

## **Strategic Review of Policing Response from the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner**

In September 2019 the Police Foundation launched a major, independent Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales. The overall aim of the Review is to set the long-term strategic vision for English and Welsh policing. The first phase was a national call for evidence, from various bodies, on challenges police may face in the coming decades. Respondents were asked for evidence, insights, arguments and perspectives by answering a number of questions.

Below is extracted from the response of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner, showing questions asked and responses given. This document does not comment on Terrorism/Counter Terrorism Policing.

### **What forms of crime or other 'threats' to public safety are most in need of a new, revised or more concerted strategic response?**

#### Serious Violence

Avon and Somerset was one of the areas that successfully bid for funding for Violence Reduction Units. The new public health approach to trying to tackle this problem is welcomed and the partnership working under VRUs has started well.

However one of the most immediate barriers to success is the funding situation. Trying to adopt a new way of working which is transformative and sustainable, when the funding is short term and in year, is even more challenging. The suggestion to improve this is to ensure funding is secured for the medium term and that the local division of that funding is also determined centrally and guaranteed so that PCCs do not have to bid for money each year which brings great uncertainty.

The focus of this work nationally is on knife crime and gang violence. However the majority of serious violence in Avon and Somerset does not involve knives and is actually linked to the Night Time Economy and Domestic Abuse. It is therefore important that there continues to be a national drive on how these types of serious violence are also tackled as these can be very different than gang related violence.

#### Reducing reoffending

The majority of crimes are committed by people that have previously offended and a small percentage of any given population in England and Wales is responsible for a large percentage of crime.

To sustainably reduce reoffending requires working with the offenders to change their lives and to do this across the seven pathways to reduce reoffending requires multi-agency working. The PCC for Avon and Somerset last year started funding a Senior Responsible Officer role to coordinate this effort and work with all agencies to make transformational change. Within the last few months a Regional SRO has been recruited (part funded by all South West PCCs) to try and transform the regional approach.

The suggested solution being that, like VRUs, the various lead agencies are mandated to work together and Local Authorities are given ring-fenced funding to help deliver the seven pathways.

#### Rape and Serious Sexual Offending

The current situation with how RASSO cases are dealt with by the Criminal Justice Service has been well documented and publicised in national media. The position we find ourselves in is failing victims

and vulnerable people on a personal level and also undermines public confidence in the whole Criminal Justice Service.

This office understands the delicate balance of Human Rights that must be maintained between the defendant's right to a fair trial (Article 6) and the victim's right to respect privacy and family life (Article 8). It is feared that the current approach to disclosure goes beyond reasonable lines of enquiry (in breach of the CPIA) and therefore as a state we are failing to protect people from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (Article 3).

There should be national guidance issued specifically to deal with reasonable lines of enquiry in RASSO cases in order that the CPS and defence do not get on disproportionate 'fishing expeditions' which undermine the victim and their private life. This clarity would also help ensure investigations are more efficient and valuable resource is not wasted conducting unnecessary digital investigation for example.

#### County Lines

County Lines is rated the second highest threat in Avon and Somerset's current Strategic Threat Assessment. There are strong links to exploitation of vulnerable people and serious violence. Trying to tackle serious violence without tackling County Lines at the same time would be nonsensical.

The current response requires improvement because, by its very nature, County Lines operates across territorial and regional policing boundaries. Individuals involved in selling drugs will often originate from a force area other than the one they are operating in, travelling through numerous other force areas en route.

Given the cross-border nature of this offending it is sensible that there is increased national coordination. The multi-agency partnership approach, adopted by policing within their areas, now needs to extend to multi-force / multi-area working as well to help tackle this problem.

#### Cybercrime and Fraud

Recent crime figures show that fraud and computer misuse account for over half of recorded crime nationally. These crimes are often complex, time consuming and require specialist skills to investigate. In terms of threat harm risk these will not necessarily be a priority compared to other crimes. Therefore as it stands regular officers/staff may not have the capability or capacity to appropriately deal with these types of offending.

Given the borderless nature of cyber-dependent offending the natural conclusion is that this should be the responsibility of a national policing body. This is not limited to investigation but also should include prevention – as this too may require more specialist advice.

Where there is a national body to deal with this there will always remain a role for local forces and should rightly be so where the victim is vulnerable – as vulnerability should properly be addressed as part of broader neighbourhood policing and safeguarding.

### **What sources and drivers of 'demand' are having a particular impact on police resources?**

#### Non-crime demand

Nearly a third of all Avon and Somerset demand is caused by missing persons and concern for safety (19% and 13% respectively). Hospitals are a particular focal point of this type of demand and one of the ways to try and reduce this is to work with hospitals to ensure appropriate procedures are in

place and adhered to so that the police are only called when necessary. In terms of missing people the Constabulary have also started using desktop investigation for those low risk cases in order to manage this demand.

