



**Minutes of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel
Wednesday 20th March 2024, 10.30am
John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1
1HE**

Present:

Local Authority and Independent Member Representatives:

Councillor Andy Wait (Bath and North-East Somerset), Councillor Ann Morgan (Bath and North-East Somerset), Councillor Asher Craig (Bristol City Council), Councillor Jonathan Hucker (Bristol City Council), Councillor Lisa Stone (Bristol City Council), Julie Knight (Independent Member), Richard Brown (Independent Member), Councillor Peter Crew (North Somerset Council), Councillor Brian Bolt (Somerset Council), Councillor Heather Shearer (Somerset Council and Chair), Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Somerset Council), Councillor Martin Wale (Somerset Council), Councillor Raj Sood (South Gloucestershire Council), Councillor John Bradbury (South Gloucestershire Council)

Host Authority Officers Present:

Patricia Jones	Panel Lead Officer
Pippa Triffitt	Clerk/Democratic Services Officer

Police and Crime Commissioner and Support Staff:

Mark Shelford	Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)
Alice Ripley	Chief of Staff
Paul Butler	Chief Financial Officer (CFO)
Ben Valentine	Senior Performance and Governance Manager
Inspector Stuart King	Commissioner's Staff Officer
Joanna Coulon	Scrutiny and Performance Manager

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Nicola Clark, Cllr Stuart Davies, and Independent Member Gary Davies.

2. Public Question Time

None.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 1st February 2024.

It was noted that “Fine Line Leadership” on Page 12 should read as “Front Line Leadership”.

It was observed that neither the PCC’s response to the Panel’s Precept Report nor the agenda papers for the present meeting sufficiently covered the Panel’s request on Page 13 of the previous minutes for the cost figures for Operation Hemlock.

The minutes were otherwise confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.

Actions:

- 1. The OPCC to provide more detailed information on the cost figures for Operation Hemlock.**

5. Matters Arising

None.

6. Chair’s Business

The Chair informed the Panel that it was Cllr Craig’s final meeting as a representative for Bristol City Council. She thanked Cllr Craig for her dedication and for the valuable contributions she had made during her eight years as a Panel member.

The PCC added his gratitude to Cllr Craig for her work on disproportionality and expressed his appreciation that she was to continue co-chairing the steering group for Tackling Disproportionality with the Chief Constable.

Cllr Craig thanked the Panel and commended the manner in which the greater good inherently supplanted political considerations in terms of the Panel's decisions and outcomes. She confirmed that she would be returning to a future Panel meeting to deliver an update from the Tackling Disproportionality steering group.

The Chair confirmed that the Budget Task and Finish Group formed at the AGM in 2023 would become a sub-committee of the Panel going forward.

7. Business Crime Report

The Chair invited the PCC and CFO to present the Report. The following is a summary of the key points made.

- The PCC informed the Panel that business crime had been a focus since the start of his appointment, and he wanted to understand the root issues.
- The police needed the support of the large companies in dealing with the criminals effectively, as smaller companies would otherwise suffer.
- The report demonstrated the recent work on business crime and gave an indication of the direction the work was taking. It was a priority issue due to the concern voiced by affected communities and the importance of supporting small businesses.
- The CFO confirmed that the larger companies were beginning to take the issue more seriously, as the impact on them was increasing.
- 18% of shoplifting events reported involved some level of violence. There were several factors that led to shoplifting, including the cost-of-living crisis, and the influence of drugs and alcohol. There were also instances of organised crime on a large scale. However, more analysis was needed on the drivers and patterns of business crime.

