

**Lincolnshire Police Response to
COVID-19 Pandemic
Positive Impact Briefing
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Introduction

Lincolnshire is a large and rural geographical area with a relatively poor infrastructure in terms of road network, in fact Lincolnshire has one of the worst Road Traffic Collision (RTC) rates in the Country, therefore travelling between locations can take much longer than anticipated.

Over the last couple of years, police demand in Lincolnshire, in terms of the number of calls to the police and the number and complexity of recorded crimes has increased. However the number of police officers to deal with this increased demand has fallen, largely due to the reductions in funding and the requirement to maintain a balanced budget.

This briefing demonstrates some of the positive impacts of policing the COVID-19 pandemic, when calls for service and crime demand reduced to become more equitable with the supply of police officers and staff. It demonstrates the level of service which can be achieved if sustainable increases in funding for resources were realised.

Op Talla Response

On 17th March, Lincolnshire Police reacted to Government advice and pulled together an Op Talla Major Incident Room (MIR) to help manage and steer the force response to the COVID-19 crisis. Under the Gold Command of ACC Wilson (with support from Supt Timmins), the MIR was made up of the following thematic cells:

- Information and Intelligence cell
- Resourcing and Welfare cell
- Powers and Policies cell
- Logistics cell
- Comms cell

We were able to formulate and deliver a coordinated, informed response ensuring our communities continued to receive a quality service and our staff understood what was expected of them in a very fast-moving environment. We were able to change our whole operating model almost overnight from an office and station-based set-up, to embracing the world of flexible and remote working.

We have been able to balance the changing demand from COVID-19 as well as the usual demand we expect at this time of year, utilising a common-sense approach to enforcing the coronavirus legislation.

As at the 31st May, 237 fixed penalty notices had been issued across the County to those who were breaching coronavirus legislation.

Impact on Staffing

The initial absence from work as a result of employees displaying symptoms quickly recovered and the advent of swift testing of staff further reduced the requirement for officers to be absent. As such, the service provided to the public has remained exemplary.

As the pandemic began to bite, all training within the force was cancelled. In common with other forces, Lincolnshire extended the accreditation timescales for Personal Safety Training, First Aid

training and some other command accreditations. We are working to recommence training but on a risk basis.

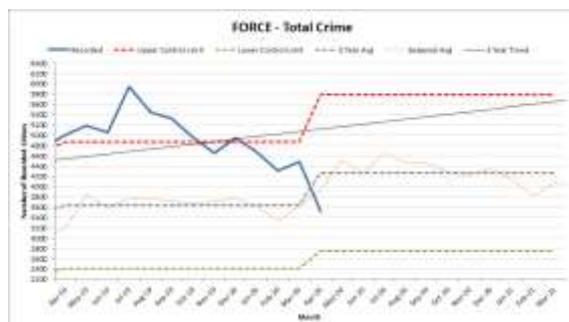
The majority of support functions within the force continued unabated. Wherever possible the force facilitated personnel to work from home, providing appropriate equipment for this to be conducted. Some non-essential functions were paused, such as elements of the change programme, most of which are being relaunched.

We have seen a difference in the way that daily business is being conducted. Greater use of telephone conferencing has been utilised for meetings, negating the requirement for people to travel across the county and assisting in the maintenance of social distancing.

Assault on Emergency Workers

There were been a number of COVID related assaults on police and other emergency workers over this time. Between 23rd March (lockdown) and 21st May, 11 of the 70 recorded assaults on officers specifically mentioned that the intention of the individual was to spit/cough/breathe at the officer for the purpose of transferring Coronavirus. It is really pleasing to say that the courts have taken these offences seriously and we have had some custodial sentences. We are also happy to report that those affected have not been seriously harmed and do not believe anyone has actually contracted the virus in these circumstances.

