

**The Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner's response to the publication of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMICFRS) - Custody services in a COVID-19 environment (Apr 2021).**

[The report can be found here](#)

In July 2020, HMICFRS announced its intention to inspect the police response to the COVID-19 pandemic including custody services in a COVID-19 environment. Fieldwork was carried out in five forces: Gloucestershire Constabulary, Lancashire Constabulary, the Metropolitan Police Service, Norfolk Constabulary and South Wales Police.

HMICFRS reported that in many ways, custody work carried on as usual when the pandemic began. The numbers of detainees entering custody varied from force to force. Overall, forces told HMICFRS that the total numbers of detainees decreased (slightly) between April and August 2020 when compared with the same period in 2019, particularly for detained children.

There were fewer arrests during the first lockdown (April to May 2020) in the five fieldwork forces. After that, numbers returned to previous levels. The number of detainees with, or suspected of having, COVID-19 isn't known but was reported as low.

Forces anticipated staffing shortages and developed plans to manage demand for custody services. These plans mainly involved avoiding arrests to keep detainee numbers as low as possible. However, when staffing shortages did not materialise some forces took the opportunity to clear outstanding cases and arrest those wanted on warrants, who were easier to find during lockdown.

Health and wellbeing in custody suites is a clear focus. Forces have invested, and continue to invest, in making custody suites as COVID-19 safe as possible for staff, detainees and visitors. Although custody officers have greater control over the movement of people in the custody suite, they remain concerned about their ability to socially distance from others. Other staff share this concern. Forces are trying their best to implement distancing measures in custody suites, but it is difficult to adhere to in practice and is impossible in some cases.

Forces found that they must manage demand for custody services more carefully than in pre-COVID-19 times. The virus demands that they:


- Manage detainees' COVID-related risk;
- Take on additional tasks arising from changes in the way detainees receive their legal rights; and
- Continue to manage the risks, and care, for detainees who are spending longer in custody while waiting for virtual remand hearings.

HMICFRS made six recommendations five of which are for Chief Constables relating to:

- Tracking the numbers of detainees with, or suspected of having, COVID-19
- Recording and monitoring the way in which detainees receive their legal rights
- Recording the use of bail and released under investigation (RUI)
- Assessing any Increases in pre-charge bail
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual remand hearings.

The Force will continue to use its dedicated 4ACTION database for tracking and responding to all HMICFRS recommendations and areas for improvement overseen by the Deputy Chief Constable. The Force also provides regular HMICFRS update reports to my Joint Audit and Scrutiny Panel (JASP) who provide additional scrutiny in these important areas.

Yours sincerely



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE  
POLICE & CRIME  
COMMISSIONER

Caroline Henry  
Police and Crime Commissioner