- The national focus was on prolific offenders. As stated in the report, the current approach taken by Avon & Somerset was not sufficient, therefore they were looking to make improvements.
- Reporting crime was a significant issue, particularly by the larger stores, where sometimes only 5% of crimes were reported, leaving aggravated violent thefts often unreported.
- The previous twelve months had seen an increase in reports, from 18,000 offences to 23,144, which was an increase of 28.6%. The rise in reported business-related theft since January 2023 stood at 38% in the 6-month moving average. However, there was a long way to go to improve the reporting of business crimes.
- There were a number of new technological initiatives to improve the reporting of crimes; for example, a QR code could take the reporter to the appropriate site and allow them to upload CCTV footage directly to the form.
- Each Local Policing Area was producing its own response to the National Action Plan, capturing local activity to drive improvements.
- Areas of concern in the reporting process had been flagged, such as the wording on the automatic email responses to the crime report, and the reasons given for concluding that prosecution would not be in the public interest.
- Since the PCC was appointed, the Business Crime Forums had expanded and increased their support and engagement. The force was collaborating with local businesses, groups, and initiatives to identify the most effective strategies for tackling business crime.

The Chair thanked the PCC and CFO and invited questions and comments from the Panel. The following is a summary of the ensuing discussion.

- The Panel noted Page 7 of the Report and asked whether those affected by business crime would be asked for their feedback with regards to making the reporting process simpler. The PCC stated that many organisations did not report to the police directly, and instead followed an internal reporting process. However, the internal system did not always provide a full report on the issue. The plan to make reporting

easier included using a unique QR code for each store with pre-loaded information. Furthermore, more pressure was being generated amongst national organisations to report directly to the police, and 999 calls were receiving excellent feedback. However, it was important to avoid duplication of work if both internal and external reports were made.

- The Panel highlighted the statement on Page 6 relating to the Neighbourhood's problem-solving plans in relation to business crime and suggested that there should be more than two live plans for this if problem solving was to be improved. The PCC stated that all areas also had their own local plans to drive forward local initiatives in addition to the two Force-wide plans.
- The Panel recalled Page 2 of the national plan, which stated that compliance of the investigative standards was subject to an HMICFRS inspection. The CFO confirmed that the Constabulary were aware this was an area for improvement, and that the issues had been acknowledged. The inspection would also flag further areas for improvement.
- The Panel praised the encouragement given to large companies to report business crime, but asked how the OPCC would ensure that the lack of public confidence in the force was addressed if there was not a suitable grip on tackling business crime and the figures in the Report did not improve. The PCC highlighted the broader issue of leadership; it had been commented on in a leadership course that management did not equate to leadership, therefore work was being done on improving them to address this. The Constabulary continued to respond to local concerns and support the network of Neighbourhood Teams along with the Chief Constable and the senior team.
- Cllr Hucker informed the Panel that he had attended a meeting of key stakeholders in his ward of Stockwood in Bristol, along with the Neighbourhood Team. The owner of the local convenience store stated that they may be forced to close the store due to shoplifting costing them up to £300 a week. The Metro Mayor for the West of England had introduced the Safer Shops West scheme where independent shops could receive a grant of up to £2,000 to install security measures. Cllr Hucker asked whether this was an initiative independent from the police force. The PCC stated that it was the Mayor's own initiative, but that the police were helping to support it.

- Cllr Sood raised the issue of the anti-social behaviour that often accompanied shoplifting; this did not appear to be addressed in the report. Furthermore, it was important that the force recognised the practicalities of being a sole trader and how shoplifting and anti-social behaviour affecting them personally as well as their business. It was also crucial that shopkeepers witnessed action beyond receiving a crime number. The PCC acknowledged the importance of protecting small businesses and the need to make reporting crime easier. The aim was to create a unique QR code for each shop to allow for faster reporting, particularly in the absence of CCTV footage. The Constabulary would consider all options and ensure the relationship with the shops and Neighbourhood Teams was maintained. The CFO had also worked to bring shopkeepers together to provide feedback on the action they wanted to see from the police.
- The PCC reminded the Panel that tackling business crime required engagement from the community; 80% of shoplifting was relating to addiction, therefore this was an issue that required attention. In terms of anti-social behaviour, the Constabulary improved its crime recording processes two years ago, so that they were better at identifying and recording crimes underpinning the anti-social behaviour; this required training of officers and staff. The CFO confirmed that the issues raised by the Panel were also mentioned at a meeting with the Association of Convenience Stores. Concerns were raised regarding convenience stores in particular as they often had residential space above them, therefore business crime equated to an invasion of the living space. It was recognised that reporting all crimes when running a small business was not always feasible, but the CFO emphasised that there was a joint responsibility between the shopkeepers and the police to report and respond, respectively. Reporters also needed to provide as many details as possible; a physical response could only be provided with evidence, but all records would assist with identifying and targeting crime hotspots.
- Cllr Crew recalled that there were those who shoplifted for fun and those who had criminal intent. In Weston, the North Somerset team and the PCSOs had worked to identify a group shoplifting for fun and the case had now gone to court. Convicting those with criminal intent had proved more difficult but they were beginning to see improvements. However, there was a major store that had no CCTV or security measures, but they were complaining the police were not responding to