Overall Crime Demand

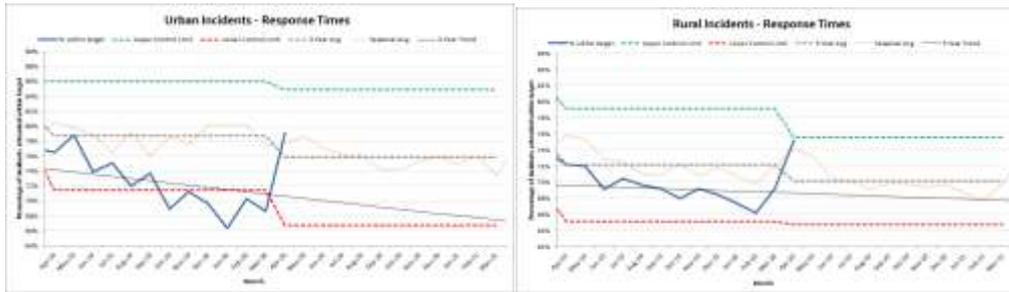


The coronavirus pandemic had a positive impact on the number of offences being committed – offence numbers for April were lower than expected in most areas, especially victim based offences such as Violence.

Since lockdown on 23rd March to 24th May, which was 9 weeks, there had been a 27% reduction in recorded notifiable crimes (compared to the same weeks in 2019) – this was in line with National trends.

Lincolnshire is ranked 18th in the Country in terms of the lowest number of offences per 1000 residents and Lincolnshire residents only have an 8% chance of being a victim of a recordable crime (excluding fraud)

Response Times - Urgent



The number of 999 calls reduced during COVID-19 due to less opportunity for people to be involved in an emergency situation – this lower demand meant our aim to respond quickly to as many urgent incidents as possible improved significantly and demonstrated that our resourcing capacity is stretched in times of ‘normal’ demand due to volume and the geography of the County.

The Force Urban Response time target is <15 minutes and covers Lincoln North, Lincoln Centre and Lincoln South. April saw 79% of urgent calls responded to within 15 minutes, compared to 68% in March. **The average response time for urban incidents over the last 12 months is 15:17 minutes**

The Force Rural Response time target is <20 minutes and covers the rest of the County. April saw 75% of urgent calls responded to within 20 minutes, compared to 69% in March. **The average response time for rural incidents over the last 12 months is 19:36 minutes**

This improved performance is a combination of less traffic on the roads and less urgent calls for service which gave us more opportunity to respond in the way we aspire to.

Proactive Policing

As a result of a reduction in ‘normal’ demand and improved staffing levels due to less abstractions for training etc. there were plenty of opportunities for proactive policing across the Force area – some examples are as follows:

Drugs

Drugs are a key driver of criminality and exploitation in Lincolnshire and the Force has been proactive in targeting those creating harm through the distribution/supply of drugs.

The supply of drugs is also linked to violence and the enforcement action taken forms part of our wider Violent Crime Reduction Initiative, Operation Raptor, which was launched in January.

Locally, regular and special constabulary officers have been able to be more proactive which has resulted in a number of arrests, disruptions and intelligence gathering across the County. This has included County Lines criminals in Skegness, multiple site cannabis farms in Gainsborough, cross border organised criminals with Humberside, dealing in Boston and Grantham.

Some of the offences we have uncovered were false imprisonment and drugs supply of all types (heroin, cocaine, psychoactive substances). We have seized thousands of pounds and other property, closed premises involved in criminality and gained the confidence of our communities.

One such offence was, Operation Infrared which related to a proactive search of an address in North Kyme, Lincoln where a sophisticated cannabis farm was located. Approximately 5,700 plants were found with their estimated net worth ranging up to a full yield potential of £4,000,000. Six people were arrested from this location; with 4 being charged and remanded for the cultivation of cannabis and 2 being released on police bail. A problem profile to understand the extent of large scale cannabis cultivations in Lincolnshire has been commissioned.

