



**OFFICIAL - PUBLIC**

**CHIEF CONSTABLE'S REPORT TO NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD  
5 NOVEMBER 2020 (report submitted 30 October 2020)**

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the Police Service of Northern Ireland's response to Covid19 since March 2020.



# 1. Context

## 1.1. Introduction

The Police Service of Northern Ireland has been responding to the challenges of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Health Emergency since March 2020. Over that time there has been a shift from the initial ‘policing a Covid crisis’ to ‘policing in a Covid environment.’

The current challenges to policing are as significant now in late October 2020, as they have been at any time during this health emergency. Foremost amongst current concerns are the impacts of high community infection rates, the resource impacts of contact tracing and self-isolation as well as the complexity of policing changing restrictions in an environment of varying public acceptance and compliance.

## 1.2. The health picture

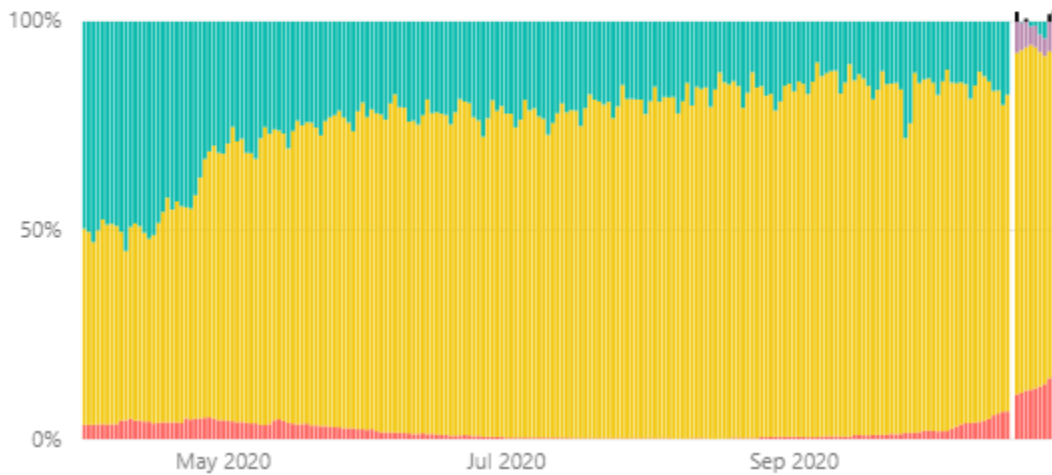
It is vital to read this report in the context of the Covid19 health data throughout 2020. Sadly, as of 28 October 2020 there have been 680 Covid19 deaths in Northern Ireland. Health colleagues continue to face rising demand in hospital admissions for Covid related illnesses, with hospital bed usage exceeding 100%.

**Previously Reported Deaths and Deaths in Current Reporting Period by Date of Death**



### Bed Occupancy - % Occupied and Unoccupied

● Covid Occupied ● Other Occupied ● Awaiting Admission ● Unoccupied ● % Over Capacity



(Source – Department of Health Dashboard 28 October 2020 - <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/>).

The pattern of these figures mirrors the approach to regulation and enforcement by the Northern Ireland Executive, which is in turn translated into additional demands upon the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

#### 1.3. Recorded Crime (data sourced from PSNI Statistical Bulletin published 29 October 2020, available on the PSNI website)

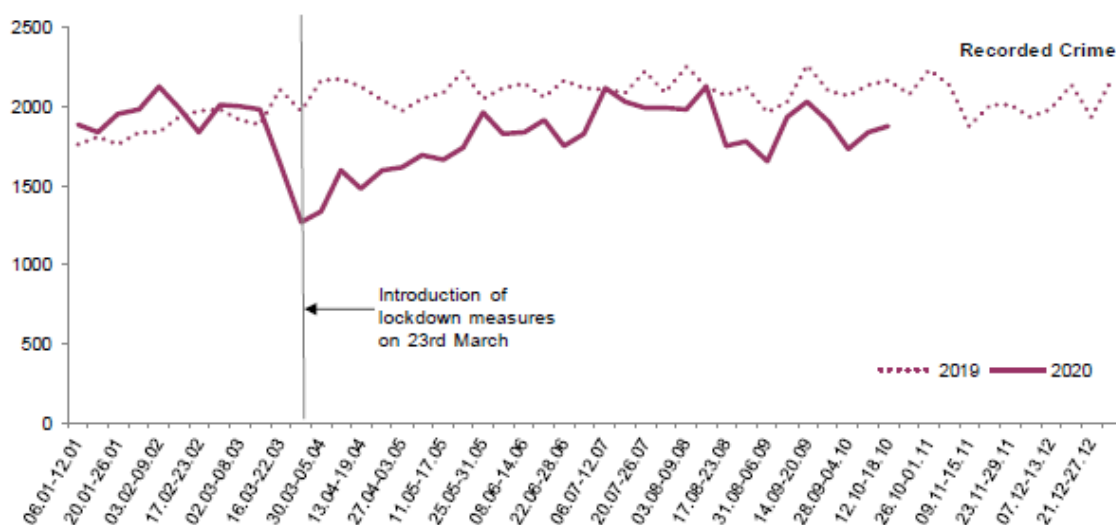
Overall crime levels fell by 23 per cent between the week beginning Monday 16th March and the following week when lockdown measures were introduced. The lowest level of overall crime was recorded during the first week of lockdown.

