

Chapter 2.7. The Impact of Changing Working Patterns for Police Personnel in England and Wales During COVID-19 Lockdown One

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ABSTRACT

A national health emergency coupled with public order and restraint imperatives compounded the levels of stress in policing. In England and Wales new working patterns were negotiated to manage the constraints of a different working environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter explores the impacts of the COVID lockdown restrictions on police personnel in Lockdown 1 utilising five themes: preparedness and protection; relationships with the public; changing work demands; communication; and support. Empirical data comprising the qualitative comments of front-line police personnel derived from a broader online national survey are reported to illustrate sentiment towards these issues. The qualitative data suggests that frustration and disappointment, combined with changing work practices and a perceived disconnection with the public heightened stress levels in those working on the frontline during Lockdown 1.

Introduction

The outbreak and spread of Covid-19 in the UK represented a public health crisis and had a seismic impact on the emergency response workers who sought to adapt their services to the government's changing guidelines and restrictions. These restrictions had a direct impact on the lives, livelihood, and liberties of all UK citizens¹. The focus of this chapter is the impact of COVID-19 in Lockdown 1 (26 March 2020 – 4 July 2020²) on police personnel, their work practices, their relationships with the publics they serve and on their own wellbeing. The chapter draws on a survey conducted with police officers in August 2020 (Fleming and Brown, 2021a) and with police staff in September 2020 (Fleming and Brown 2021b) about their experiences during the first lockdown. The sample was selected from a subgroup of officers and police staff serving on the front line in custody suites, neighbourhood and response policing in England and Wales. It is these duties that have been associated with the greatest stress for those policing on the front line during COVID-19 (Newiss et al 2021). Adapting several studies representing police responses to COVID-19, the chapter considers their reported responses against the backdrop of the authors' own research.

The first case of COVID-19 in England was 29 January 2020 but it was not until March that wide-ranging restrictions on liberties and freedom of movement were imposed. The police were empowered to impose fixed penalty notices in lieu of a criminal charge for breaches of these regulations during lockdown. They could remove a person to a place for screening and assessment or detain the person until a public health officer could assess them if there were reasonable grounds to suspect they were infectious. Resources were stretched as police sought to combine these additional and sometimes confrontational duties with their existing responsibilities – difficulties that Bonkiewicz and Ruback (2012) noted in their discussion of policing in times of crisis. For emergency

¹ The Joint Committee on Human Rights (2021) noted 65 different regulations.

² Restrictions were temporarily eased over the summer period until most restrictions were formally lifted on 4 July 2020

services workers, the pandemic posed many challenges. In the context of policing these challenges were identified by scholars both in the UK and elsewhere.

Policing challenges during the pandemic

On 6th April 2020, the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee (2020) heard evidence about the police's preparedness for the pandemic. Four key concerns were identified. First, access to personal protective equipment, where and when needed, in a timely fashion, getting it replenished, and making sure that it was the right spec of kit. Second, the need for communications with chief officers and government, to be clear, concise, and consistent across the country. Third, pressures on staff because of the numbers in self-isolation. Finally, the need to think about how police can protect the public without putting officers and the public at greater risk of contracting the virus, while at the same time maintaining the working relationship with the public given the new emergency powers. These challenges for the police were echoed in the academic literature that followed.

In the short time since the pandemic much scholarly effort has been put into recording the trials of policing in crisis (Papazoglou et al., 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021; Mehdizadeh and Kamkar, Drew and Martin 2020; Sadiq, 2020; Stogner et al., 2020; Frenkel et al., 2021). To date, the empirical work of Fleming and Brown 2021a; Fleming and Brown 2021b, Brown and Fleming 2021 and Newiss et al, 202) provide nuanced understandings of the impact on police personnel working under conditions of COVID-19. Laufs and Waseem's (2020) systematic review of the challenges facing policing during general crises identified: (1) police-community relations; (2) the psychological and mental wellbeing of police officers; (3) intra-organisational challenges (such as resource allocation or staffing issues); as well as (4) inter-organisational communication, collaboration, and cooperation.

