

Public Safety, Public Trust

Innovative Ideas for Police and Crime Commissioners in 2021:
Partnership working with the community and voluntary sector



Introduction

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) play a crucial role in tackling crime, addressing the needs of their communities, and ensuring the justice system is fair and effective. In this role, PCCs can stimulate local innovative practice, bring together organisations and individuals from across the criminal justice system to make these initiatives a success and make substantial change to the lives of people affected by crime. The additional challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have underlined the crucial leadership and convening role that PCCs play in their communities.

This document highlights some of the main challenges currently facing the criminal justice system and provides practical innovative solutions that PCCs could include in their plans upon taking office. It focuses on ideas that involve working together with community and voluntary sector organisations, making use of the unique convening role of PCCs.

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Supporting the long-term recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a surge in demand for support services across the country and lockdown measures have exacerbated existing economic and social issues.¹ During the pandemic, PCCs have played a vital role in providing leadership, convening a wide range of partner organisations, and providing resources to enable community and voluntary sector organisations to meet this increased demand. As lockdown eases, many of these challenges will endure², and PCCs will continue to be at the forefront of responding to them.

Case study 1: The PCC in Warwickshire set up a fund for initiatives in the community that aided the recovery from Covid-19. One organisation in receipt of this funding is the Benn Partnership, which delivers a community project in Rugby that supports members of the Black community with challenges that have disproportionality affected this group during the pandemic.³ Another organisation, Aspire in Arts, used the funding to enable qualified youth workers to do community outreach work in places where young people were gathering.

COVID-19 has caused considerable strain on the criminal justice system. The suspension of jury trials and the sporadic closure of courts in response to the pandemic has exacerbated an already sizeable backlog of court cases in England and Wales.⁴ Through supporting and investing in the implementation of Out of Court Disposals (also known as diversion schemes) in their area, PCCs are able to reduce both reoffending and pressures on the criminal justice system.⁵ A recent report has identified good practice in the use of Out of Court Disposals and restorative justice (RJ) to assist with court backlogs.⁶

The pandemic has seen a significant spike in cases of domestic violence, resulting from lockdown measures trapping victims inside with their abuser, as well as restricting access to family and friends, and support services.⁷ PCCs will have a central role in responding to the long-term impact of domestic abuse after lockdown restrictions have eased, including ensuring that specialist services supporting Black, Asian and minority ethnic victims can continue providing much needed culturally specific support.^{8,9}

Mental health provision has been under greater strain during the pandemic. Higher levels of anxiety and stress have been reported to affect a larger number of people suffering from economic uncertainty and social isolation, combined with reduced access to usual pathways of support.¹⁰ PCCs can support preventative measures that aim to stop mental health demand from escalating, ensuring that those in crisis are given the most appropriate care at the earliest opportunity.

The pandemic has seen people in prison locked in their cells for up to 23 and a half hours a day without access to rehabilitation and resettlement support, resulting in increased concerns about their mental health.¹¹ Families have not been able to visit their family members in prison for over a year, putting additional pressure on partners and children¹². PCCs can work with community and voluntary organisations to provide valuable support to improve well-being, maintain family ties and support successful resettlement from prison to the community.

Case study 2: The PCC in Sussex awarded a grant to Sussex Prisoners' Families from the Community Safety Fund, during the pandemic, to provide a part-time community outreach worker to support families with a relative facing arrest, court or prison. The charity said 'research shows that if prisoners have a supportive family, they are less likely to reoffend, so supporting families makes communities safer.'



Tackling violence and exploitation

Overall levels of violent crimes have decreased over the past ten years. However - putting aside the disruption to recent trends caused by COVID-19¹³ - there have been worrying recent rises in knife crime and robbery.¹⁴ To tackle this, 18 police forces, with the support of the Home Office, created Violence Reduction Units (VRU), which uses a multi-agency, long-term approach to tackle violence and its underlying causes, especially for young people. A Government evaluation found that since their inception, VRUs have provided interventions for 100,000 individuals at risk of violence and criminal activity.¹⁵ The ongoing work of VRUs provides a wealth of ideas for how to tackle violent crime.