In the thirty weeks from 23rd March 2020 to 18th October 2020 compared with the same time period in 2019, overall police recorded crime has fallen by 14.9 per cent and levels have fallen across each of the main crime types.

The six weeks from 6th July 2020 to the week beginning 10th August 2020 showed some of the highest weekly totals for overall crime, offences of violence

with and without injury and criminal damage since the lockdown measures were introduced; these levels were comparable with some of the weekly totals seen prior to lockdown. The level of theft offences including burglary remains lower than those prior to lockdown. (see Figure 7 extracted from the PSNI Recorded Crime Statistical Bulletin below).

**Figure 7** Police recorded crime, weekly totals from Monday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020 compared with corresponding weekly crime in the previous 12 months

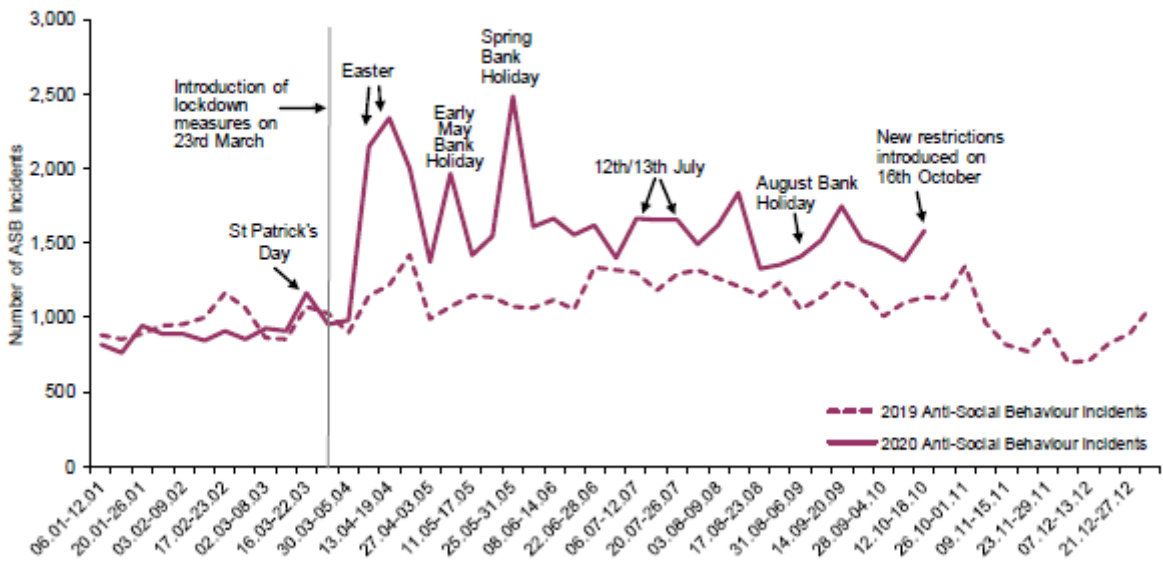


1.4. Anti-Social Behaviour (data sourced from PSNI Statistical Bulletin published 29 October 2020, available on the PSNI website)

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown measures were introduced in Northern Ireland on 23rd March and these have had a substantial impact on levels of anti-social behaviour. From 27th March 2020 calls received by the police were able to have codes applied that indicated the call was related to Covid-19. This section has been temporarily added to the monthly update to allow the monitoring of levels of anti-social behaviour since lockdown.

