

Annual Report 2020-21

Foreword

This annual report covers an unprecedented time in the lives of the people of County Durham and Darlington and the unique responses that have been made by the Constabulary and the Office of the Durham Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner (ODPCVC).

The Covid-19 pandemic and the first national lockdown started at the beginning of the time coverage for this report and so these 12 months have been both unique and challenging in equal measure.



To begin, I would like to pay tribute to the officers and staff of the Constabulary who have responded with amazing courage, flexibility and professionalism in the face of the crisis. My own office staff have also responded incredibly well in trying circumstances to ensure that the role of the

Commissioner remained effective and focussed on the significant challenges that were faced by policing and our close partners. Whilst in person engagement and meetings were impossible, revised working practices ensured that all our core functions continued and in many cases were enhanced at a time of significant demand.

As further testament to the way in which we were able to adapt, I am pleased to report that the ODPCVC received a national prestigious award '[CoPaCC- Open and Transparent Quality Mark 2021' \(Comparing Police and Crime Commissioners\)](#).

With agreement of the Chief Constable, I published a revised work plan stemming from the existing police and crime plan in order to provide strategic direction to the Force. We police by consent and it was vitally important for the Constabulary to continue to have the support of the communities they policed at a time of national emergency with legislation which would impact significantly on freedoms we have all come to expect. Whilst in some policing areas in the UK there were differing approaches which came under some criticism, the approach delivered by Durham was measured and proportionate, thereby retaining public confidence which is vital in the post Covid recovery. Our public perception tool surveyed 11,636 people across the year and mapped confidence levels throughout. This gave me real time insights to the feelings of our communities

and showed how local feeling responded to the constant challenges in policing the regulations.

This proportionate approach of the Force was tested with a widely publicised issue concerning the visit to County Durham of Dominic Cummings which came to light at the end of May 2020. The separation of responsibility between that of the Chief Constable versus that of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) centres on the influence over operational response. As Acting Commissioner, I had a responsibility to speak on behalf of our communities in addressing concerns the visit raised at a time when people's lives were being severely restricted. Consequently, I requested the Chief Constable to establish the facts of the allegation that Mr Cummings had breached Covid regulations during his visit to Durham. The resulting work completed by the Force was proportionate and thorough, addressing the immense public interest issue. I was confident that all of this was conducted in an independent way and was not subject to political influence despite much social media comment to the contrary. This was a difficult path to tread and the Chief Constable should be commended by her approach and the fairness shown in responding to an extraordinary event.

During the Covid crisis, significant funding was made available to the Criminal Justice system to assist with activity. My office was exemplary in understanding what funding was available and how to access and apply for it. A total of £1,571,439 was accessed from a number of initiatives as a direct result, improving our offer to local

communities across a wide criteria. In particular and as part of this, [the Safer Streets fund application was lauded by the Home Office](#) in its approach and had led to significant funded improvements on people's homes making them be and feel safer. For 2020/21, the ODPCVC, together with Durham Constabulary, Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council, was successful in securing Government funding for County Durham and Darlington, £560,360 and £298,918 respectively to implement burglary prevention initiatives.



In July 2020, I decided to allow the Force to go ahead with the investment of a new custody centre. A significant quantity of research from the Force and that commissioned independently by my office, concluded that the proposal from the Chief Constable, to meet her operational need, was affordable and appropriate. Following the request from the Chief Constable and my decision, we jointly embarked on a thorough engagement process with the public, residents, partners, councils at all

levels and within the Force, to give confidence of the need and requirements and the new concept of handling custody that the plans involved. When complete, it will give Durham Constabulary a state-of-the-art facility which will provide better and crucially, more efficient care to those under investigation than is currently possible across the aging and almost obsolete existing estate.

One of the most important tasks that falls to a PCC is the setting of the Force budget and making a decision on what burden the local taxpayer contributes. The policing precept is the proportion of council tax which goes to fund local policing. Each force has a different level of local versus central funding, so it is very difficult to compare forces based purely on what their local precept level is. Durham has a high percentage of lower band council tax properties, meaning the level of funding that we get, is relatively low as well. Our forecast showed that if funding assumptions were correct, by 2023 the Force would have to be running at a deficit budget in order to maintain service levels. Despite central government funding the overall increase in office numbers, there are still significant costs that need to be covered to cater for the increase, along with keeping pace with inflation and rising staff costs. The level of precept rise is capped every year by the government. [This year it was capped at a £15 rise for the budget 21-22. I decided to consult with the public on setting the maximum rise, to maintain service levels and invest in what people were telling me was important.](#) As a consequence, the Force will be accelerating the recruitment of new PCSO's, it will be investing in more control

room and call handling staff and be able to recruit more experienced officers negating the long training time needed and will ensure continued investment in technology to keep officers on the streets and be visible. During my public consultation on my proposal over 1100 responses were collated and presented to the Police and Crime Panel, who have a power of veto over the proposed rise. The Panel accepted my recommendation for the maximum increase.

The end of the reporting period covers the start of purdah, the formal pre-election period in the run up to the delayed 2021 PCC election. My time in office as Acting PCVC has been a challenging one. The situation following the untimely death of PCVC Ron Hogg, combined with the unfolding Covid crisis resulted in an unprecedented situation whereby according to existing legislation, myself as the appointed Acting PCVC was in office for 1 year and 9 months. This anomaly in the legislation is likely to be resolved following a review of the PCC role conducted during the past year by the Home Office. I am encouraged by this and we anticipate a government white paper in 2021 for consultation on the governments recommendations. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Durham and Darlington Police and Crime Panel for their confidence in me and my team, and for their support in holding me to account so that despite the difficulties, the communities of Durham and Darlington and benefitted from continued policing activity over the past year, helping to make people feel safe and be safe under extremis. I wish the newly elected PCC every success in what is a role that is a privilege to have been asked to occupy.