### Crime

Currently the crime type generating most demand in Avon and Somerset is violence against the person (19.5%) and this demand has shown an upward trend over the last five years. As discussed above the continued funding of Violence Reduction Units and focussed multi-agency working is the starting point to try and tackle this in a different way.

### Mental Health

An area of demand that can drive both non-crime and crime demand is mental ill health. The 2019 Force Management Statement shows that mental health related calls increased by 8% on the previous year – the equivalent of over 3,400 extra officer hours spent at the scene. In 2018, 42% of all detainees arrested on suspicion of committing a criminal offence were judged by the Custody Officer to need an initial assessment from an embedded Mental Health Worker. This represents a 6% increase from 2017. Over the last year, 30.8% of all people reported missing were identified as having a mental health condition/in mental health crisis, which represents a year-on-year increase of 5.5% from 2017.

The police are not, nor should they be, mental health specialists: this should be appropriately dealt with by the health service. However due to austerity, like policing, the health sector has had to make cuts and has also struggled to meet demand. Where there are not sufficient services in place to help those in need early and in a consistent way they are more likely to end up in crisis and therefore come into contact with the police.

There needs to be better provision of mental health services to stop people reaching crisis point. There also needs to be better joint working between policing and healthcare so that when people are in crisis the best response is available combining health expertise with policing powers.

### Drugs

It is well established that drug use is a key driver of crime and disorder; with particularly strong links with acquisitive crime and with opiate and crack cocaine users (OCU). The latest CSEW shows class A drug use (as a percentage of those surveyed) is at the highest point since recorded in 1996 and has been on an upward trend. The numbers of estimated OCUs also continues to increase in line with population growth. However this can vary and County Lines is opening up markets in different areas: in Somerset the numbers of OCUs increased 24% from 2014/15 to 2016/17. There is nothing to suggest this drug abuse will change soon and it is a global problem as recognised by the UN.

Prevention – to stop people using controlled drugs and becoming addicted in the first place – is beyond the remit of policing. However policing does and should play an important part in trying to break the cycle when those drug users commit crime. There needs to be better and more consistent use of drug test on arrest as well as increased funding for diversionary programmes for offenders to be referred into. Substance misuse is an important pathway to reduce reoffending as mentioned above.

### Statutory management of offenders

In 2018 the number of registered sex offenders rose by 9% on the previous year and this has been a continued area of growth in recent years. In Avon and Somerset the Constabulary felt it necessary, like other forces, to step outside national guidance in how it manages low risk Registered Sex Offenders. This was because demand was outstripping capacity and the subsequent need to manage

risk at the right level in an effective way. The police do have an appropriate role to play in managing offenders but if there were to be any national changes which may broaden the statutory duties on police, e.g. management of Domestic Abuse offenders, then this will need to be appropriately funded and guidelines for forces about the suitable resourcing of this.

### **How have public, partner agency and societal expectations of the police service changed?**

Within the Avon and Somerset Local Public Confidence Survey one of the questions asks about people's priorities for policing. In the last year, of 3000 people surveyed, reassurance (e.g. by having more police on the street) was the top priority stated by 42% of respondents. This was also the top priority in the 2014/15 but with 31% of respondents in that year. This is significantly higher than any other theme. The biggest changes in priority in this time were violent crime (which increased from 2.7% to 8.1%) and accessibility (which increased from 2.9% to 7%). In that same time period the following themes all saw less people citing them as a priority: speeding, road safety, parking, litter and local information on policing.

Reassurance and visibility are certainly a legitimate expectation of the public and are important in maintaining the public confidence necessary to police by consent. However due to reduced resources and increased, complex demand the ability to have visible police on the streets clearly cannot be the top priority for policing. The context for this also is that the majority of people are not victims of crime so reassurance in essence is all they need from policing. This has been recognised as an important factor in Avon and Somerset and a couple of key things have been done to try and better meet these expectations. Firstly there has been investment in technology in order to enable mobile working and promote more time out of stations for officers. Secondly neighbourhood policing, and PCSO numbers, have also been protected to ensure strong community policing. There is room to further improve in how these expectations are met by delivering improved outcomes to reassure the public and also consider how the public can be reassured without needing to see 'police on the streets' e.g. engagement through digital platforms.

The themes, cited above, that have been less frequently given as policing priorities are either non-crime or road related. This generally supports the view that people have lower expectations of policing generally and public awareness of the reduced resources / increased demand on policing.