The East Midlands Specialist Operations Unit, continued to support us in tackling Serious and Organised Crime – recent enforcement includes:

- Disruption to the supply of drugs between Leicester and Skegness with 2 kilograms of cocaine and £1,200 cash recovered
- Enforcement against those involved in the supply of drugs between Leeds and Lincoln/Gainsborough with £2,500 cash and a knuckle duster seized along with £26,000 in a bank account being restrained
- A warrant was executed as part of disruption to drugs supply between the West Midlands and Lincoln where £36,600 cash, baseball bat, machete and hunting knife was recovered
- Six people were arrested on 5th May on suspicion of conspiracy to supply Class A drugs following a series of early-morning warrants in the Gainsborough area, in one of our largest operations of recent years. Drugs including cocaine, heroin and cannabis, as well as £12,000 cash and weapons were recovered. Five people have been remanded in custody.

Acquisitive Crime

A series of burglaries in Skegness was identified during the earlier part of lockdown. Local CID took a very proactive stance, and having viewed CCTV tentatively identified a suspect. Officers went and arrested a male, who was previously unknown to Lincolnshire, but had been bailed here from Nottinghamshire for another offence. They found an “Aladdin’s Cave” of stolen items from burglaries in the Skegness area. In total, he was charged and remanded for 9 burglary dwellings and 4 attempted burglaries. The CPS lawyer sent an early email of thanks recognising the team for their hard work, good humour and great team spirit.

An increase in residential shed burglaries was identified in the North Lincoln area. Operation Kirkwood was implemented to proactively target this issue, to prevent further offences and identify those committing crime in the area. Following proactive patrols and identification of opportunities for enforcement, three people were arrested in quick succession and searches carried out. This identified an address with a significant amount of what is believed to be stolen property from these offences, which was recovered and returned to its owners. The main suspect currently remains on police bail whilst the evidence is collated, and offences have now stopped.

Roads Policing

In the early days of the lockdown, traffic on the roads reduced by around 50%, however there were irresponsible drivers and riders taking advantage of the emptier roads and we took the opportunity to let those drivers know our specialist operations officers were on patrol, both in cars and motorbikes, marked and unmarked and would enforce speed limits on our roads. Proactively we used Specialist Operations to get messages out not to attend the coast and they turned people away. This led to very little infringement on the guidance over the key dates such as VE day & Easter - other areas around the country weren’t as lucky.

We continue to receive reports of drivers speeding across the county so we have stepped up our patrols and enforcement. Drivers who do not comply with the law may face having their vehicle seized, may be arrested or reported for offences. Alongside our speed checks, the counties fixed and mobile safety cameras continue to check the speed of drivers at collision hotspots and where we know people exceed the speed limit.

We also had the opportunity to proactively police some of the quieter roads which may not always have the attention that they need due to their rurality and capacity of officers.

As a consequence of a reduction in firearms deployments and assistance to local neighbourhood areas, the Armed Response Vehicles (ARVs) had the opportunity to carry out much more Fatal Four proactivity. During April and May, the ARVs have issued; 213 x Traffic Offence Reports (TORs), seized 52 vehicles under SOCAP (Serious Organised Crime & Police Act), arrested 16 people for drink/drug driving, were involved in 13 instances of vehicles failing to stop (FTS) and 5 Tactical Pursuit and Containment (TPAC) deployments.

Licencing

Every report received by Lincolnshire Police of bars and pubs being open during lockdown was investigated by our licencing team – and reassuringly no breaches were found. Any pub or bar which continues to open could lose its licence and face being fined. Businesses are allowed to remain open if they are operating a collection or delivery service only. Where there are some concerns, we pass these to the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Trading Standards team

Vulnerability

The number of calls relating to people missing from home or in relation to the Concern for Welfare of others initially decreased during lockdown. This is now on the increase and we recognise that from work the LRF has done there tends to be a heightened number of cases of mental health concerns following a pandemic of this nature. We will work together with partners to ensure that collectively we are ready for any increases.

As COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, we are prepared for the number of Domestic Abuse and Sexual offences reports to rise as victims gain more opportunities to make a report or notify a friend or neighbour once they are distanced from the perpetrator. We will continue to monitor the number of reports and take positive action against perpetrators and continue to support victims.

We took a proactive approach, working with partners, to ensure that those victims of hidden harm were still able to be supported and had outlets to raise the alarm if need be. This included a number of media campaigns including:

- Posters and leaflets designed for Domestic Abuse and COVID-19 were utilised across the county – by the Coop, Link Magazines and Lincolnshire Scene publication. They were also placed at food banks and town parishes are encouraged to utilise them through their Facebook community pages.
- National Domestic Abuse campaign materials were present at the testing sites across the county.
- We actively promoted Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) when achieved at court to push the message that we will remove the perpetrator where possible.
- We produced a video of thanks to all the domestic abuse and sexual abuse service workers during this time - <https://www.lincs.police.uk/news-campaigns/news/2020/thank-you-to-those-working-with-victims-of-domestic-and-sexual-abuse/>

Anti-Social Behaviour

The number of anti-social behaviour incidents significantly increased during lockdown, with 172% more incidents recorded in April 2020 (compared to the previous 12 monthly average). These were predominantly related to inconsiderate behaviour reports from members of the public informing us about breaches of the initial lockdown guidance such as neighbours not adhering to social distancing, BBQs and gatherings in gardens and public spaces, and people travelling to visit family/friends.

An example of such a report is when officers attended Twyford Woods near Grantham on 19th April following reports of people gathering and riding quad bikes. When officer attended, there was a group of around 15 people, including riders and spectators. The group fled the scene when our officers arrived but some were located soon after in a nearby carpark. Eight people were issued Fixed Penalty Notices and six were given a Section 59 warning - all were from the Bedfordshire area.

Stop & Search



The number of people stopped and searched during April significantly increased – 400 people compared to a previous 12 monthly average of 246. Whilst there were less people outside of their homes due to lockdown and greater engagement with those who were out and about to understand why, the increase in the number of those who were also searched demonstrates a level of increased proactivity. The resulting number of those who were arrested (15%) remained consistent.

Op Springboard – Housekeeping

Before COVID-19 when our ‘normal’ levels of demand outstripped our supply of resources, in terms of staffing and time, we were falling behind with a number processing and system management tasks. There was no time or space to focus on administrative management and to remove poor processes.

As the impact of COVID-19 became clear, we quickly started to use this period of reduced demand to focus on core tasks and those that were outstanding prior to a return to business as usual.

Some early results are noted as follows:

- **Victims Code of Practice (VCOP)** – We have addressed around 600-700 VCoP outstanding tasks and are now reviewing further identified tasks incorrectly resolved as part of a wider audit.
- **Managed and Learning Environment (MLE) NCALT** - there has been a good reaction from local departments and areas in getting mandatory courses completed. The biggest impact was seen in the completion of 500 Modern Slavery training packages.
- **Professional Development Reviews (PDRs)** - at the start of lockdown there were over 500 outstanding PDRs to be completed. This has reduced in number by around 60-70 and officers/staff are assessing whether the HR systems are accurate to ensure an annual PDR is completed and recorded.
- **Suspects Outstanding** - We have reduced from 900 to around 600 suspects outstanding and are looking to work with divisions around reducing this number and maintaining the good work that has been undertaken during this time.
- **Open/Unresolved occurrences on Niche** – There were around 23,000 occurrences on Niche that were open/unresolved for a variety of reasons. The Crime Management Bureau (CMB), Crime Registrars, and those on 12 week isolation have worked to reduce the numbers by reviewing

each occurrence and closing them appropriately – the figure has been reduced to around 6,000 and continues to fall.