In summary, several issues were identified in this body of work representing the challenges of COVID-19 policing:

- tensions in maintaining *relations with the community* while ensuring compliance with new regulations and restrictions especially if citizens are resistant, do not wear personal protective equipment (PPE) (Newiss et al, 2021) or deliberately break the rules as a form of political dissent (see Wetherill, 2021);
- *good communication* as well as a *supportive work culture* (Laufs and Waseem, 2020). These 'essentials' found resonance in Fleming and Brown's 2021a and 2021b studies of the pandemic (see also Brown and Fleming 2021);
- *pressures on a policing workforce* during a public health crisis that included diminished strength of the workforce due to infections and illness of officers and their families and the availability of physical resources to safely police (House of Commons, Home Affairs Select Committee, 2020). Lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), IT and other necessary *protective provisions* can quickly cripple the response capacity and decrease the morale of officers (Lauf and Waseem, 2020);
- *workload demands and priorities* which changed fundamentally under lockdown regulations. In a crisis, Laufs and Waseem (2020) suggest two dynamics are at play here. First, officers are involved in crisis-related tasks such as enforcing public health restrictions, which in turn affect police community relations, and second, police are responding to changes in crime patterns. Furthermore, because physical contact with suspects or offenders is unavoidable, previously routine practices such as interviewing or managing custody requirements need additional time and resources.

We have summarised this research into the following five themes:

1. Preparedness and protection of staff
2. Relationship with the public
3. Changing patterns of demand/ work force pressure
4. Communication
5. Support for officers

In the following section we present further support for our themes. Thereafter, we report from qualitative responses from our own empirical data observations of police officers and staff working during the first COVID lockdown.

Preparedness and protection

HMICFRS (2021a) noted many forces had prepared risk assessments for a flu pandemic, but not formally tested preparations for dealing with a pandemic as they had done for terrorism or weather-related scenarios. The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) had by mid-March 2020 established Operation Talla (Op Talla) whose aims were: to get the most out of co-ordination, communication, and collaboration, to provide advice and act as the focal point for government.

HMICFRS (2021a) observed that not all forces were prepared for the scale of the task they were confronted with and the significant pressure on managers. Some overestimated the ability of supervisors to cope with the extra work – such as risk assessments, allocation of work and remote management – without additional support. Initially, forces did not have enough existing stocks of

PPE, and what they had was inadequate. It took time to produce and circulate detailed, tailored police service guidance. When Op Talla did circulate advice, there was some confusion, as this differed from the initial guidance forces had received. Some forces had bought PPE that was deemed no longer suitable when the advice changed, forcing them to buy new supplies. For the workforce, the changes in guidance and communication about these changes, caused confusion and frustration, particularly on wearing masks in vehicles.

Relationship with the public

Forces adopted the Four Es approach suggested by the College of Policing³. Guidance was aimed to help officers ensure that the public understood what was being asked and why. However, forces found it difficult to provide a consistent message, partly because of the complexity of the legislation and regulations and partly by the frequency of changes. Forces were not given enough time to adjust their responses or messaging in relation to changes (HMICFRS, 2021a).

Ghaenmaghami et al (2021) analysed free text responses from 447 (59%) adult members of the public in a single force who completed an attitudinal survey between 28 July and 15 September 2020. They reported feelings of being fobbed off when ringing the non-emergency 101 number, which suggested a lack of effective policing. However, there was also a myriad of responses that recognised that police were under-resourced, making their job much harder, but ‘doing the best they can’ under the circumstances within limited resources.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS 2020) undertook a public attitude survey in June 2020. Just over half of the adults surveyed reported that they had noticed others breaching virus restrictions locally since the virus outbreak. Of these, 7% reported the breach to the police. Their main reasons

³ The College of Policing (2020) issued guidance to the police known as the four ‘E’s: Engage – officers speak to people and try to establish their awareness and understanding of the situation; Explain – officers try to educate people about any personal risks they are taking; Encourage – officers may need to guide individuals, suggesting they return home; Enforce – officers may, as a last resort, remove a person to the place where they live, using reasonable force only if it is a necessary and proportionate means of ensuring compliance.

for not reporting were that it was considered too trivial (36%) or the police could not have done anything (10%). Provisional data from the NPCC⁴ showed that by June 8th 2020, a total of 15,715 Fixed Penalty Notices had been recorded by forces in England and Wales for breaches of government regulations during the first lockdown period⁵. The data show most fines were issued during the month of April and the first two weeks of May, with a reduction as lockdown restrictions were eased.

