



Minutes of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel Tuesday 4th February 2025 at 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 Lisa Durston (Bristol City Council), Councillor Cara Lavan (Bristol City Council), Councillor Sibusiso Tshabalala (Bristol City Council), Richard Brown (Independent Member), Gary Davies (Independent Member), Julie Knight (Independent Member), Councillor Peter Crew (North Somerset Council), Councillor Brian Bolt (Somerset Council), Councillor Nicola Clark (Somerset Council), Councillor Heather Shearer (Somerset Council), 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
Scott Wooldridge	Head of Governance and Democratic Services

Police and Crime Commissioner and Support Staff:

Clare Moody	Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)
Sarah Crew	Chief Constable (CC)
Jon Reilly	Deputy Chief Constable (DCC)
Alice Ripley	Chief of Staff
Paul Butler	Chief Finance Officer (CFO)
Ben Valentine	Senior Performance and Governance Manager
Joanna Coulon	Scrutiny and Performance Manager
Neil Bennett	Director of Communications and Engagement
Niamh Byrne	Head of Communications and Engagement
Jason Sims	Staff Officer to the Chief Constable
Jo Hayward-Melen	Staff Officer to the Police and Crime Commissioner

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Stuart Davies.

2. Public Question Time

Three submissions were received in advance of the meeting and circulated to the Panel and PCC. A copy of these statements is attached as Appendix 1 to the minutes.

Claire Loneragan, Jodie Green and Charlotte Revely attended in person and addressed the Panel in turn with their statements and questions.

The PCC read out a prepared response to the questions and statements.

Ms Loneragan asked a supplementary question as to whether the Equality Analysis and the Data Protection Impact Assessment had already been conducted and whether the results could be published. The PCC agreed to supply a written answer to this question.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting on 10th December 2024

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record.

5. Matters Arising

The Chair thanked the OPCC for providing the Action Sheet resulting from the minutes of the previous meeting.

Referencing Action 1, the Chair emphasised the importance of consistency across the force area in terms of contact between the Neighbourhood Teams and the town and parish councils. The PCC agreed and assured the Panel that all five of the local authorities were included in the Neighbourhood Teams' communications.

6. Chair's Business

None.

7. Chief Constable's Presentation

The Chair invited Chief Constable Sarah Crew to give the presentation. The following is a summary of the key points made:

- The Chief Constable informed the Panel that she was in attendance to seek support from the Panel to increase the policing Precept by £14 for the average Band D property.
- In 2024, a new PCC was elected, and a new Police and Crime Plan was formed. The Chief Constable's letter to the PCC utilised a 'pain, pride, hope' framework which would also be used in her presentation.
- Pain:
 - Conversations with front-line police officers over the previous year had starkly highlighted the challenges they faced in striving to meet a complex range of public needs.
 - Over the previous decade, crime had risen by 54%. In 2024, there had been 170,000 crime reports, which was a 15.7% rise in victim-based crimes. These changes predominantly affected front-line officers at a time when the public expectation of the services provided by the police force continued to grow.
 - The number of crimes allocated per officer per year increased from 12.9 to 39.7 between 2014 and 2024.
 - The weight of digital data for each crime was also increasing, as was the complexity of crimes committed.
 - The force had made significant progress in responding to cases of rape and serious sexual offences. Reports of domestic abuse had increased by 149%, and domestic abuse comprised 20% of the crime workload.
 - Significant resources were required to respond to crimes effectively and efficiently.
 - It was expected that internet child abuse offenses would double in number in 2025 and continue to increase exponentially.
 - There had been a 500% rise in recorded knife crime offences over the previous decade, a significant increase in recorded hate crime, and in stalking and harassment cases.
 - Recorded retail crime had increased by 25% over the previous 12 months. The volume of positive outcome rates for shoplifting had also increased; however, it was challenging to keep on top of retail crime and the pressure it placed on the high street as it had a significant rate of reoffending; 25% of offenders committed 75% of the crime. Challenges in the Criminal Justice System meant

preventing reoffending was difficult, therefore the force was routinely arresting and charging persistent offenders.

- A significant element of policing was constant supervision, such as supervising an individual in a hospital setting or children in police protection. Supervision amounted to 82,000 working hours per year in 2024, which equated to 28 shifts per day.
- The front-line officers were struggling with the weight of the public demand, and the complexity and range of the services expected.
- Pride:
 - Over 300 police officers were deployed with short notice during the riots in Summer 2024. They disrupted clashes and prevented an attack on a hotel in Bristol which was housing asylum seekers. They worked 12-hour shifts to ensure there was a visible police presence in affected communities. There were 53 arrests, 50 charges, 41 convictions, and over 50 years' worth of custodial sentences issued.
 - The recent operational focus was on serious youth violence, particularly knife crime. Operation Hardy produced a 54% reduction in knife related street crime in 6 months and a 78% increase in arrests for possession of a bladed article.
 - Officers had conducted targeted intelligence-led operations which led to 15 arrests.
 - The Early Intervention Team had engaged with 60 children at risk, attended 85 child protection meetings, and identified 14 adult offenders. Their efforts were reducing harm and fostering safer futures.
 - Walk and Talk with female police officers was increasing the confidence of women amongst communities, with over 80 sessions in the past year.
 - Project Vigilant led to the training of 125 officers and staff in identifying sexual predatory behaviours, particularly in the nighttime economy.
 - The Nightlight team were recognised nationally for their work in identifying dangerous individuals who posed a risk to children and women involved in on-street sex work. In 2024, 16 vulnerable children had been safeguarded from sex work exploitation and 65 reports of dangerous individuals had been investigated.