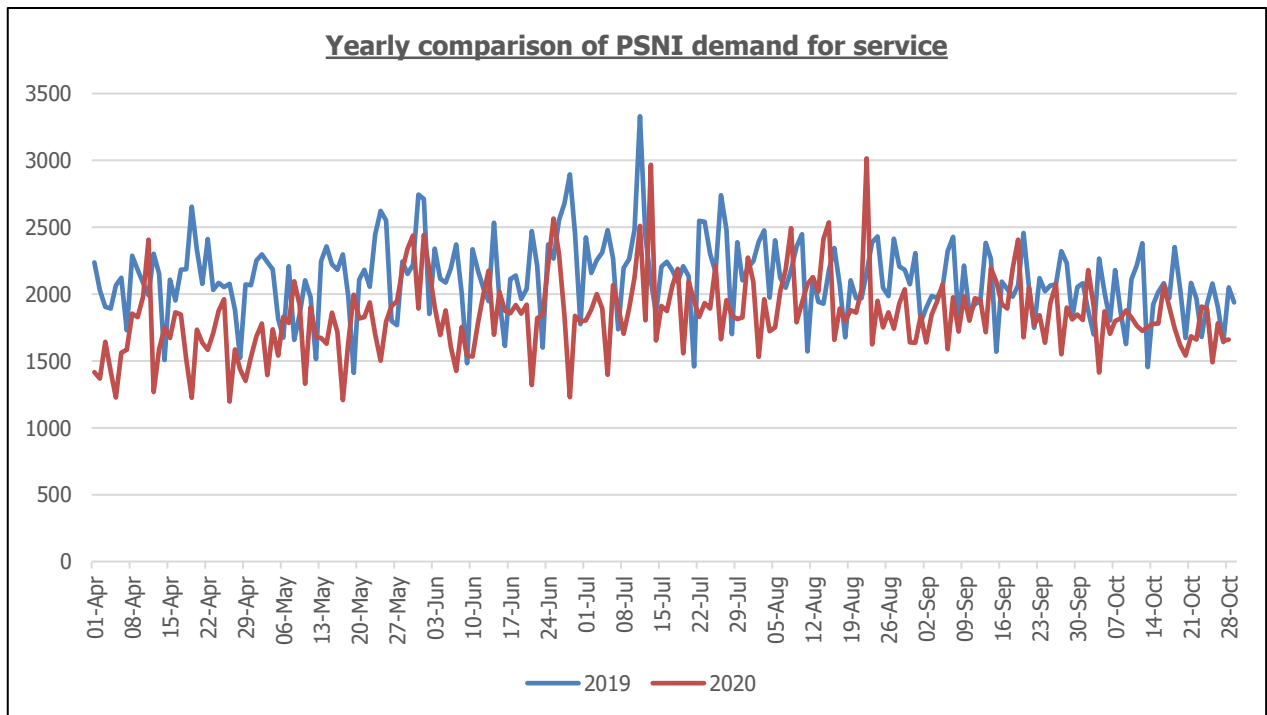
It is clear from the available data that anti-social behaviour incidents (including those coded as Covid19 related) have been higher throughout the Covid period compared to the same period last year (see Figure 6 extracted from the PSNI Anti-Social Behaviour Statistical Bulletin below).

**Figure 6 Weekly anti-social behaviour totals from 6th January 2020 compared with weekly anti-social behaviour totals in 2019**