Case study 3: The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, initially created by Strathclyde Police in 2005, adopted a public health approach and developed a range of innovative solutions. These included the use of ‘navigators’ working in hospitals to connect patients affected by violence to programmes, and support for developing social enterprises such as Street & Arrow, who employ people with convictions to work in their street food stalls, providing mentoring and training. Since its creation, Scotland has seen homicides fall 39 per cent over the last decade.

Initiatives to tackle violence and exploitation will be most effective when they draw on the crucial expertise of people with relevant lived experience in both the design and delivery of services. PCCs can commission community and voluntary sector organisations, which employ people with lived experience of the criminal justice system, to help do this effectively and meaningfully.

Case study 4: St Giles Trust runs the SOS project which offers intensive support to vulnerable young people.¹⁶ The support is provided by carefully selected, professionally trained individuals who come from similar backgrounds as the young people they are supporting, using their lived experience to offer real understanding of the challenges they are likely to encounter. St Giles Trust delivers 1:1 support in London, Kent, West Midlands, Merseyside, West Yorkshire and South Wales, working in partnership with the police and other agencies to tackle the exploitation of children and young people through county lines.

Preventing child sexual exploitation (CSE) remains a key priority for the police, and PCCs can play a key role in raising awareness of the issue to help identify CSE and prevent it at an early stage. PCCs can also support initiatives to increase understanding and provide services to those impacted.

Case study 5: In Cleveland the PCC commissioned research into the background, motivation and approaches of people who have perpetrated CSE, and into effective interventions that prevent future victimisation.¹⁷



Supporting victims of crime

PCCs play a crucial role in ensuring that victims of crime are appropriately supported and that they receive their entitlements under the Victims’ Code. One effective way of doing this is to commission restorative justice (RJ) services, which provide victims with an opportunity to meet or communicate with the person who committed the crime to explain its harmful impact. Evidence shows that RJ can reduce reoffending,¹⁸ improve victims’ satisfaction and feelings of fairness, while also holding those who have caused harm to account.¹⁹ PCCs can make these services particularly effective by providing active leadership and bringing together a range of relevant organisations.

Case study 6: Restorative Gloucestershire, which has benefitted from long-term funding by the PCC, brings together agencies and authorities to facilitate RJ, strengthening provision, taking the lead in its area to build awareness and confidence in the use of restorative interventions. It also acts as a ‘centre of excellence’ that provides training and strategy development to embed restorative practice across a range of partner agencies.²⁰ Gloucestershire allows both victims and those who have committed offences to initiate RJ, which can increase the number of referrals.

PCCs have a vital role to play in providing holistic services to support survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Case study 7: In Dyfed-Powys, the PCC consolidated a number of separate contracts to provide Independent Domestic Violence Advisory (IDVA) services, working with four local authorities to jointly commission a service that works in courts and with health partners to ensure victims are offered support at first contact with health services. Almost three quarters of people said they felt better able to cope with aspects of everyday life after leaving the service.²¹

Every year thousands of young people aged 11 – 24 come through hospital doors as victims of assault and exploitation. In London, Nottingham and Birmingham, specialist charity Redthread have trauma-informed youth workers embedded in emergency departments alongside clinical staff to engage these young victims at this time of crisis.

PCCs can also bring together relevant agencies, including grassroots organisations working with specific community groups, to help victims of hate crime access services and increase confidence in the reporting of hate crime.

