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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear colleagues

Following the high profile media and social media coverage, we want to address the events during the Black Lives Matter protest in Bristol on Sunday 7th June which was attended by around 10,000 people.

We have had many people contact us this week expressing a range of views about the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston and the subsequent police response. Some have stated their support for a proportionate, considered police response that prioritised public safety over damage to property. Others have expressed disgust at the actions of a small minority of people, in an otherwise peaceful protest, and their displeasure at what they perceive as a lack of real time action from the police.

Many people were also angry at the public health implications of the clear breach of Government regulations to protect against Covid-19, for which many of us have spent months making sacrifices. We understand all these perspectives, and we want to be clear and transparent about the nature of the decisions taken during the police operation.

First and foremost we want to assure you that we were very clear prior to this demonstration, that in light of the health crisis this country is facing, our respective organisations were calling for people to express their anger in ways that protected public health.

Our Local Authority partners, in various locations where events took place, supported us in this messaging. The police advised those who felt that they had to attend, to do so safely and with a clear consideration around the risk of Covid-19 transmission to their health and the health of others.

Secondly, it is important to make you aware that there was no prior intelligence to indicate any pre-meditated intention to pull down the Colston statue. The damage to this statue occurred within the space of two minutes which was not long enough for police to deploy the level of resources needed to prevent the statue being damaged as well as maintain public order.

Once the statue was down, officers had to balance the risk of intervening with the risk of causing disorder and unrest. Had officers intervened we believe that this would have led to widespread disorder involving many people already angry at the use of force by an American police force. This could have led to an escalation of the situation causing injuries to members of the public, officers and damage to other public and private property and would have had very serious local and national implications.

These are difficult decisions but ones that have to be made by the policing command structure taking into account all the circumstances, including the significant numbers of people in attendance, the safety of the general public and the dynamics of the incident itself. We fully support the decisions of the command team who acted with common sense in a proportionate way.

It is not for politicians, local or national, to influence or second guess operational policing matters.

We are pleased that the conduct of the majority of those who attended the protest was peaceful, although with emotions running high. As a result the event passed with no violent disorder, no injuries to the public or our officers, and no arrests. We are confident that, after the officers assessed the circumstances, they not only made the right decision but they also did the right thing to prevent any escalation of tension into violence, injury or worse.

The legacy of Edward Colston in the city has been a controversial one that has divided opinion among the people of Bristol for many years. While, of course, we completely condemn unlawful acts of criminal damage and we are disappointed that people have committed them during a peaceful protest, we fully understand why it happened because of what Colston represents.

We also understand why people think officers should have acted immediately to challenge the actions of those involved in the criminal damage. It is important to stress that all forms of public order policing pose challenges and every protest is different; the police have to use their vast experience of facilitating and allowing peaceful protests to make the right decisions, at the right time, to keep people safe and minimise disruption and disorder. Policing is always at the consent of the public and we're here to protect, serve and uphold the law.

Finally, we want to assure you that the police are thoroughly investigating the matter and every effort will be made to prosecute those responsible and bring them to justice. The police sought early investigative advice from the Crown Prosecution Service and have already identified a small number of people directly involved in the damage through footage recorded of the incident. As with all investigations, the police will act without fear or favour.

Thank you again for your support.

Yours sincerely



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Police & Crime Commissioner



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