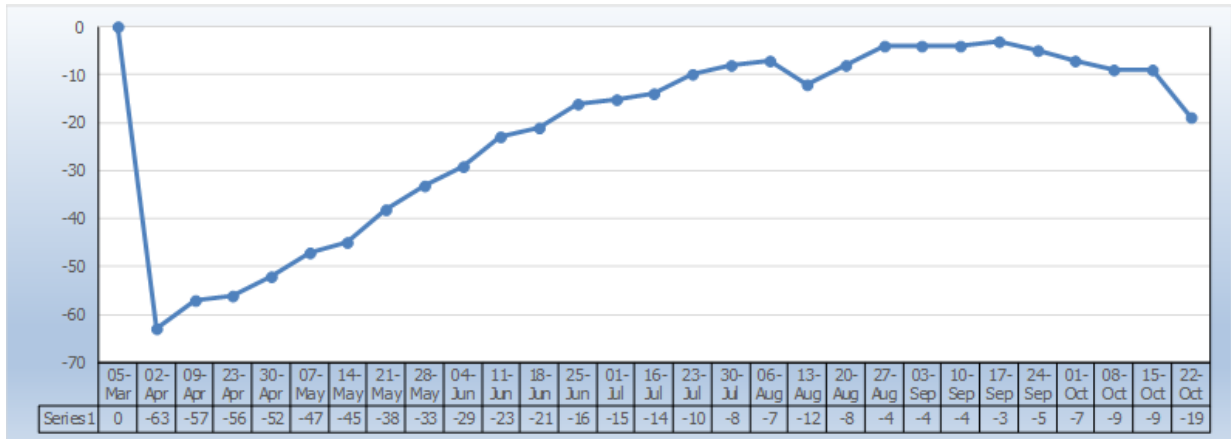
**1.5. Calls for Service**

Calls for service reduced markedly in March and April 2020 at the height of lockdown, but have risen gradually since then much closer to expected call levels.



### 1.6. Traffic Movement Data

Traffic volumes slowly returned to near normal levels by September, though recent Covid restrictions have resulted in a slight decrease once again. This is nowhere near the dramatic falls witnessed when the fuller lockdown was applied in March.



## **2. Our Approach**

### **2.1. Operational Command and Control**

As for all major events, Command arrangements were put in place consistent with Authorised Professional Practice (APP) issued by the UK College of Policing.

#### **Gold Commander**

The Gold Commander is responsible for the Strategic Approach to policing the health emergency including the strategic management of resources, equipment, policy and practice, business continuity and business recovery. The Gold Commander also leads for policing in the cross-departmental and partnership arrangements addressing the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### **Silver Commander**

The Silver Commander has responsibility for the tactical delivery of policing in a Covid-environment with particular emphasis on operational policing, enforcement and Covid custody provision, managed through daily meetings with the wider operational team.

A number of teams were established to enhance capacity across key support functions such as logistics & supplies, IT, fleet availability and estates issues. Throughout the Covid period we have maintained our fleet capacity, have been able to quickly cleanse affected areas of the estate to maintain service delivery, maintain adequate supplies of equipment and roll out over 3000 laptops. This was due to careful and coordinated planning and sound leadership.

## Covid Coordination Centre

The daily tasking and co-ordination of the Covid-related demands facing the organisation is the responsibility of the 'Covid Co-ordination Centre' staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The teams are led by an Inspector and with staff including tactical advisors with officer and public safety expertise. The team continually assess calls for service for Covid-related risks, coordinating resources and responses. The team also provide advice and guidance to operational officers and partners and monitor and supervise police enforcement activity to ensure consistency of approach.

## Protected Crews

In the early phase of the Covid-19 response, Designated Protected Crews were established in each policing district. This was initially to ensure the finite Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available was allocated to specific crews most likely to require it. Over time, the crews have become very experienced in dealing with Covid-19 related matters and accordingly have been retained in the interests of safety, effectiveness and consistency. They are issued with a wide range of personal protective equipment.

## Custody

Safe custody provision (including medical provision and legal profession provision) has been a priority since the initial Covid-19 response. This led to the establishment of designated Covid Custody facilities. This approach has been successful in managing a high risk business area and continues to be so. Importantly, service provision has been protected within our custody estate with the maintenance of safe working practices.



## 2.2. Organisational Arrangements

### Safe Working Environment

In the initial response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the approach to keeping our people safe centred on facilitating home working (enabled by significant Digital Mobilisation) where possible and where this was not achievable, to rotate shifts and alternate staff to ensure social distancing in the workplace. This approach has been developed over time into 'blended working' arrangements which seeks to maximise safety in the workplace whilst keeping people who are working from home engaged with the organisation and maintaining organisational performance. Safe working practices have been codified in a specific guide to managers, supervisors and staff and this is maintained through Health & Safety Inspections/assistance, management responsibilities and partnership working with Staff Associations. Extensive signage has also underpinned our safety messages. In addition there has been service wide communication including weekly senior leadership briefings, use of our intranet and weekly email updates from the Gold Commander.

More recently we have insisted upon workplace bubbles in order to minimise the transmission risk via face to face contact. Meetings take place online or by telephone conferencing when at all feasible. If not available or feasible, meetings and briefings are required to be conducted in rooms large enough to facilitate effective social distancing. A corporate video conferencing solution involving Microsoft Teams is expected to go live by January 2021 once accreditation requirements have been met and infrastructure upgrades have been completed.