Changing patterns of demand/workforce pressure

Farrell (2020) noted mobility restrictions had a “dramatic” effect on both physical and online crimes. Assaults and public disorder crimes declined in the UK as restrictions on hospitality outlets were introduced. As non-essential shops closed, shoplifting plummeted. Online and virtual activity increased, accompanied by new opportunities for scams and fraud. Lockdown breaches also created new workload. Figure one shows the overall numbers of reported crime. It shows a fluctuating pattern of a drop, rising during and after the first lockdown (ONS 2020).

Insert <Figure 2.7.1: Recorded crime for England and Wales Oct 2019 to Sept 2020>

During March 2020 there was a fall of 5% in crimes recorded compared to February 2020 but by May 2020 there was a 12% increase in crime from the previous month. From 13 May the government introduced initial easing of the lockdown restrictions. This included the reopening of some businesses and the relaxing of some restrictions on freedom of movement. April 2020 represented the only month where full UK lockdown measures were applied throughout, during which time the police recorded their lowest number of crimes in England and Wales across all months in the year ending May 2020. Figures indicated a similar pattern for most individual offence types, showing a

⁴ [Statistical update on lockdown fines given by police in England and Wales \(npcc.police.uk\)](https://npcc.police.uk/statistics/lockdown-fines)

⁵ The latest available update indicates 118,963 fixed penalty notices (FPNs) were issued over the period of COVID legislation (NPCC 11th Jan 2022) [Update on the national police absence rate and Coronavirus FPNs issued by forces in England and Wales \(npcc.police.uk\)](https://npcc.police.uk/statistics/national-police-absence-rate-and-coronavirus-fpn-issued)

decrease in crime levels during the initial lockdown period, and an increase in May 2020 during which restrictions were slowly relaxed. Theft showed the largest volume decrease of 15% between February and March 2020 followed by a substantially larger 35% fall between March and April 2020. The largest volume increase during May 2020 was seen for violence against the person offences which rose by 13% from the previous month. Following a 9% fall in public order offences between March and April 2020, the number of public order offences recorded between April and May 2020 increased by 23%. These changes are likely to reflect the introduction and subsequent easing of lockdown restrictions, as well as seasonal variation within these offences.

The House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee (2020) noted that at this time approximately 13% of all police officers and staff were absent due to sickness, self-isolation, or caring responsibilities, which is about 10% higher than would be considered 'normal'.

Communication

In the reviews conducted by HMICFRS (2021a, b) the Inspectorate noted that many forces were frustrated by the way that some government announcements were communicated. Often forces and the NPCC were not consulted prior to changes in regulations and there were examples of notification by way of the evening's televised government briefings where changes were announced. This, and the absence of guidance caused some operational difficulties and created confusion and stress among officers and staff.

Ghaenmaghami et al (2021) also mentioned communication. One theme of responses from their respondents was confusion, which related to the boundaries between the police and other institutions, such as the government. They observed that for both public and police alike, the question asked was, what exactly were the 'rules and expectations?' Their respondents were frustrated with the constant 'tinkering with the rules'. For the police, this issue was compounded by

the fact that it was they who were tasked with arbitrating lockdown restrictions, with the constant threat of ‘misreading’ the situation and impeding their ability to do so through fear of repercussion (Blowe and Lubbers, 2020).

The pandemic situation changed quickly and the requirements to respond to it also changed. The HMICFRS (2021a) review indicated that most of the changes were communicated in forces through briefings, emails, force intranets and online meetings. Structured training to support the communication was not always possible. Officers told the Inspectorate they often felt unsupported in this fast-changing context and were not always clear about what applied in their local areas.