their issues with shoplifting. The PCC requested to discuss this issue further after the meeting.

- The Panel asked the PCC about the role he was playing in encouraging change on a national level, as national retailers needed to engage with the issue by adjusting their shop layouts and reporting all crimes directly to the police. The PCC stated he worked closely with the National Lead for Retail Crime, in addition to regional store managers. In relation to theft of fuel, he had written to the Secretary of State for Transport; councils could pay for the privilege of accessing databases directly which meant, for example, that parking attendants could send tickets directly to offenders. However, petrol retailers could not do this. The Secretary of State acknowledged the issue and recognised the pressure for change.
- The Panel highlighted the importance of ensuring the teams processing the crime reports were fully staffed; the PCC confirmed that they were. The aim was to make the process as efficient as possible for both the staff and public. Ideally, the reporter's information would remain in the system, therefore it would appear automatically on each report they submitted.
- The Panel noted that the national chain stores must take responsibility for implementing crime preventative measures. The stores were often organised in such a way that made profits higher but shoplifting easier. The PCC agreed with this sentiment but emphasised that it was not for the police to instruct them on this choice.
- The Panel recalled that the community trigger online form had recently changed and took a long time to complete. The OPCC informed the Panel the Community Trigger had been replaced with the Anti-Social Behaviour Case Review and was a partnership effort owned in four out of five areas by the Local Authority, with the exception of Somerset. However, it was acknowledged that it was an important process to get right, and changes should be made if needed.
- The Panel requested assurance that the force was confident they were effectively targeting offenders, as the positive outcome rate for shoplifting was only 16.4%, meaning Avon and Somerset were ranked 34th nationally for outcome rate. The PCC assured the Panel that

business crime was rising as a priority. A focus on business crime would see an improved service to the residents.

The Chair thanked the PCC and CFO, commended the honesty of the Report and its analysis, and requested that an update on the progress of tackling business crime was brought to a future meeting.

8. Commissioner's Update Report

The Chair invited the PCC to present the Report. The following is a summary of the presentation.

- The PCC informed the Panel that the South West had topped a recent national poll regarding public confidence in the police.
- The Channel 4 documentary, *To Catch a Copper*, had received both positive and negative engagement, but the importance of transparency remained, and building trust and confidence in the police was now the focus.
- Knife crime continued to be a concern. The police force needed the support of the community to help solve this.
- The Avon & Somerset OPCC had been identified as a leading unit in the country and had given a training workshop to share good practice.
- There had been a 13% reduction in economic and cybercrime over the past year, which was a significant change, and was likely due to the increased resilience against such crimes.
- The programme to Tackle Disproportionality continued, but increased engagement from some partners was required to make it most effective.

The Chair thanked the PCC for his Report and invited comments and questions from the Panel members. The following is a summary of the ensuing discussion.

- As Co-Chair of the steering group, Cllr Craig agreed that the programme to Tackle Disproportionality suffered from a lack of engagement from its partners. Cllr Craig also informed the Panel of the Youth Creative Power Town, which was a Black-led group in Bristol that

worked with the Constabulary to investigate solutions to serious violence in their communities. The solutions presented to her in their presentation were all achievable and did not require additional resources. They had since been invited by Cllr Craig to lead their own conference on the subject and she would also put them in touch with the PCC.