Case study 8: The Warwickshire PCC coordinates the Warwickshire Hate Crime Partnership, which brings together representatives from a number of statutory, voluntary and community organisations. A partnership website also provides information and advice on hate crime, as well as allowing the reporting of incidents in Warwickshire.²²



Reducing the harm caused by drugs

Tackling substance misuse is a crucial part of reducing drug related crime. According to the Government's Drug Strategy 2017, 'every £1 spent on drug treatment yields a £2.50 saving on the social costs of drugs, including crime',²³ and recent Ministry of Justice research found that treatment cut crime by a third.²⁴ Furthermore, the provision of high-quality harm reduction is cost-effective²⁵ because it cuts crime and improves health long-term.

There were 4,393 registered deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales in 2019, the eighth consecutive year that deaths rose to their highest level. Against this troubling national picture, PCCs are uniquely placed to push forward measures that can prevent drug-related harm, and reduce the cost of drugs to society.

Almost half of recent drug deaths involved an opiate such as heroin and morphine.²⁶ To mitigate this risk, PCCs can help ensure police officers are equipped with naloxone and support other agencies administering naloxone. Naloxone is an emergency antidote for overdoses caused by heroin and other opiates/opioids. It temporarily reverses the main life-threatening effect of these drugs (the slowing and stopping of breathing).²⁷

Case study 9: West Midlands is one example of an area following such an approach and since its implementation over 75 people have been trained to administer naloxone.²⁸ Durham Police also administer naloxone to people in custody who are experiencing an opiate overdose, as well as distributing the life-saving drug to people being released from police custody.²⁹

PCCs could also explore supporting the use of drug checking, which allows people to voluntarily submit a sample of their drugs for testing to identify what they contain, without fear of arrest. These tests provide information to individuals about what substance they actually have in their possession, and they also provide useful intelligence on the drug market in a particular area.

Case study 10: WEDINOS is a drug checking project in Wales that allows people to submit a drug sample anonymously for testing. Results and legal information are then made available through a number of online channels.³⁰ Initial evidence on drug checking schemes in the UK suggests that they can access 'harder-to reach' and new user groups, and can play a part in reducing drug-related harm.³¹

PCCs could also explore Heroin-Assisted Treatment (HAT), an evidence-based intervention where people who have not responded successfully to any other type of treatment (such as methadone and buprenorphine) can be prescribed heroin to use in a supervised clinical setting.³² These individuals are at particularly high risk and there is strong evidence of higher adherence to HAT and improved outcomes for this group³³.

Case study 11: The UK's first HAT programme was initiated by the PCC for Cleveland and is based in Middlesbrough. It aims to reduce offending and tackle problems linked to long-term, illegal drug use including the cost to the community and public services. Participants in the Middlesbrough HAT programme reported that their quality of life had improved by 200%; use of illegal opioids had reduced by almost 98%; overall substance use had gone down by 48%; and attendance rates at the programme were running at 98%.³⁴



Breaking the cycle of re-offending

People often commit crime due to underlying issues in their lives such as drug or alcohol dependence, mental and physical health issues, housing or homelessness, or problems with money or relationships. PCCs can use smart approaches to intervene early on, so people don't end up caught in the cycle of re-offending. Recent evidence suggests these types of projects reduce both re-offending and the financial costs to the criminal justice system.³⁵ Analysis shows use of such schemes varies significantly across the country.³⁶

Case study 12: Checkpoint is a programme run by Durham Constabulary, funded by the Durham PCC, which aims to reduce the number of victims of crime by reducing reoffending. Checkpoint offers eligible individuals a 4-month long contract as an alternative to prosecution. They are supported through the process by a specialist police 'navigator' who completes a detailed needs assessment with them and draws up the contract. The contract offers interventions to address the underlying reasons why they committed the crime, to prevent them from doing it again, and the offender makes a commitment not to reoffend for the duration of the process.³⁷

Case study 13: CASSPLUS is an advice and support service for people attending magistrates' courts in Devon and Cornwall. The service, which has been running since 2005, uses volunteers to offer practical advice, personalised support, and help to access services. It helps people resolve a range of issues which can lead to offending, such as debt, homelessness and mental illness. A 2020 interim evaluation report of CASS+ found it to be a 'vital and necessary service', with an 'overwhelmingly positive impact on service users'.³⁸

Recent research³⁹ has shown that diversion schemes for young people, which do not rely on an admission of guilt, can help divert more Black, Asian and minority ethnic people from being swept into the criminal justice system, instead helping them to access support services.