- **Outstanding tasks** - Pronto tasks which are created through the Mobile Data Terminals have reduced from 905 at the start of the process to below 400. This shows the good work undertaken by all operational officers and staff to work through these tasks
- **Intelligence** – the number of intelligence submissions awaiting processing reached zero from around 3,000 and will continue to be monitored

The work of Op Springboard has identified a number of key lessons learned regarding reasons for backlogs and their causes, such as not reviewing workloads and any outstanding tasks of officers and staff when they leave or move within the organisation – we are introducing mechanisms for preventing these in the future.

Volunteers

The Special Constabulary continued to provide additional resource during the peak 3 month period of March to June as shown below:

YEAR	MARCH Hours	APRIL Hours	MAY Hours	TOTAL COMBINED
2019	4264	3463	3946	11673
2020	4719	5036	5503	15258
Increase	+11%	+45%	+39%	+30%

We saw an increase in attendance from the Special Constabulary, as some of these officers were furloughed from their employment and therefore had more capacity to volunteer their time. There was an increase in duty time of over 30% in the peak period, with over 8740 hours of response policing, 1176 hours of roads policing and 179 hours of dedicated rural crime patrols. The duties were completed by 104 of the 140 strong unit, due to social distancing, shielding and 20 officers still in initial training.

With the initial leave ban and cancellation in training amongst regular officers, staffing levels have been higher than usually the case, with the Special Constabulary providing additional resource and allowing for greater flexibility with pro-active policing. During the period, Special Constabulary officers have taken part in various operations, the execution of warrants, provided specialist support with drones in addition to their normal duties.

The Force had to stop using police staff volunteers in other roles due to the restrictions but will be looking at how we reintroduce them as restrictions are lifted, including areas such as Community Speed Watch.

Communication Strategy

From early on we were conscious of the concerns both internally and externally and sought to get the tone right to give confidence to both the public and our colleagues.

The public response has on the whole been very positive. When we have interacted on Social Media channels it is clear the public have been very supportive of the action the Police are taking to ensure people comply with the Government guidance and legislation in what is a difficult situation.

It has been evident that the majority of the public in Lincolnshire have complied with the Lockdown regulations making the Policing of them much easier and it has only been in a minority of cases we have experienced breaches.

Lincolnshire Police have adopted new methods of communication to have a two way conversation with the public utilising Facebook Live in which the public can ask questions direct with senior officers policing the response to COVID-19. This has enabled the public to get clarity about the restrictions and receiving an answer immediately to their questions. The feedback from these events has been positive and has reached a large number of people.

The Independent Advisory Group (IAG) has sat as part of the Op Talla Gold Group advising the Police on their response to the pandemic. As part of this they conducted a survey of the public, which was publicised on Social Media. There were 2822 responses to the survey from the public. On the whole the survey indicates that the respondents are satisfied with the measures taken by Lincolnshire Police to encourage the public to comply with Government advice.

Planning for the Future

We are now planning for the recovery from the pandemic and the gradual release from the lockdown and its impact. Each command of the Force has formulated plans for what policing the release of lockdown will look like. This has included a range of scenarios such as increased traffic on roads and collisions, an increase in Violent Crime, an increase in safeguarding referrals etc.

We recognise there will still be a number of challenges the Force will have to overcome as the lockdown is released and the country returns nearer to normality.

The Force is also ensuring that the organisational learning from our response to the pandemic is captured and we don't simply return to how we used to conduct our business. The response to the pandemic has promoted a lot of innovative ways of working and accelerated many of our remote working technologies and it is recognised that we do not want to lose this.

Conclusion

In summary, this briefing demonstrates some of the positive impacts of policing the COVID-19 pandemic and the opportunities that a reduction in 'normal' demand has provided in terms of improved resourcing capacity, enabling more proactivity of operational policing and ensuring internal processes are improved and outstanding core workload tasks are cleared.

As we return to 'normal' levels, it will be a challenge to sustain these positive impacts as demand will inevitably start to once again outstrip supply of resources. The communities of Lincolnshire deserve the level of policing we have been able to provide during COVID-19 – a level that without a sustainable improvement in funding for Lincolnshire, will not be able to be maintained.