- The Panel reflected on Priority 1 of the Police and Crime Plan, which related to street crime, violence, and anti-social behaviour. Police visibility was always enhanced after tragic events, but it was felt to be lacking before they took place. The Panel questioned whether such events could be prevented if patrolling officers used their powers to stop and search; evidence that this was occurring in high-crime areas was therefore necessary. The PCC confirmed that the Constabulary continued to stop and search and were given hotspot training. The Senior Performance and Governance Manager added that 6,300 stop and searches were carried out in 2023, which was around 17 per day on average. The PCC offered to share reports of this activity.
- The Panel commended the Chief of Staff on the success of the OPCC nationally.
- It was noted that the recent murderers in Bristol and Bath were quickly brought to justice, but felt that issues with knife crime were frequently glossed over. Such events had a devastating impact that reached beyond the families and affected the whole community. The solution could lie in a collaboration between police and community, but the police needed to take the lead. The Panel asked how confident the PCC was in the force's model of dealing with knife crime, whether the data was fed back into the system to support future investigations, when the Panel was likely to see the enhanced action plan against knife crime, and whether there would be joint accountability monitoring to measure its success. The PCC informed the Panel that the Neighbourhood Policing plan was largely operational, therefore questions relating to the piece should be directed to the Chief Constable; however, the issue was being addressed as a priority through the Violence Reduction Partnership and the Constabulary. It was important to strike a balance between recognising convictions and avoiding celebrating the issue at hand. There was an assurance piece in motion to capture learning and best practice following recent incidents in Bristol.

- The Panel requested the background information relating to Avon & Somerset's first place ranking in the South West for public confidence in the police. The Panel expressed surprise at the use of GPS to oversee anti-social behaviour and serious violence hotspot patrols by tracking location rather than focusing on outcomes. The Panel requested that the link to the online fraud hub mentioned on Page 3 of the Report was shared with Panel members.
- The Panel noted that the Report included the recent HMICFRS inspections and the PCC's mandatory responses and requested that live inspections were also included. The Chief of Staff agreed to include these in future Reports. The OPCC added that the force was currently being inspected on serious and organised crime for a two-week period.
- The Panel welcomed the £1.6 million of funding from the Home Office for anti-social behaviour and serious violence initiatives, and asked which geographic areas would benefit. The PCC stated he needed to discuss disclosing the locations with the Chief Constable as there may be operational sensitivities involved. The Panel asked whether the funding was included in the latest budget report. The CFO stated that the funding had not been confirmed when the budget was announced, therefore it was unlikely that it had been included, but he would check the figures and confirm.
- The Panel suggested that Reports should focus on what would be achieved with the increased Precept, rather than what would still be lost through efficiency savings. The CFO agreed with the sentiment but stated that the latter was required operationally.
- The Panel highlighted the results of the last PEEL inspection on Page 10 of the Report and questioned why Number 10 was categorised as 'Closure Pending' after receiving improvements, yet the PEEL grading remained as 'Requires Improvement'. The PCC informed the Panel that it was HMICFRS who signed off the categories.
- The Panel also highlighted the process of police officer dismissals in the Home Office review. Recommendation 14 stated that the Home Office should clearly define the route by which officers were able to be removed if they were unable to receive vetting clearance. The Panel asked for an update on the progress of this. The PCC stated that work over the previous two years had resulted in changes to the vetting

process, but currently the Chief Constable did not have the power to dismiss an officer if they did not receive vetting clearance. However, this was under review and the necessary change to allow for this was due to be signed off. The Chief of Staff added that the review would implement a programme of significant and detailed changes. Currently, the OPCC was focused on the changes in Tranche 1 which was due to be rolled out in April. However, they would come back to the Panel with an update on the vetting process.

- The Panel noted the absence of road safety in the Report and emphasised the importance of Vision Zero. The PCC assured the Panel that this was still a goal they were trying to achieve; he held regular meetings on road safety with the Constabulary and they were working alongside the highways departments of the councils and community groups.

The Chair thanked the Panel for their questions and comments and invited the PCC to make any further points.