### Contact Tracing Team

This team manages a confidential and secure process for our officers and staff which identifies 'close contacts' of individuals who are either confirmed or presumed positive for the virus. They can provide advice and guidance to the

Service on actions which should be taken in the event individuals test positive or are in contact with others who do so, or are presumed to be positive.

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Supplies of PPE were at times critical in March 2020 in common with other emergency and health organisations. The logistics team had specific responsibility for sourcing and procuring sufficient stocks working with partners and suppliers. The excellent work of this team was able to stabilise supplies and despite ever increasing usage of PPE, we now routinely have 3 months stock of all items with the logistics team continuing to monitor usage, maintain stocks and ensure supplies across the organisation. A police staff member of our logistics team was honoured with an MBE in the recent Royal List.

All officers have been required to wear surgical face masks whilst in police vehicles for some time now. As of Monday 26 October 2020, all persons on the police estate must wear face coverings in communal areas to further reduce the risk of infection.

These control measures and continual reinforcement of Covid messaging have ensured (to date) that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has retained sufficient operational capacity to deal with all calls for service.

## Occupational Health and Wellbeing (OHW)

OHW have faced a significant rise in demand this year as officers and staff have been struck with both the physical and psychological effects of the Covid19 virus. Colleagues within OHW have met this demand and have made a significant contribution to maintaining our overall operational capacity by doing so.

### **3. Criminal Justice**

#### **3.1. Strategic Context**

The policing of a pandemic health emergency sits in a different context than for day to day policing.

In normal circumstances, policing priorities are derived from the Northern Ireland Policing Board's Policing Plan, supplemented by Local Policing Plans and the Service Strategic Assessment. The framework to policing these priorities derives from the criminal law, our human rights approach and working with partners.

In a pandemic health emergency, in order to align with our human rights policing principles, most notably necessity and proportionality, the policing response requires to be informed by the Senior Health advisors within government (rather than Ministers). This provides assurance that police resources and actions focus on those areas (geographic or thematic) identified by the evidence available to Senior Health Advisors and remain reflective of wider efforts to address the pandemic. This in turn provides assurance that police actions designed to support the protection of public health are necessary, proportionate and legitimate in all of the circumstances.

This approach does not compromise the operational independence of the Chief Constable. Whilst policing actions are informed by the Senior Health Advisors, the Chief Constable retains responsibility for managing operational policing decisions resulting from that advice.

#### **3.2. Tactical Context**

As with all decision making within the police service, tactical decision making is based on the National Decision Model (NDM). This provides a framework for a consistent approach to decision making that ensures our actions remain lawful,

necessary, proportionate and ethical



The steps of the NDM are based, in this context, around Health Protection Outcomes and associated risks.

Decision making also takes full cognisance of the fact that offences under Health Protection Regulations are summary offences (indeed lower scale summary offences). Such offences are thus only triable at a District Court. This is significant when it comes to the proportionality of police actions in respect of enforcement actions, particularly when it comes to operational situations which could foreseeably lead to disorder and require police use of force. Consistent with Authorised Professional Practice and our legal responsibilities, our planning and actions must be designed to minimise the recourse to use of force by police officers. Many large gatherings have been at funerals and peaceful protests. Police actions have been and will continue to be sensitive and proportionate to the prevailing circumstances. No two operations are the same, and we police with nuance and considered decision making. All of our actions must meet the

‘proportionality test’ when considered against the level of offences within the Health Protection Regulations.

Investigative proportionality is also impacted by the summary nature of offence under the Health Protection Regulations. In routine police operations it is commonplace for evidence to be gathered at the time of an event/incident and retrospectively investigated including such steps as using captured images and footage in public appeals to identify those allegedly committing offences. Throughout the current health emergency, there have been a significant number of incidents, involving significant numbers of people, not immediately identifiable to investigating police. Such cases present investigative proportionality challenges due to the scale of resource required to pursue lines of enquiry and the likelihood that investigative tools, such as public release of images and footage is unlikely to be proportionate in the circumstances, despite the public interest in some of the incidents.

Acknowledging the above constraints, commanders will routinely outline tactical parameters in an effort to ensure the policing approach to individual incidents is proportionate in terms of the potential use of force and the level of police resources applied, commensurate with the health protection risks arising.

