

## **The Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner's response to the publication of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMICFRS) - Impact of the pandemic on the Criminal Justice System (Jan 2021).**

[The report can be found here](#)

All four of Her Majesty's Justice Chief Inspectors have united to express "grave concerns" about the potential long-term impact of COVID-19-related court backlogs on the criminal justice system across England and Wales.

In a joint report, the Chief Inspectors spell out how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the work of the police, prosecutors, prisons, probation and youth offending teams.

They point to difficulties and lengthy waits at all stages of the criminal justice process that "benefit no one and risk damage to many".

The Chief Inspectors highlighted some positive initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the acceleration of digital working, and praised the commitment of staff.

However, other areas were of more concern, including the lack of education provision in custody and in the community for young people and the highly restrictive regimes for a majority of prisoners which have continued for many months without respite, impacting negatively on their physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing and also more generally on prospects for effective rehabilitation.

They conclude the greatest risk to criminal justice comes from the "unprecedented and very serious" backlogs in courts. For example, the number of ongoing cases in Crown Courts was 44 per cent higher in December 2020 compared to February of the same year. At the time the report was published figures show more than 53,000 cases were waiting to come before Crown Courts. Some of these cases have been scheduled for 2022. Inspectors emphasise that despite additional funding, the continuing impact of COVID-19 could cause further delays.

Police forces immediately mobilised a national coordination centre and implemented a national learning programme, Operation Talla, to swiftly collate and disseminate good practice around England and Wales. At force level, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire &

Rescue Services (HMICFRS) saw evidence of excellent scanning and consideration of changes that needed to be made to estate, processes and guidance to help keep people safe.

In terms of attempting to ease local pressures, the Chief Constable and I successfully lobbied the Government for establishing a Nightingale Court in Nottinghamshire. As of January, there were more than 8,000 outstanding cases at Nottingham Magistrates' Court and more than 1,000 cases at Nottingham Crown Court. Nightingale courts have been set up by the government to deal with the backlog of cases caused by delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Mercure Hotel was the first to host a Nightingale Court in the East Midlands. Cases have already started being heard at the venue with a tent and security staff visible at a separate entrance on the front of the hotel. People are scanned as they entered, similar to the process at other courts in the city.

The report does not make any specific recommendations and the focus of the report concerns itself on the impact and provides some case studies about affected organisations including Police forces which have sought to mitigate the risks. The use of technology and video conferencing is a good example in terms of establishing virtual courts.

Police increased their use of telephone or video calls to discuss incidents, take statements and complete crime reports, with some innovative digital solutions. For instance, Sussex Police started using remote interviews for domestic abuse victims which leave no trace on a caller's phone.

Clearing the backlog is essential but going forward, exploring all opportunities to utilise technology to will be of paramount importance.

Yours sincerely



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Police and Crime Commissioner