

**BEV HUGHES**  
**DEPUTY MAYOR**  
**OF GREATER**  
**MANCHESTER**

Rt Hon Priti Patel,  
Secretary of State for the Home Department  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

11<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Dear Home Secretary

**SUBJECT: Criminal Justice Joint Inspection – Impact of the pandemic on the Criminal Justice System.**

I write in response to the recent joint inspection to review the impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on the Criminal Justice System (CJS).

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the frontline workers within the CJS who have responded, adapted and continued to answer the calls to service from those within our society that require support and assistance. This, together with the critically important work to manage those individuals already in the CJS, has demonstrated the resilience and commitment of these services to ensure the various mechanics of the system continue to move and progress, as they need to.

I welcome the joint inspection of this work and have considered the findings of the report. The ongoing pandemic has required CJS services to respond and adapt working practices in such unprecedented times. Rightly, the report acknowledges these challenges and it was encouraging to read that the welfare of staff and service users was prioritised at the outset.

The report makes some interesting observations regarding the use of digital technology and the benefits seen from that, not only at present, but possibly as part of future practices as a tool to communicate with a variety of people in a remote setting.

However, the report also highlights fundamental concerns in respect of backlogs, particularly within the court setting. It is concerning to hear of cases being set for 2022 and the potential impact this delay could have on the wellbeing of victims and the accused and on their respective families.

GMCA, Broadhurst House, 56 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EU

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In response to the pressures created by Covid-19 on the CJS I convened and chaired an Extraordinary Greater Manchester Local Criminal Justice Board to assess the challenges and risks and plan an effective response. A Task and Finish Group has been established that has developed an accurate understanding of those cases that are inevitably experiencing delays through the system. A fully coherent plan with four workstreams to address the issues arising from the analysis has been developed in partnership and is underway.

Consideration is also being given to where demand can be safely reduced for cases before entry into the system as well as those already in the system, to relieve the pressure downstream. In addition, Greater Manchester has two Nightingale Courts based at the Lowry Arts Centre and Manchester Deansgate Hilton Hotel, to help alleviate some of the pressure being experienced.

However, despite this comprehensive joint activity, concerns remain in respect of long-term capacity, particularly at Crown Court. In February 2020 there were 850 outstanding Crown Court trials. In January 2021 this figure had risen to 1,320. The delays experienced in the months preceding the Covid-19 pandemic were already poor and it is important that we do not think that returning to these levels demonstrates success in the long-term. Sitting days were cut year on year as part of a Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service's (HMCTS) efficiency perspective but without regard to the wider implications to the CJS and the implications for victims and their families. I recognise that sitting days have increased this year for the first time in a number of years in response to the pandemic and this approach needs to be maintained. Rather than looking back on previous levels of demand it is important that collectively we look forward and aspire to achieve more.

Crime reporting levels are increasing to pre-Covid-19 levels for most crime types and as a result of the HMICFRS Victim Support Assessment we anticipate that reporting, recording, investigations and prosecutions will increase in Greater Manchester. It is, however, acknowledged that this may take circa 18 months to filter through.

I would welcome a dialogue in respect of the work we have undertaken in Greater Manchester and to discuss how we can share knowledge and learning to minimise the impact on people and ensure that access to justice is at the heart of service delivery.

Yours sincerely



**Baroness Beverley Hughes**  
**Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester**  
**Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice**

GMCA, Broadhurst House, 56 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EU

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