### 3.3. Criminal Justice Initiatives

The challenges of maintaining effective criminal justice processes in the highly restricted Covid context has led to the development of creative solutions by our criminal justice leads. These developments include:

- Colleagues worked closely with the Court Service, Public Prosecution Service and the Judiciary to introduce ‘Live Link’ facilities that enable evidence by video, thus reducing face to face contact transmission risks.
- Use of digital statements to reduce the risk of public contact transmission
- Conducting voluntary attender interview on remote video conferencing

platforms, thus reducing the need for the suspect and their legal representative to enter a police station. The interview is recorded and shared with the PPS as part of the evidential file.

- Officers giving remote evidence via video link – this has begun in Belfast to connect defendants with charges and will be rolled out across 12 other sites in the coming weeks.
- Expanded scope of Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND) – Theft offences up to the value of £200 and Criminal Damage offences to the value of £300 are now within scope, reducing the number of such cases that enter the court process.
- No prosecution decision making process – we have agreed a fast track process with the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) to have these decisions made within 48 hours

#### 3.4. Operational Context

The '4 E's' – Engage-Explain-Encourage-Enforce have become common parlance over the last 6 months. This approach, endorsed by the National Police Chief's Council in the UK, and reflective of the approach adopted by An Garda Síochána, is the operational expression of necessity and proportionality for operational officers. The approach also has the support of key stakeholders and partners in the joint effort to address pandemic. Our enforcement actions as of Monday 26 October 2020 are outlined in the following tables:

## From March To Date Your Police Service Has Issued:

# 1075 CRNs

Community Resolution Notices

# 1598 COV1

Penalty Notices starting at £60 fine rising to a max of £960 (issued to over 18's only)

# 400 COV2

**81 Commercial / 319 Private**

Prohibition Notices issued to licensed premises or for restriction of gatherings in a private dwelling

# 45 COV3

Failure To Isolate (£1,000 fine)

    we care . we listen . we act

Police Service of Northern Ireland



ENFORCEMENT						
	COV 1	COV2 COM	COV 2 PRIV	COV2 TOTAL	COV 3	CRN
BELFAST CITY	798	22	174	196	9	324
LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH	24	1	1	2	6	17
ARDS & NORTH DOWN	33	5	9	14	9	19
NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN	120	8	9	17	6	97
ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE & CRAIGAVON	97	3	32	35	4	100
MID ULSTER	34	4	10	14	2	69
FERMANGH & OMAGH	74	12	15	27	2	64
DERRY CITY & STRABANE	302	7	37	44	3	154
CAUSEWAY COAST & GLENS	18	7	8	15	1	55
MID & EAST ANTRIM	55	2	9	11	2	76
ANTRIM & NEWTOWNABBEY	43	10	15	25	1	100
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1598</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>1075</b>

#### 4. The Coming Months

Turning to the weeks ahead, as the recently revised Regulations bed in it is clear that we will face considerable demands upon our resources. When the initial lockdown of March took place we witnessed sharp decreases in reported crime and calls for service, allowing us to divert resources to Covid related duties without a dramatic impact upon service levels. However, as already outlined in Section 1, crime levels and calls for service have returned to near normal levels. When coupled with greater expectations upon us to enforce Covid Regulations, I must make it clear that it will place extra demand upon the Service.

Despite these pressures The Policing Board can be assured that I have instructed planners not to abstract Neighbourhood Officers from their core duties at this time, in order to maintain continuity of service in those key areas. Whilst any future abstraction would be as a last resort it would be impossible to give a guarantee that they will not be abstracted. We will need to make creative use of our other resources and if demand increases significantly it is also reasonable to expect that financial costs via overtime and equipment are likely to increase once again. We remain alive to the £60m of additional funding given to policing and local authorities in England and Wales to deal with their Covid responsibilities.

The Garda Commissioner and I agreed to have a shared learning debrief undertaken by a number of senior officers in both organisations. The outcomes from that exercise will help to shape our response to the coming phases of Covid. The final report has been submitted to the Policing Board.

We will also reflect upon the outcomes of research undertaken by 'The Instinct Lab'. Their feedback presents us with insights as to how we communicate within the organisation to different age groups. We will review our methods of communication to ensure the key messages about our public response to Covid 19 and officer and staff safety reach a number of different age groups and in a way that reflects their needs and concerns. ENDS