### **What threats and challenges should the police, working with others, expect to encounter and prepare for over the next one to two decades?**

#### Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

In the Avon and Somerset Strategic Threat Assessment 2019/20 CSAE was rated as the highest threat. It showed that CSE is usually lone, peer on peer offending, and CSA is often committed by family members or somebody known to the victim. There is no indication this demand will reduce. Operation Topaz is the force proactive response to deal with CSAE by better identifying victims and offenders and disrupting the activity; this proactive approach will naturally increase demand. The STA also identified the increased numbers of Indecent Images of Children being shared and viewed online as well as the increasing use of digital apps and games to enable this offending – this links to the point below.

#### Digital relevance

One of the points mentioned in Question 1 was cybercrime. As well as cyber-dependent there is also a large amount of cyber-enabled crime and an increasing need for digital investigations. With the

pace of technological change this is not likely to slow down. Having the right technology and right people is expensive and does not lend itself to the budgets of a public sector organisation; the private sector are able to offer more competitive salaries to attract relevant specialist skills. As mentioned above a joined up national approach has to be the best way to tackle this and it is a challenge for policing as a whole, not just Avon and Somerset. A national approach will also stop internal competition between forces for the scarce resources.

#### Information Governance

Connected to the digital challenge is good information governance. Policing deals with large volumes of personal and sensitive data which is paramount to manage correctly. This challenge is made more complex in the need to use data analysis and information sharing with other agencies to improve service delivery. The use of data drives operational decision making and, given the increasing public knowledge and interest in this field, good information governance is now a key factor of legitimacy. As the amount and use of data is only going to continue to grow this can pose a significant threat to public confidence if it is managed poorly.

#### Hate crime

Hate Crime offences increased after the Brexit referendum; these increases have now stabilised at a new normal and have not receded back to pre-referendum levels. Aside from actual increases in hate crime Avon and Somerset are continually trying to improve links with all communities and instil confidence in them to report crimes particularly hate crime. Therefore it is expected recorded hate crime will also increase because of improved reporting from communities that under report at the moment.

#### Lack of diversity and inclusion

Having a police force that is representative of the communities it serves is important to both public confidence and legitimacy of that force. This has been a priority for Avon and Somerset for a number of years, particularly gender and ethnic diversity, and some measurable improvements have been made. However the force as a whole is still not close to being representative of the community and this difference becomes more stark when considering more senior ranks/positions. This challenge of diversity becomes even more important when considering the above challenge of hate crime.

#### Aging population

The UK as a whole has an aging population. The Avon and Somerset area already has more older people (65 years and over) than the national average: 19.7% compared to 18.3%; in Somerset nearly a quarter of the population is already in this older age range. Life expectancy has outpaced healthy life expectancy and this therefore means there will be increasing numbers of people with health problems and vulnerability. An aging population also reduces the proportion of people in employment age so this may also be a challenge for workforce planning – especially given that police officers are almost entirely under the age of 56.

#### Climate change

Some of the challenges that may be caused by climate change include rising sea levels, wetter winters and hotter temperatures. The first two will both result in increased flooding which the police currently have to manage with partners. Flooding will also cause areas to become more isolated and vulnerable and hamper the police's ability to respond to these areas. There have been a number of studies and links made between heat and increased levels of crime so if borne out increased crime and ASB could be another side effect of the climate change.

#### Territorial policing

Although there has been the recent announcement of investment in policing the funding is effectively ring-fenced to deliver the additional officers. Therefore large fiscal challenges still remain for police forces including lack of capital funding and increasing pension costs.

This response has also cited a number of areas where offending is becoming more borderless and this trend is only likely to continue with the increasing use of technology to commit or enable offences.

In addition, as mentioned with specialist digital capability above, forces can end up competing with each other for limited resources and this will be exacerbated wherever there is a national problem such as the lack of accredited investigators.

Collaboration between forces is supposed to provide economies of scale and efficiencies allowing for better service delivery to the public. However collaborations can be challenging as each force and PCC must always put their own territorial area first as those are the communities to which they are duty bound to deliver the best service. Avon and Somerset has experienced first-hand the difficulties of entering or maintaining a successful collaboration.

In order to overcome these challenges and truly realise the benefits of economies of scale, without the political challenges of collaboration, there must be a reduction in the number of territorial forces; perhaps moving to a much smaller number of larger regional forces. This would also help ensure a more consistent approach to policing, and service delivery to the public, throughout the country.

#### Loss of local control

In October the Home Office circulated draft national policing outcomes. Monitoring outcomes is sensible given the increased funding in policing over the next four years. Improved outcomes will help demonstrate value for money and why the extra funding was needed. However the risk is that this indicates an intent to start taking a more centralised approach to policing in the round. Although a more national approach is welcomed in specific areas of policing if this were to be done in a broad brush way there would be a loss of the local control and local accountability through Chief Constables and PCCs and potentially a derogation of dealing with local priorities.