There are a range of valuable interventions that specifically focus on women. PCCs can play a vital role in commissioning women's centres⁴⁰, which provide safe spaces for women facing multiple disadvantages, many of whom are victims of sexual or domestic abuse, to access specialist services as a 'one-stop-shop' that will support them across a range of issues. Evidence shows that women's centres reduce reoffending more effectively than prison sentences, and have formed a successful part of Greater Manchester's pioneering approach to supporting women who have offended.⁴¹ There are also diversion schemes specifically targeted at women, that PCCs can promote and support.

Case study 14: New Chance is a diversion scheme for women, which is funded by the West Midlands PCC. Participants are referred by the police into a system of tailored support delivered by non-profit organisations, such as Women's Aid. Engagement with the scheme allows the individual to avoid receiving a criminal record. An evaluation found the scheme to reduce reoffending rates for participants with substance misuse issues by more than 50 percent.⁴²

PCCs can also use their convening power to encourage local employers to work with the New Futures Network⁴³ to offer job opportunities to people leaving prison, as well as promoting the 'ban the box'⁴⁴ campaign to help people with convictions find employment and contribute to their communities and families. A recent APCC briefing showcases examples of PCCs working with community and voluntary sector organisations to support people into employment⁴⁵.

PCCs' work on reducing reoffending can be greatly enriched by involving people with lived experience of the criminal justice system in the design, commissioning and implementation of policies and programmes. Recruiting and consulting with people with lived experience can improve PCCs' understanding of how to prevent crime and re-offending in their areas⁴⁶.



Building trust in policing across all communities

In 1829, British policing was established on the principle that ‘the power of the police to fulfil their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions and behaviour and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect.’⁴⁷ PCCs can play a crucial role in building the trust and confidence of all our communities in the police and ensuring agencies comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty⁴⁸. They can do this by ensuring thorough needs assessments are carried out for different groups with protected characteristics and that Equality Impact Assessments are carried out and influence the design of services and policies. In addition, an external scrutiny board can assist with community scrutiny, as well as providing advice to the police, conducting research and helping co-produce services. A group of individuals reflecting a range of voices from across a local community can be a valuable resource for a police force that wants to ensure it is transparent, accountable and effective.

Case study 15: Norfolk Constabulary have set up an independent scrutiny panel to review the circumstances in which some detainees in police custody are strip-searched. Each quarter, Independent Custody Visitors review the circumstances of several strip searches, checking on legality and proportionality and reporting back to the Constabulary. The Constabulary have reported back that the panel’s observations have had a positive effect on the standards of recording and justification for this power.⁴⁹

Children and young adults aged 14-25 are at a stage in their development where they may lack reasoning, engage in reward seeking behaviours, be overly-influenced by their peers, and lack trust and confidence in the law and criminal justice agencies.⁵⁰ These distinctive needs make it appropriate for criminal justice agencies, including the police, to adopt a particular approach to this group that recognises their developmental maturity. This applies both to responding constructively to their behaviour, but also to their democratic engagement with PCCs.