Support for officers

Drew and Martin (2020) suggest that policing in the COVID-19 environment had three components that put officers at risk: the ongoing and sustained threat of catching the virus; being a rescuer-victim, specifically those who contracted the virus as part of their duties; and higher-than-normal stress due to the elevated physical danger for officers and their families. In their study Newiss et al (2021) found that about half of those working from police premises reported feeling anxious about contracting COVID-19 because of their policing duties and potentially infecting, sometimes vulnerable, family members. Newiss et al (2021) and Fleming and Brown (2021a) found that overall, officers felt supported by their line managers and peers but less so by senior management teams who were often considered remote from the realities of the front line.

Experiences of police officers during lockdown one

During August 2020, the present authors undertook a survey of a sample of police officers serving in England and Wales. A total of 463/1000 police officers returned usable questionnaires. For the purposes of this chapter, officers serving as custody/detention officers or in neighbourhood and

response policing were extracted and some further analysis is presented here on their free text comments. A full account of this survey and methods is available in Fleming and Brown (2021a). In the event only 16 detention officers were available from the survey. To boost these numbers, we also extracted 87 detention officers from a survey of police support staff conducted in the same period with the same questionnaire (full details available in Brown and Fleming, 2021b). Support staff working as detention officers share much the same duties and conditions of work as police officer colleagues (HMIC 2004). The two open ended questions in the survey were:

Qualitative question 1: Please can you briefly describe any new ways of working that were initiated during lockdown that you think are worth keeping in the post COVID recovery?

Qualitative question 2: Finally, are there any other comments you would like to make about your working life during the pandemic? If not, please type N/A.

In the following section we identify the qualitative responses from response, neighbourhood and detention officers and staff. The responses from the support staff detention officers are in italics.

Table 2.7.1: Frequency of responses and demographics of respondents

Duties of officers	Response	Neighbourhood	Custody/Detention Police officers	<i>Custody and Detention Support officers</i>
N	102	76	16	87

Average age	36 years	41 years	44 years	<i>44 years</i>
Average length of service	10 years	14 years	19 years	<i>12 years</i>
Number giving responses to QQ1	41 (40%)	24 (31%)	5 (31%)	<i>16 (19%)</i>
Number giving responses to QQ2	56 (54%)	34 (45%)	5 (31%)	<i>44 (50%)</i>

Preparedness and protection

The two issues that officers/staff commented upon was the confusing flow of information with little time to absorb changes, the failures in planning and the provision of protective equipment. Lee et al (2021) noted the problems with communication and information management at the onset and during the pandemic. In part this was because the initial surveillance approach adopted by government was replaced by a containment strategy. As a result, frontline staff lacked easy and reliable access to the correct and most up-to-date information. For police there was a flurry of legislation, advice, and guidance, which was often announced suddenly giving little time to interpret and issue instructions to officers. This lack of clarity and constant updating greatly added to the stress of response and custody personnel.

De Camargo (2021) points out that there was an escalating demand for PPE with existing stocks rapidly depleting, which led to assumptions that the previously established modes of sourcing PPE in the UK were no longer practical and current stock levels were insufficient to meet demand. De Camargo says much of the PPE was distributed to front-line care workers and NHS staff, leaving some police forces with severely depleted stock levels in the first few months. This absence was reflected in the somewhat testy comments by officers who felt their needs for protection were

secondary to health care workers. Similarly in De Camargo's study, interviewees suggested that shortage of PPE was not the only problem, particularly as the 'Op Talla' team ensured that supplies were replenished as quickly as possible, but the lack of appropriate PPE advice regarding instructions and training was also troubling. The participants in our study made a similar point. Additionally, they drew attention to the lack of planning, consultation, and precautions to make their workspaces safe and the levels of stress that this afforded them.

