



# Hampshire Constabulary

Chief Constable Olivia Pinkney, QPM, MA

Police Headquarters  
Leigh Road  
Eastleigh  
Hampshire  
SO50 9SJ

Telephone: 02380 478280

Minicom TextRelay:18001 101  
email: [chief.constable@hampshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:chief.constable@hampshire.pnn.police.uk)

**Our ref:**  
**Your ref:**

Dear colleague

15 May 2020

Further to my letter to you on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and the positive feedback I received, I thought it would be helpful to share a further update as how the Constabulary is operating as we become more accustomed to working within this COVID environment. As always, please do share with your wider networks if this would be useful.

## **Our approach as a Constabulary**

In my last letter, I shared my 'COVID' strategy as Chief Constable, which dovetails with the wider Local Resilience Forum strategy. These continue to hold up well, largely remain unchanged and we are connected within the Response and Recovery phases.

Within the Constabulary, our entire focus is on our core role of helping keep communities safe. This role has been enhanced for the past two months to protect the NHS and save lives, which we have done to the very best of our ability, and I am proud of our achievements thus far. We are focussed, as ever, on our strong partnerships in your area, which enable us all to give a better public service.

I also have a relentless focus on staff welfare and wellbeing, which has required considerable agility within an organisation of 5,000 whose role has personal contact with the public at its core. We continue to have very low COVID absence rates (below 3%) and I am grateful to officers, staff and volunteers for their dedication to duty.

## **Operational Delivery**

We are now at the end of the week where easing in some restrictions in England was announced and with two bank holiday weekends behind us. The efforts of the public over the past few weeks have meant our police officers have rarely had to enforce the Government Regulations and I thank our communities for their tremendous commitment and resolve. We have had to resort to formal Enforcement by way of a Fixed Penalty Notice only a handful of times a day,

I am also confident the vast majority of public will continue to do their bit, continue to take personal responsibility and follow the guidance in this next phase of social restrictions.

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As many of us are now able to spend much more time outdoors, all citizens will need to continue to take responsibility for doing that within the restrictions set out by the Government. The Constabulary has a role to continue to encourage and support our communities to comply fully with the restrictions, thereby saving lives.

Our role in policing has changed as public health Regulations have changed. We will continue to police the Regulations (which do not extend as far as government guidance and so we have no role in enforcing (2m) social distancing, wearing of masks or avoiding public transport, by way of example).

What has changed is the nature of 'reasonable excuse' for being out of our homes. It is still not permitted for someone to gather in groups with those not in their household or if they have left their house for one of the reasons not designated as reasonable, such as:

- To go on holiday (this includes to visit and stay overnight at a holiday home or second home).
- To visit the homes of friends and family (exceptions include to protect a vulnerable person, for medical purposes or to escape risk of harm).

My officers and PCSOs are actively patrolling in all our communities, and I am fortunate to be regularly spending time with them. I understand the challenges they face and see first-hand how they engaging with the public, asking questions to establish circumstances, explaining Regulations, and encouraging those breaking the rules to comply.

This approach has gone a long way to maintaining the excellent relationships we have with our communities. We continue to have millions of direct social media connections every week where we engage, encourage and explain. [This link](#) has the revised College of Policing guidance, which has been shared throughout the Constabulary.

This coming weekend, the first after easing of restrictions, will be testing for the Constabulary. We have well established and tested district patrol plans and local policing will be visible in all our communities and working with partners. Due to the continued postponement of reaccreditations in various skills, we have more officers and staff on duty in our public spaces. Our Special Constabulary, who have given over 6000 hours of volunteer patrol time since COVID restrictions began, joins them and I am enormously grateful to them.

We patrol where intelligence and calls from the public suggest we should be - they help us identify areas that are being used in contravention of Regulations and local policing teams are briefed as part of their patrol plans and response. Last weekend, we had 1000 calls from the public reporting breaches of COVID Regulations.

In practice, beyond our targeted patrolling, I anticipate we will be intervening only in large gatherings and in large house parties (where the Regulations do not come with an associated Power of Entry, so we must use wider legislation or enter by invitation). Officers do not want to use their enforcement powers if they do not have to, but its right that they are able to take action against those who disregard the remaining restrictions and in doing so, put people at risk.

