

Chief Constable outlines increasing demand as lockdown eases



Chief Constable Andy Marsh

Statement from Chief Constable Andy Marsh:

I want to address some of the concerns raised about our handling of incidents over the weekend and give a wider context around the increasing demand we are facing as lockdown eases.

To do this, I want to give a snapshot of the demand being placed on us to give the public a better understanding of the incidents we dealt with and the people we were trying to help over the weekend just gone.

Between 5pm on Friday 17 July to 8am on Monday 20 July, we received 1,017 calls to 999 requiring an immediate emergency response and a further 914 which needed a priority response. This is in addition to calls to the non-emergency 101 number and reports submitted online through our website.

The incidents we attended resulted in 178 people being taken into custody between Friday and Sunday – a 20 per cent increase on the last weekend of June and higher than the levels we were seeing before lockdown began.

Significant incidents from over the weekend included the following:

- A serious disorder in Easton, Bristol, on Saturday night following which two men were stabbed. One man was left in a serious condition. Two arrests were made and an investigation is ongoing
- A 150-strong street party in Easton
- Four serious collisions – a pedestrian died on the M32, another on the M5 near Clevedon and people suffered very serious injuries in collisions in Henbury and Yeovil

- 14 officers were assaulted while trying to help people and protect the public, facing being spat at, biting, scratching, punching, kicking, pushing and verbal abuse – including racial abuse. All these officers remained on duty – including one who returned to work immediately after treatment to a dislocated shoulder.
- We pulled officers away from front-line response duties to form a dedicated unit to respond to reports of unlicensed music events. This team successfully prevented one such event near Frome in Somerset on Saturday night after information from the public – but were then deployed to Upper Swainswick near Bath to prevent any more people turning up to a rave which was already underway when we had our first calls. We called officers in from rest days and other forces to close the event down by Sunday afternoon. We've seized five vehicles and sound equipment and made one arrest. A post incident review is ongoing and we will take robust action against those found to be responsible.
- Officers were trying to find 39 missing people – including nine assessed as high risk
- There were 95 calls reporting concern for welfare and 36 for people in mental health crisis
- Officers also had 79 reports of domestic assault to respond to

We cover a huge area – from Thornbury to Chard and Minehead to Frome, and on a daily basis my officers and staff show great professionalism and dedication in dealing with everything from theft, assault, complex fraud investigations, the protection of children and vulnerable adults, helping victims of domestic abuse and hate crime and delivering the worst news possible to families after collisions and serious incidents.

This is all on top of three months of additional pressure on officers and staff working tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the clear risks to their own health.

We have a proud tradition of policing by consent. This means working with our communities. We put our lives on the line to serve and protect and you play your part by reporting incidents, giving us information and showing pride and respect for the community you're a part of.

Sadly, we don't have limitless resources and can't be everywhere at once. We have to use our professional experience to assess every call, every request for help – and consider what incidents pose the greatest risk to public safety.

Our brilliant 999 and 101 call handlers quickly prioritise calls based on the risk of harm – potential loss of life, serious injury or sexual assault, factoring in the vulnerability of victims and witnesses and whether the offender is on the scene.

Our officers, supported by a wide range of police staff and volunteers, will then respond. Their actions are dictated by the evidence and resources available and a wealth of legislation. Our first priority is to keep everyone safe. That's victims and witnesses – but also officers and staff and it includes suspects and offenders, no matter what we're told they have done.

I am hugely proud of my officers and staff and the special constables and volunteers who give their time to support us. We don't always get it right, but we learn from the times where we do fall short.