Table 2.7.2: Comments in response to the theme preparedness and protection

Response	Neighbourhood	Custody
<p>Response officers were truly tested at this time, being told we had to police under legislation that had come in just hours before our shift, not being given any training.</p> <p>Lack of PPE to begin with, lack of thinking from the force regarding workspace.</p> <p>I feel the force was slow to react to getting PPE to the front line and offering support and guidance to front line officers who were still putting themselves at risk every day.</p>	<p>No one recognised that we were the front line - yes NHS had the intense pressure of saving very ill people, but their 'customers' generally wanted their help, and they had PPE up to the eyeballs.</p> <p>No thought was given to the few officers that kept working all through the pandemic whilst others worked from home for the lamest of reasons.</p> <p>The work of the Neighbourhood/Community</p>	<p>It became an horrendous place to work, numerous sergeants going home crying. New legislation every day to work with and no time to stop to read it properly</p> <p>PPE in custody non-existent at the start. No plastic screens or social distancing at all.</p> <p><i>During COVID we have been expected to do even more during a stressful time without any proper guidance or support from our SLT. The PPE that was provided was substandard. we were given additional</i></p>

<p>From May onwards we finally got sufficient PPE and this has been helpful.</p> <p>In the main office, Perspex shields were placed on desks this was several months into the pandemic and only hindered our work as we work in a team and often had to sit next to each other. The placement of Perspex screens and social distancing was encouraged too late and simply does not work in the police. It appears to be more of a token gesture rather than a concern for our safety.</p> <p>We were allocated numerous different briefing rooms for each shift. To begin with the room allocated was not fit for purpose which was not ideal.</p>	<p>Department has been completely ignored and Response taken priority</p> <p>At the start of lockdown our shift had no sergeant, and I was new to the neighbourhood policing role and shift pattern so did not have the support in place from management.</p>	<p><i>responsibilities with no training and had to learn by ourselves.</i></p> <p><i>When we first went into lockdown we were instructed to carrying on processing detainees which requires you to be close to them. It took a long time to sort out the changes and this added extra stress because the message from Government was to practice 2m distance, but the job was still expecting staff to carry on as normal.</i></p> <p><i>I believe the force should have responded a lot quicker than it did. I don't think many people took on board the seriousness of the infection. As I was criticised for wearing a mask initially.</i></p> <p><i>Our force did not have a grip on things with regard to custody... were slow in providing PPE, social distancing was poor.</i></p>
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Relationship with the public

Results from Ghaenmaghami et al (2021), suggested that some police officers had little faith in the public's willingness to voluntarily comply with restrictions. They also found some effective and positive communication between public and police. There were no comments in our study that suggested positive interactions between police and public over COVID precautionary restrictions, rather, comments reflected a disenchantment with police with the police being misunderstood or criticised. Mills, Symons, and Carter (2021) note that as the rules and guidance rapidly changed, not only did few members of the public fully understand the rules but neither did the police, and that between 1 May 2020 and 28 February 2021, 17% of coronavirus-related charges in England and Wales were reported as incorrectly applied. This ambiguity amplified tensions already high because of fears about the virus.

Table 2.7.3 Responses to the theme of relations with the public

Response	Neighbourhood	Custody
Members of the public are bizarrely more concerned about being in contact with the police and can often be obstructive i.e. asking me why I am not socially distancing from a member of the public that I have to physically restrain from	We were trying to stop people getting the virus when they clearly didn't care /understand/wish to follow advice-all we got was abuse, assaults and media criticism when we were expected to stop people spreading the virus -with no PPE and being spat at	<i>In the beginning there was a lot of anger as not only were we expected to just "crack on" we also had to increase our efforts to cover the work to be completed in a very confrontational role.</i> <i>Limiting contact with prisoners when not necessary i.e. only</i>

<p>injuring others. It's frustrating.</p> <p>We were given many, many calls from neighbours reporting each other for breaches that may have been true but a waste of time</p> <p>I would still go to the same jobs and would only increase my workload and slow me down from doing enquiries for the actual work, to go and tell people to obey the legislation</p>	<p>the public are becoming more hostile, more rude, and abusive and more selfish and uncooperative. Its grim out there.</p> <p>Contacting people by phone/via email for statements instead of having to go in person.</p> <p>It's been horrendous dealing with COVID jobs on top of our daily basis</p> <p>Job virtually impossible, blamed for everything in the public's eye</p>	<p><i>taking dna/fingerprints if evidentially necessary.</i></p> <p><i>Reducing the amount of drug testing and finger printing for people we already have records for</i></p>
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Changing patterns of demand