Case study 16: Youth Commissions on Police and Crime, established by Leaders Unlocked in a number of areas of the country, are platforms for young people aged 14-25 to influence the future of policing and crime prevention in their local areas by working in partnership with their PCCs and police forces to tackle urgent issues such as reducing youth offending, relationships with the police, and support for young victims and witnesses. Since 2013, the Youth Commission has recruited and trained over 800 young people aged 14-25 as Youth Commissioners. Youth Commissions are also valuable recruitment pools of talented and motivated individuals - about eight per cent of Youth Commissioners have progressed on to become Special Constables, Police Community Support Officers or other roles such as Independent Custody Visitors and Community Court members.⁵¹

Historically, the police’s use of stop and search has disproportionately affected people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, undermining their trust in the police.⁵² PCCs can support Community Scrutiny Panels to allow communities to scrutinise the police’s use of stop and search. Best practice is for these groups to be independent, representative of those most impacted by stop and search, open and visible to the public, and informed by a range of relevant data and information.⁵³ If run in accordance with new College of Policing guidance⁵⁴, these groups may help to improve the ways these powers are used and the police’s relationship with the communities they serve.

Case study 17: The stop and search scrutiny panel in Bedfordshire meet quarterly to scrutinise police actions and performance. The panel review dip sampled footage from Body Worn Video and provide independent feedback that is subsequently reported back face to face to those officers involved. They use a red, amber, green traffic light-style grading against both delivery of the legal requirements by the officers and their manner and tone in dealing with the individual. As well as stop and search, the panel also scrutinise the police use of force, including the use of handcuffs and physical restraint.



Tackling racial inequality

The police killing of George Floyd in America has sparked a renewed focus on issues of racism and disproportionality in policing and criminal justice. While we have a different history of race relations to the US, similar issues permeate our own criminal justice system. Over 21 years have passed since Sir William Macpherson led the public inquiry following the racially aggravated murder of Stephen Lawrence.⁵⁵ The final report made a total of 70 recommendations to show zero tolerance for racism in society and included measures to transform police attitudes towards race relations and improve accountability. Over two decades later, racial disproportionality still persists in the use of police powers and in wider criminal justice outcomes. PCCs can play a pivotal role tackling this inequality to improve trust and confidence and ensure a criminal justice system that is fair and effective for all.

As David Lammy's 2017 review highlighted, Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups are still disproportionately represented throughout the criminal justice system.⁵⁶ These disparities are present not only in the use of stop and search powers, but also in the use of force, deaths in custody and in the prison population. Over half of children in custody are from Black, Asian or minority ethnic communities. Therefore, PCCs have a crucial role in reviewing data and analysing trends in order to hold the police and other public bodies to account and take action where race disparities are identified.

Case study 18: The Avon and Somerset Lammy Review Group is chaired by an independent local resident who has been at the forefront of racial inequality activism. The group collects data on how decisions are made at each point of a person's journey through the justice system to understand where any bias is and then challenge it.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies, such as PCCs, local authorities and the police, to publish information to show they are eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between communities. Involving Black, Asian and minority ethnic people meaningfully in decision-making processes, and in co-producing Equality Impact Assessments, reduces the risk of bias seeping into decision-making processes, as well as helping to increase the cultural competency of public bodies.

Case study 19: The London Mayor's Office for Police and Crime (MOPAC) developed and published an Action Plan to improve transparency, accountability, and trust in policing. More than 400 individuals and organisations participated in its development – including 45 Black-led civil society organisations.⁵⁷ The plan was co-created with members of Black and ethnic minority communities, young people and the Metropolitan police through a series of online workshops. MOPAC have committed to hold quarterly online meetings to review progress and seek advice on the implementation of the plan.

A lack of trust and confidence within Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities can impact recruitment. PCCs can improve trust by supporting opportunities to create more diverse police forces that better reflect the range of communities they serve.

Case study 20: In South Wales, the PCC launched a positive action programme, in partnership with the University of South Wales, to prepare ethnic minority candidates who want to join the force with the application and assessment centre process.⁵⁸ Candidates are also offered support of a 'Development Champion' - an existing officer or staff member trained to help, guide, and mentor them. South Wales Police has witnessed an increase in the number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic applicants, including the highest ever application and appointment levels – rising from 2.8% in 2015, to 11.5% in 2019; leading to the appointment of 38 Black, Asian and ethnic minority PCs in that time (4.3% of all recruited Constables).

Endnotes

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