The PCC informed the Panel that he had presented a bronze statue to the Chief Constable to thank her for her strategic courageous leadership. He extended his thanks to the Panel for endorsing her appointment, and expressed his gratitude to the Panel and the Chair for their work since his own appointment as PCC. He stated that he would be standing in the PCC election on 2nd May and noted that the relationship between the Panel and the OPCC had significantly improved over the previous few years due to the emphasis on transparency and partnership. The Panel's Lead Officer and Joanna Coulon, the Scrutiny and Performance Manager, were commended for their work in facilitating this.

Actions:

- 1. The OPCC to share reports of stop and search activity with the Panel Members.**
- 2. The OPCC to share the link to the online fraud hub.**
- 3. The OPCC to provide background information relating to Avon & Somerset's first place ranking in the South West for public confidence in the police.**
- 4. The OPCC to include live HMICFRS inspections in future Update Reports.**
- 5. The CFO to confirm whether the £1.6 million of funding from the Home Office was included in the latest budget report.**
- 6. The OPCC to provide an update on the vetting process review.**

9. Performance Report

The Chair invited questions and comments from the Panel members on the Report. The following is a summary of the key points made.

- The Panel requested clarification on the graph scale on Page 13 of the Report. The OPCC confirmed the scale was based on local surveys and related to the percentage of people who had seen a police officer or PSCO within the last month.
- The Panel noted that the figures on Page 4 of the Report related to October 2023, and suggested that the commentary could therefore be out of date.
- The Panel highlighted the ongoing assurance work to review problem-solving plans related to neighbourhood crime on Page 7 of the Report and asked whether gaps in the plans and the related training opportunities had been investigated. The OPCC confirmed they were researching best practices from other forces. The PCC added that the overarching theme was how to best design a problem-solving plan so that there were no gaps.
- The Panel requested further information on the non-degree entry route for police officers mentioned on Page 12 of the Report. The PCC explained that this was a new idea to bring previous life experience and learning into the police force. It was an operational decision, but the PCC emphasised his interest in the project.
- The Panel highlighted the downward trend in residential burglaries between October 2018 and October 2023 shown on Page 7 of the Report and asked whether there was a reason for this. The PCC informed the Panel that the crime profile was shifting towards cybercrime. Furthermore, residents were taking more steps to ensure their properties were more resilient to burglary.
- The Panel highlighted the workforce survey on Page 12 and the high results obtained in 2020 compared to other years. The OPCC confirmed they were expecting an assurance report on this survey and offered to bring the results to a future Panel meeting.

Actions:

- 1. The OPCC to bring the results of the assurance report on the workforce survey to a future Panel meeting.**

10. Standing Complaints Report

The Chair requested an update on the long-standing issues with iCase and the impact of the delay in its implementation. The CFO stated the project had encountered challenges but was due to go live within the next couple of months.

The Lead Officer updated the Panel on her recent meeting with the OPCC's Director of Performance and Accountability, which had taken place to get an understanding of what the PCC's oversight of the police complaints regime looked like in practical terms in 2024 (following a robust scrutiny exercise of the former administration in 2019).

Formal feedback would be circulated to the Panel in due course.

The Chief of Staff emphasised the importance of the PCC's oversight of complaints and confirmed that the OPCC had cultivated a strong working relationship with the Constabulary and had full access to their handling of complaints.

Actions:

- 1. The Lead Officer to circulate feedback on the oversight of complaints.**

11. Work Programme

The Chair invited the Panel members to submit suggestions for agenda topics for the 2024-5 work programme to the Lead Officer; these would be discussed with the OPCC in May. Topics already under consideration included knife crime, neighbourhood teams, and the vetting of police officers.

Actions:

- 1. Panel Members to submit suggestions for agenda topics for the 2024-5 work programme to the Lead Officer.**

12. Panel Costs Report

The Chair invited the Panel to note the Panel Costs Report. She expressed her gratitude to the constituent authorities for providing the funding that had been requested by the Panel.

The Lead Officer emphasised the importance of the funding from the constituent authorities as the funding from central government had been stagnant since 2012. She confirmed that a Panel Costs Report would continue to be brought to the Panel at intervals going forward.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for 10am on 27th June 2024 in Deane House, Taunton.