities to collect and make use of police data, to coordinate workforce planning and to procure equipment and technology.

We also saw the acceleration of investment in new technologies to enable remote working and to reduce the need for face-to-face contact with members of the public. Some of these innovations hold great promise for the future and should be sustained. Examples include remote resolution of calls, the diversion of less serious offenders from the criminal justice system and virtual interviews and hearings.

Recommendation 9: The NPCC should review how new technology helped to deliver services to the public and provide for more agile working during the pandemic. It should share good practice from around the country and make recommendations to ensure that lessons are learned and improvements sustained.