COVID-19: An appraisal of the police response to the pandemic

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Police Foundation and Crest Advisory release research on the challenges of enforcing new coronavirus laws

Brief 2 mins read

A crisis in policing is usually localised and limited in duration to a few days or, at most, a few months. However, policing in England and Wales has been responding to the COVID-19 pandemic for 10 months, and will potentially still be enforcing coronavirus legislation beyond the one-year anniversary of the first lockdown.

The pandemic has challenged the way that policing views its role. Dealing with a virus is very different to handling crime, and at the start of the pandemic there was almost no time to prepare for the new laws that police were expected to enforce.

The research carried out by the Police Foundation and Crest Advisory included:

- findings on the effectiveness of the police response
- challenges the police have faced
- how successfully the service has responded
- policing in 2021
- lessons learned for the future

The **appraisal of the police response to the coronavirus pandemic** was based on interviews and survey responses from all levels within policing, with additional interviews with senior figures in central and local government, and in partner agencies.

Five key findings

- At the start of the crisis, the police service successfully galvanised itself to deliver what was required of it during a pandemic.

- The use of a national coordination centre through Operation Talla provided police forces with critical tools and information.
- Policing has been forced to use its discretion on a strategic scale, while walking a fine line with the public and the Government.
- As the service delivers business as usual alongside work related to COVID-19, there are growing concerns about workforce wellbeing and fatigue.
- There is a general frustration at the poor performance of the criminal justice system during the pandemic and a concern that this could affect public confidence in the police, as well as the courts and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

The findings show that, overall, policing is good in a crisis. Many shared that policing was not prepared for the pandemic but that the service responded rapidly. Forces have enabled home working, a change that is arguably long overdue and may bring benefits in the future. Fears that the police's relationship with the public would come under strain are yet to be realised. It may be policing's relationship with parts of the Government that has been more challenging.

Policing has risen tactically to the challenge but the major question is how long policing can remain good in a crisis. Many officers query the long-term impacts of home working or staff fatigue. The effects of the restrictions implemented by the Government on policing's operating environment, the justice system and, in particular, other public services may prove impossible to mitigate indefinitely.

Go to COVID-19 restrictions

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