Like you and as widely reported in the media from many beautiful areas of England, I know some communities are concerned about large numbers of visitors, now that it is lawful to drive

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to beauty spots, and to spend time on our beaches. We are in close touch with those who make the decisions about access to those beauty spots and carparks, and will plan alongside them.

There are reports circulating about forthcoming protests around the country (“mass huggings”). We will actively monitor such reporting and are well versed in our response to protest. If and when they do occur we have the skills, training and command structure in place to ensure a proportionate response.

## **Policing demand**

Your Constabulary is very much ‘open for business’ and here if the public need us. Ultimately, any changes to Regulations from now will mean more people are out-and-about. We are ready to meet any increase in demand, at whatever pace it comes. As ever, we ask the public to stay vigilant, and to report any emergencies through 999.

Officers are also working hard to keep us all safe from the full range of crimes in what remain challenging circumstances so we would ask everyone to work with us and remember that if you need our help we are here for you.

In addition to our usual relentless focus on protecting those most at risk of harm and stopping those who wish to cause that harm, we continue to be alert to the different crimes and vulnerabilities, which are heightened because of COVID restrictions. These are abuse in the home in all its forms; fraud and online exploitation; community confidence and public order; drug related harm.

Domestic abuse is in line with 2019 figures, and whilst one crime is too many, I am reassured victims are seeking help and in combined patrol plans with partners we are using information smartly to support those who we know have been previous victims of abuse.

Our child abuse teams continue to work in new and creative ways with our partners in Children Services and the NHS responding to child protection concerns across our area, protecting vulnerable children, whilst ensuring we are operating as “COVID-secure”.

Protecting children from online high harm threats is a sustained priority and we have increased our proactive on-line work, with the National Crime Agency and others, to identify and respond to risk. We have undertaken over a third more online child abuse search warrants & arrests than usual.

I remain concerned about a warm summer with young people in large numbers, potentially not returning to education before September and with limited access to diversionary activities. Whilst we have only seen small pockets of anti-social behaviour to date I am worried, and again welcome your help in connecting partners together to deliver a plan for this.

The Criminal Justice system, despite great efforts by local criminal justice partners, continues to cause me considerable concern. The backlog in ‘court ready’ cases, for myriad reasons, is of extreme concern and totals over 1000. There are victims and witnesses in each and every case and we are keeping in contact with and supporting as best we can.

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## Our staff

Operationally, our workforce is generally holding up very well indeed and I remain absolutely committed to protecting the health and wellbeing of all our officers, staff and volunteers. Never has *'looking after our people'* been so important. Nevertheless, at a time of heightened concern across the whole country, we have seen appalling behaviour by a minority of people; coughing, spitting and threatening to use COVID as a weapon against others. Threatening to infect people with COVID-19 sickens me and I welcome the tough stance taken by the CPS and our courts. It will not be tolerated and offenders have been sent a clear message that there is a very real risk they will go to prison. It is completely unacceptable for people to behave in this way against police, emergency workers, key workers or indeed any member of the public.

I am so proud of how all of the Constabulary has responded to this national crisis. Every day I hear and see the care and compassion shown by teams and individuals, who have faced daily challenges with a characteristically positive and friendly attitude.

Finally, I take this opportunity to announce Assistant Chief Constable Maggie Blyth will be returning to our ranks and as of Monday 15 June, Maggie will take the lead on the Local Policing and Public Protection portfolio, with ACC Scott Chilton moving across to take the reins of Crime, Criminal Justice and Intelligence.

Scott has been fantastic in local policing for some years, and his broad background brings a huge amount of welcome experience to his new role. As many of you will know, Maggie previously worked in Hampshire as district commander for Portsmouth before joining Wiltshire Police in 2019 as ACC Local Policing and Specialist Operations. Maggie is a great addition to our excellent leadership team, her partnership and vulnerability background is second to none and I am looking forward to the years ahead with this team.

I hope this letter provides a useful update. Your continued support for our police officers, staff and volunteers is always warmly welcomed and I remain grateful for it.

Yours sincerely



**Olivia Pinkney**  
Chief Constable