In the annual assessment of the state of policing, (HMICFRS, 2020), Chief Inspector, Sir Tom Winsor, noted in the first months of the pandemic some demands on the police fell e.g. number of emergency 999 calls, fewer arrests, and less acquisitive crime. However, there was an increase in online reporting and greater demand in cases of child and domestic abuse. Forces were also reporting increases in demand, from vulnerable people exacerbated by the scaling back of other

public services. Incidents involving vulnerable or mentally ill people are often complex and time-consuming for the police to deal with. Newiss et al (2021) in their snapshot study indicated that officers faced challenges to implement new working practices at short notice such as, Virtual Remand Hearings in custody units and virtual multi-agency platforms in safeguarding teams with minimal additional resources. Many frontline officers interviewed reported an initial drop in demand for service during the first lockdown, thereby allowing them to clear back-logs and expend more time patrolling and engaging with the public. Although these benefits were short-lived as demand (and deployment patterns) returned to normal over the summer together with their COVID policing responsibilities.

In our national survey data, whilst there were a few comments to suggest that front line policing remained much the same response and neighbourhood officers did indicate that their workloads had changed with their usual call outs augmented by having COVID related matters to deal with. These officers, as had the Hampshire officers in the Newiss et al (2021) survey, noted an initial fall in demand but then a pickup by the summer (consistent with the pattern observable in the crime trend data represented in figure one). Force control rooms began triaging calls to help manage the workloads, and some officers were able to work from home. The custody officers in our sample also noted the increases in workload associated with mental health issues. HMICFRS (2021b:25) reported that, “In the first lockdown, many people in the criminal justice system with mental health, drug or alcohol problems had reduced access to support. Many prisoners were kept locked in their cells for longer. Of prisoners surveyed between July 2020 and September 2020, 78 percent said they were allowed out of their cells for under two hours each day, of whom 42 percent reported being allowed out of their cells for under an hour each day.¹⁹”. As the inspectorate observed, this length of time spent in such confinement is inevitably detrimental to a person’s mental health and wellbeing as well as creating additional welfare issues for custody officers.

Table 2.7.4: Responses to the theme of changing demand

Response	Neighbourhood	Custody
<p>My work as a front-line response sergeant was not changed at all, the only change are the addition of face masks and more use of telephone statements</p> <p>None. As front-line officers we were given no new ways of working and it was business as usual.</p> <p>Working life during COVID as a Police Officer was actually very calm & meant you were actually able to investigate and get a bit of a breather from constant calls on the radio</p> <p>My response area was changed and is now larger and busier but no additional staff. This worked during lockdown as other calls volume were down. However, since lockdown things are back to</p>	<p>My workload increased by 4 times the amount of normal and I was expected to do this remotely from home</p> <p>The work of neighbourhood/community policing has been completely ignored as such there is a huge build-up of work</p> <p>Huge demands and less staff</p> <p>We have been expected to simply carry on as normal when the world has changed yet we have had no recognition and no understanding - just criticism and complaint when expected to police something that is un-policeable.</p> <p>Its been horrendous, dealing with Covid jobs on top of our normal daily basis and trying to home school.</p>	<p>There was a lot more mental health and risk to deal with in custody.</p> <p><i>A lot of us now have more responsibilities, more protocols and higher risks. Some higher pay to reflect this would have been nice.</i></p> <p><i>I feel extra pressure was put on staff remaining at work due to those self isolating.</i></p> <p><i>Staff were replaced with student officers this meant remaining custody staff also had to take on the role as tutor which added to an already stressful situation</i></p>

