

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Home Secretary  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

[section55responses@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:section55responses@homeoffice.gov.uk)

Kelvedon Park, London Road, Rivenhall,  
Witham CM8 3HB

Telephone: 01245 291600  
Fax: 01245 291601  
E-mail: [pfcc@essex.pnn.police.uk](mailto:pfcc@essex.pnn.police.uk)  
<http://www.essex.pfcc.police.uk>

Your Ref: n/a  
Our Ref 20210614SH  
Date: 14 June 2021  
Enquiries to: Suzanne Harris  
E-mail: [pfcc@essex.police.uk](mailto:pfcc@essex.police.uk)

Dear Home Secretary,

I write in response to the HMICFRS thematic inspection reports 'Policing the Pandemic' and 'Custody services in a COVID-19 environment'.

I acknowledge the recommendations made in these two HMICFRS inspection reports and understand that all of those recommendations (listed in appendix A) are applicable to all Forces, including Essex Police.

The Chief Constable has provided a detailed response to me regarding each of the Recommendations relevant to Essex. Essex Police monitors all risks relating to policing the response to COVID-19 at a Strategic Risk Board which is chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable. I am reassured that the force is in a good position overall and that the individual recommendations are either completed or are well managed by Essex Police.

I recognise that ATHENA does not facilitate the capturing of specific information on how detained people receive their legal rights, which means that this data cannot be monitored. The information is recorded but not in a way that enables an overview of the numbers who receive this by virtual interaction rather than in person. I am pleased to report that the Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) scheme continued to operate through the pandemic by adapting ways of working, including replacing physical visits with phone calls. This is an area I will continue to explore with the Chief Constable and the Strategic Athena Management Board to discuss options and implications.

I am familiar with the impact that Covid-19 has had on training within the Force and am content that organised planning has ensured that backlogs have been reduced where possible and training continues throughout the ongoing restrictions.

It is pleasing to see that a continued drive towards compatible IT systems is supported in this Inspection Report. The accelerated rollout of Microsoft 365, including the introduction of Microsoft Teams, has had significant benefits for the workforce during the last 15 months. An example of joint working includes the Essex Centre for Data Analytics (ECDA) which maps data from a number of partners to inform system wide approaches to whole system issues. I will continue to work with my Chief Constable to explore further opportunities for connectivity between emergency services, the wider Criminal Justice System and other partner agencies, to support effective cross-agency working.

I will monitor the work of Essex Police as the country moves out of the pandemic, and hold the Chief Constable to account, including through the monthly Performance and Resources Scrutiny Board.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Roger Hirst', written in a cursive style.

Roger Hirst  
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

c.c. Ben-Julian Harrington, Chief Constable, Essex Police.

## **Appendix A – Recommendations**

### **Policing the Pandemic**

#### **Recommendation 1: Managing registered sex offenders**

Forces must immediately make sure that officers understand and correctly implement the guidance for managing registered sex offenders during the pandemic.

#### **Recommendation 2: Legislation and guidance**

Forces must immediately make sure they can manage their responses to changes in coronavirus-related legislation. They must ensure frontline officers and staff are clear about the difference between legislation and guidance.

#### **Recommendation 3: Test, track and trace**

Forces must immediately put in place a policy to make sure that they follow the guidance and self-isolation directions when members of the workforce come into contact with someone with coronavirus symptoms.

#### **Recommendation 4: Custody records**

Forces must immediately make sure that they clearly and consistently record on custody records information about how/when/if detainees are informed of the temporary changes to how they can exercise their rights to legal advice and representation. The record must make clear how any consents are obtained about the way in which legal advice and representation are provided.

#### **Recommendation 5: Overall scale and impact of changes**

Within six months, forces must assess the sustainability of any temporary measures introduced during the pandemic that change the way they work. They must understand positive, negative and unintended consequences of the scale and impact of the changes before determining if any of these new ways of working should continue.

---

### **Custody services in a COVID-19 environment**

#### **Recommendation 1:**

To help clarify the custody information that forces collect and use, we recommend that forces:

- track the numbers of detainees with, or suspected of having, COVID-19;
- record and monitor the length of time detainees remain in police custody, and any additional detention times due to waits for virtual remand hearings;
- record and monitor the way in which detainees receive their legal rights, and how many receive them by virtual means rather than a solicitor attending in person; and
- record the use of bail and released under investigation, and assess any increases in pre-charge bail.

#### **Recommendation 2**

We further recommend that:

- The police service should evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual remand hearings. It should use this information to help the wider Criminal Justice System learn from its experience and develop better working arrangements that meet the needs of justice and make best use of public money.
- The NPCC, working with the National Health Service (NHS), should consider how to minimise the risks of spreading the virus in the community when releasing detainees with, or suspected of having, COVID-19 and what arrangements can help achieve this.