

***'THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM – A
PROGRESS REPORT'***

**A CRIMINAL JUSTICE JOINT INSPECTION PUBLISHED ON 17TH MAY 2022
AVON & SOMERSET PCC RESPONSE DATED 12TH JULY 2022**

There were no recommendations for Chief Constables or PCCs in this report, but time taken for cases to reach court is a longstanding challenge that pre-dates the pandemic. Court closures during the pandemic made the situation worse. The result is both an unacceptable delay in offenders being brought to justice, and a detrimental impact on victim experience, as highlighted in the PCC's postbag, causing additional distress and risking victim attrition – choosing to drop out of the process altogether. This is a national challenge, exacerbated by a reduction in sitting days in 2019. Despite the focus on managing the backlog and COVID-19 recovery, a substantial challenge remains, with a national target to reduce the number of live Crown Court cases to 53,000 by March 2025, which as of May 2022 was still at 58,000. This illustrates the impact on demand and capacity and the scale of the continued challenge faced across the criminal justice system.

As Chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB), I have a key role in galvanising partners to work together in response to this challenge at a local level. A strong partnership approach through weekly, then monthly LCJB meetings during the pandemic has placed Avon and Somerset in a strong position responding to the challenge. This is evident in the number of post-pandemic Crown Court cases: nationally the number of cases in the system grew by 45% whereas in Avon and Somerset this number of outstanding cases has only grown by 17% in the same period. Working together around a single focus – to effectively tackle the backlog, embrace innovation and use of technology where appropriate, allow for contingency planning and put in place effective management of priority cases through the system – has cemented strong and effective partnership working, providing firm foundations as LCJBs are placed on a legal footing and the PCC role in criminal justice is set to grow.

Lack of data to enable oversight of the criminal justice system at a local level has presented a barrier in effective partnership working, a lack of data from HMCTS presenting a particular challenge in being able to see the true picture of timeliness and managing backlogs. The recent publication of a new national and local CJS scorecard will provide a valuable tool to support PCCs in working together to ensure an efficient and effective criminal justice system, improving transparency, understanding demand, and driving forward improvements as enhanced partnership responsibilities take effect over the coming year.

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