Photo: Steve White joined Northumbria PCC Kim McGuinness, Chief Constable Jo Farrell and CEO of One Punch North East Maxine Thompson-Curl to support the annual 'Punched Out Cold' Campaign that raises awareness of one punch assault

Photo: Images of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre which received funding from the Office



Photo: Success of Safer Streets scheme, officer pictured involved in the programme providing crime prevention advice



Photo: Acting PCVC Steve White supporting Annual White Ribbon Day to raise awareness to end domestic abuse

Outcomes progress in respect of the Police, Crime & Victims' Plan 2020/21

Victims and the vulnerable feel supported

- [£276,293 of additional funding was made available](#) by the Ministry of Justice to support victims of Domestic Abuse and /or Sexual Abuse during the pandemic.
- [Strengthening of the support for victims attending court through the secondment of two of the Restorative Justice Practitioners to the Victim Care and Advice Service](#) at a time when many court cases were unavoidably delayed due to the pandemic.
- [An additional £15,000 allocated to the Rape and Sexual Assault Counselling Centre \(RSACC\)](#) during the pandemic for continuity of service delivery, supporting the installation of IT based programmes, an on-line safe space and chat room for counselling, Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) support and a browser based helpline.
- Decision made to allocate £120,000 funding towards the regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre based in Chester Le Street which will supply the facilities for examination, crisis support and administration from April 2021. This was the agreed proportion of the cost to the ODPCVC Durham.
- [Covid-19 Extraordinary Funding made available by the Ministry of Justice](#) to support requests received from registered charities and social enterprises to meet the additional costs of adapting support services, mitigating against lost income and/or meeting additional service demands. The categories of bids received were for Domestic Abuse Commissioned Services, Domestic Abuse Non-Commissioned Services and Sexual Violence Commissioned and Non-Commissioned Services. The decision was made to allocate funding to:
 - [Aspire](#): £13,990
 - [Changing Lives](#): £25,045
 - [Darlington Mind](#): £16,270
 - [Foundation](#): £17,464
 - [HALO](#): £24,772
 - [Harbour](#): £112,057
 - [Just For Women Centre](#): £8,974
 - [Pride](#) - £21,022
 - [RSACC](#): £10,400
 - [SHAID](#): £9,269
 - [Safe in Tees Valley Community Peer Mentors](#): £17,836
 - [Safe in Tees Valley Control Room Team](#): £18,696

People have confidence in the police and criminal justice system

- [Meetings of the Local Criminal Justice Partnership \(LCJP\)](#) increased to fortnightly at the start of the pandemic enabling early identification and solution focused discussions around any developing issues.
- A change of focus for the LCJP Effectiveness and Efficiency group to a recovery group have allowed for system risks and issues to be coordinated across the CJS during the pandemic.
- Although there continues to be concern about a backlog of cases going through the Crown Court, our Magistrates Courts are on track, supported by Durham Constabulary who was the first in the country to provide video linked remand hearings. The local response ensured that the delays were managed appropriately with additional support being offered to victims and witnesses.
- [Introduction of an independent Complaints Scrutiny Panel](#) where members independently scrutinise the outcome of complaint cases and provide feedback and identify learning points for Durham Constabulary around the proportionality and decision making of investigators and Appropriate Authorities.
- [Introduction of an independent BUS Panel](#) (BAME Arrests, Use of Force and Stop and Search). The purpose of the panel is so that members of the public can independently scrutinise the police use of powers, ensuring greater transparency and improve confidence in policing.
- Introduction of an External Strategic Scrutiny Governance Group (ESSGG) which oversees the effectiveness of the existing external tactical/thematic scrutiny panels, provides constructive peer challenge, guidance, and accountability so that themes of organisational learning can be identified.

Reoffending is reduced and rehabilitation is improved

- The PCC welcomed the planned return to a unified model of probation delivery and the ongoing development of relationships with the new regional service.
- Partnership working ensured improved access to emergency accommodation for prisoners with Covid-19 who are released unexpectedly from the custody of North East prisons to make their return to the community as safe as possible.
- The introduction of the joint Youth Offending Service and Police VISIT programme (Violence Incident Support Intervention Team) to provide early support to young people (and their families) who come into contact with the police for a violent incident.

Communities are safe and crime is reduced

- Expansion of naloxone programme at a time of heightened risk of overdose during the pandemic- [Durham officers among first to carry life-saving drug which will temporarily overcome the effects of a drug overdose | Durham Police, Crime & Victims Commissioner \(durham-pcc.gov.uk\)](#)
- Success of safer streets funding- [Additional security measures secured as the safer streets project ends | Durham Police, Crime & Victims Commissioner \(durham-pcc.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Modern Slavery Statement 2020](#) signed which articulates the commitment and intended actions of the seven PCCs and seven Chief Constables across the North East and Yorkshire and Humber regions to address modern slavery through their business activities and supply chains.
- Partnership development of the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) approach in County Durham.

Priorities for the upcoming year:

A new PCC will be elected in May 2021, these are the delayed elections that were due in 2020. The new PCC will be required to publish a new Police and Crime Plan setting out the objective for the Force and their vision.