<p>normal in terms of demand my team cannot cope</p> <p>I had more work to do including child education, more cleaning</p> <p>We were sent to many calls from neighbours reporting each other for breaches that may have been true but was a waste of time if there was another lockdown I would still go to the same jobs and would only increase my workload and slow me from doing enquiries for actual work to go and tell people to obey the legislation.</p>	<p>Better management of calls coming in - being braver at telling the public that we would not be dealing with their 'complaint', when it was not about a policing matter (we managed the demand much better and 'held the line' on issues that are not within our remit) when lockdown began, we diverted a lot of demand to telephone resolution, and simply explained to people that we would not be attending... parking complaints, 'intimidating glares', dog mess, fifth-party allegations of possibly offensive text message, theft of pot plant, etc...</p>	<p><i>Understaffed, more pressure put on everyone, too much expected of what staff remained</i></p> <p><i>We needed more staffing. COVID created a court remand wing which is needing more staff, so staff are being bumped along to other stations. We are usually at minimum staffing and sometimes below minimum, It's not fair.</i></p> <p><i>We had a large increase in detainees.</i></p>
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Communication

Hartmann and Hartmann (2020) argue that during the pandemic, conventional structures, and procedures for carrying out police work is frequently unviable. This is due to the need to minimize contact and maintain social distance. As we have seen, PPE was initially insufficient. The existing shortfalls of staff (HMICFRS, 2020) and potential virus quarantining, and absenteeism is likely to

affect the number of officers available and all these factors profoundly upset established routines. They argue that in meeting demand under conditions of the pandemic, forces and individuals innovate their practice and procedures. There were several examples from our respondents testifying to such innovations in communication. Meetings were held online to avoid travel and saving time, using telephones to gather witness statements, participating in virtual court hearings. Some of these virtual innovations were not without problems due to IT incompatibilities and in some cases, access.

Table 2.7.5: Responses to the theme of communication

Response	Neighbourhood	Custody
<p>Its been hard to police throughout as there is government guidelines that are not clear</p> <p>Solicitors were given the option to call in interviews. This has had a negative impact as they are unable to see visual evidence and will often advise a client to go “no comment”. This can delay things</p> <p>Having solicitors via Facetime for interviews so we didn’t</p>	<p>Changing goal posts, huge demand on staff, mixed messages from SMT</p> <p>Meetings held online saved time and money travelling to venues</p> <p>Virtual Court attendance; for warrants, cases etc. Virtual training sessions. To be fair, anything that we could do online rather than travel miles etc, has been across the board very welcomed.</p>	<p>My force put out lots of messages out internally for staff and sign posting us in</p> <p>Accessibility to partner organisations were difficult as they tended to use zoom which we didn’t have access to</p> <p>Using telephone statements was extremely useful in limiting human contact and also time saving.</p>

have to wait so long for them to arrive		<i>Any time we tried to raise concerns we were met with resistance or ignored</i>
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Support

The importance of supporting officers during the COVID pandemic and afterwards has been highlighted by Drew and Martin (2020). They indicate the importance of monitoring staff and being alert to those under stress and who may be especially vulnerable. We previously note (Brown and Fleming (2021) that officers rated their immediate supervisors highly, but often felt the more senior officers and the force generally were less understanding and remote from the realities of their circumstances. Tensions between those working on the frontline and those working from home were exacerbated in part by the perceived resources that senior officers were giving to the working from home workforce.

Table 2.7.6: Responses to the theme of support

Response	Neighbourhood	Custody
There seemed to be no consideration or thought given to us who were still working on the front line and could not work from home, so it did leave a bit of a bitter	As a female officer I felt unsupported during lockdown in relation to my childcare and working availability as a single parent.	I was told as both key workers we could use school [as cover for childcare] not very helpful when both shift workers-Schools never open in the middle of the night!!!!

<p>taste getting to watch lots of people seemingly having a jolly lockdown while myself and colleagues were dealing with people deliberately trying to spit and cough over us.</p> <p>There seemed to be no thought or consideration given to all of us who were still working on the front line and could not work from home...there was no recognition that for some of us work hasn't changed and that we were still expected to put ourselves at risk whilst other members of staff got to do their work in a flexible way whilst sitting at home.</p> <p>Work was not supportive and did not allow for my</p>	<p>I have struggled at times with childcare however the force has been flexible with this.</p> <p>Although throughout the lockdown period I have been advised to work from home by a doctor my second line manager has made me feel extremely pressured to go back to work against medical advice.</p> <p>I was pregnant throughout, and no care was taken with regard to my mental health.</p> <p>It has been and continues to be a really challenging time, but my supervisors and colleagues have been amazing in supporting me.</p> <p>The nature of police work is stressful, dark, and negative, so working from home was</p>	<p>This was not my direct line supervisor as they were fully supportive but more senior ranks.</p> <p><i>I work in one of the 4 Departments within the police force that must keep going operationally during a time of war or global catastrophe (which is what the COVID 19 pandemic was) so that makes us a vital resource which should have been looked after and given as much support as possible, but I feel we have been treated as expendable assets.</i></p> <p><i>It's been extremely stressful and made worse by a lack of interest towards me & my colleagues.</i></p>
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department to work at home when others were given the opportunity	something I didn't want to do. So, I took leave and juggled my hours to try and to fit	<i>My line managers have been outstanding however anyone above that have been disappointing.t</i>
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Conclusion

Challenges for policing in the pandemic included the provision of adequate protective equipment; maintenance of good public-police relationships; changing work demands because of lockdowns, and limitations to free movement; staff shortages due to illness and self-isolating; additional stress over and above the norm for policing.

The research findings reported in this chapter generally support previous studies of policing under conditions of COVID-19. Initially instructions to the workforce were unclear because of the frequency and rapidity of government announcements and confusion between requirements and advice. Support for staff seemed patchy with greater satisfaction felt for front line supervisors' efforts but a certain disconnect with senior management teams. This is at odds with the sentiment expressed by one chief officer giving evidence to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee (2020):

"As any chief constable up and down the country will tell you, the way to test these things is to get out there yourself. I have been on many briefings, as other colleagues will have been, to sit alongside the frontline to see whether they understand the tone and temperament of exactly what we are trying to do here. I am pleased to say that, in the main, they are there, and they get why we are doing this".

Another chief officer providing evidence to the Committee said:

“I think I can confidently say, on behalf of all my colleagues at chief constable level across the country and all senior leaders in policing, that the safety and wellbeing of all our staff is of paramount importance to us at all times, especially at the moment”.

Again, this was not the sentiment expressed by our respondents who felt that their senior leadership were not fully supportive, often exhibiting dismissive attitudes towards difficulties experienced by staff whilst retaining high expectations that the work would carry on as normal in abnormal circumstances.

In the early stages of the pandemic personal protection equipment was not uniformly available or replenished. Policing the pandemic did add additional stresses by changes in routines, oscillating and altered work demands, backfilling for absentees.

Like Newiss et al (2021), the officers in our sample found that new ways of working had pluses and minuses. In some instances, the innovations were more efficient, whilst in others, problems with IT made work more difficult. Working from home for some enabled a better work life balance and the management of additional caring responsibilities. For others it was burdensome and increased their sense of isolation.

There were some differences between our results and other reports of pandemic policing. Where Newiss et al (2021) and Ghaenmaghami et al (2021) found more positive commentary with respect to relationships with the public, our respondents were uniformly negative. This may reflect a national versus a single force sample. The officers in our study confirmed other research in that early teething problems with PPE and other protective measures were problematic and forces were simply not geared up to cope. A good communication infrastructure and material support being

offered to officers during a public health emergency is paramount and at the beginning of the pandemic there were clearly shortcomings with both.

From a policy perspective, Cairney (2021) notes criticisms of the UK government's response to the pandemic as slow and insufficient, failing to learn lessons from more successful governments and playing the 'blame game' with their advisors and delivery bodies. Cairney also suggests that the UK government was responding to the 'wrong pandemic', as if COVID-19 could be treated like influenza. In addition, the early reliance on a mitigation strategy to reduce infection rates which was later replaced by a vaccine elimination strategy, led to changes in policy directions and communication confusion. These shortcomings cannot be laid at the door of the police who were placed in the unenviable position of having to respond to the most severe restrictions on the public since the second world war. Yet HMICFRS was of the view that not all forces were prepared for the scale of the task and under-estimated capability and capacity to cope with the challenges presented by the pandemic.

Our research reinforces the importance of good communication, a supportive working environment and adequate preparedness to prime staff in responding to the challenges presented by the pandemic. By and large these were patchy at best and poor at worst in the early stages of the pandemic.

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