- The Race Matters Independent Scrutiny and Advisory Board worked to hold the force accountable to the actions outlined in its anti-racism strategy. The force also worked with community stakeholders to improve the Stop and Search process.
 - Chance to Change, a deferred prosecution model, supported 18–24-year-olds to change their behaviour and prevent criminalisation.
 - There had been 2,500 arrests made for driving under the influence of drink or drugs and a 19% increase in reporting. In October, new unmarked road safety vans were launched. This was a data-led approach that tackled locations with repeat offenders of the ‘fatal five’.
 - Operation Harmony, Hold, and Habit had introduced 9,000 extra neighbourhood patrols since 2014 and addressed anti-social behaviour.
 - The force’s internal culture had also made important strides forward. A new sexual misconduct advocate service had resulted in 16 members of staff reporting concerns, and the feedback on the advocacy service had been positive.
 - The Right Care, Right Person scheme had resulted in a 32% reduction in concerns-for-safety call volumes, and a 39% reduction in concern-for-safety incidents attended by the police.
 - There was significant investment in 2024 to create modern and inclusive facilities for staff members.
 - In terms of rape and serious sexual offences, there were 249 charges in the previous 12 months, up from 142 in the previous year, equating to a 75% increase. Charges had quadrupled each year since 2021.
 - There had been a 11.7% increase in positive outcomes in charge volumes across all crimes. Avon and Somerset were amongst the top 10 forces nationally for responding to 999 calls within 10 seconds.
 - Recorded neighbourhood crime levels were now lower than pre-Covid levels.
- Hope:
 - The Enhanced Video Response (EVR) had transformed how the force responded to routine calls.

- The Digital Evidence Management System (DEMS) was welcomed by officers, who were heavily involved in the design.
 - The Digital Investigation Platform (SÖZE) compressed the analysis of digital material using Artificial Intelligence (AI), and it had the capacity to increase the speed, efficiency, and effectiveness of data analysis.
 - Project Bright Light brought academic insights into the issue of domestic abuse.
 - The force hosted Jess Phillips, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, who was impressed with Avon and Somerset's work.
 - The force was backing innovative ideas when it was in the public interest, against a backdrop of declining public confidence and increasing public demands on the force.
- The HMICFRS PEEL inspection was due to be published later in the week. There were key issues that needed to be addressed nationally, and it was expected that Avon and Somerset would share some of these issues. However, it was not expected that the force would require enhanced monitoring.
 - There were other challenges, such as the rise in internet child abuse cases, and the tracking and monitoring of over 1,700 registered sex offenders, which required the reassigning of front-line officers.
 - The domestic abuse disclosure service was seeing 200 enquiries every month. The increasing number of domestic abuse reports needed to be matched with an increase in resources.
 - The force continued to face challenges in both human and financial resources. The inequity in the funding formula meant the force would have £52 million more in its budget if it received the national average funding per head for police officers.
 - Over £100 million in savings had been made since 2010.
 - There had been a rapid expansion in the number of new police officers over the previous 5 years, but the abstractions to university impacted on the force's service capacity.
 - Inflationary pressures, government policies such as the XL bully dog ban, and mandatory schemes such as the electric vehicle fleet all added further financial pressures.
 - The reduction of 250 police staff posts had consequences.

- The number of police officers with little front-line experience was a challenge but posed an opportunity in the longer term; there was a highly motivated professional group of police officers coming through that had developed positive relations with the public they served.
- 1842 police officers had joined Avon and Somerset since 2019, now forming the majority of the police officer workforce.
- In March 2024, there were 253.4 FTE in neighbourhood policing roles. This had increased to 286.4 by December 2024.
- A new ring-fenced grant of £6.3 million covered the costs of the National Insurance increase effective from April 2025. A new ring-fenced grant of £4.6 million supported the government's neighbourhood policing guarantee. However, the core grant increase of 3.1% was less than the full year effect of September's pay award, and there was no grant funding for such inflationary pressures.
- There were also capital financial challenges; the government had removed all capital grant funding in 2019.
- The £14 Precept would generate £8.5 million in funding. It was highlighted that 68% of properties in the force area were in Council Tax bands A-C, therefore they would not be paying the full £14 extra.
- The increase in the Precept by £14 was necessary to secure funds for inflationary and pay cost increases. The Council tax contribution to police funding had been growing in proportion compared to core funding for a decade and this trend was forecast to continue.
- It was emphasised that, even with the maximum increase of £14, substantial savings of £6.4 million were still required to balance the budget, as inflationary pressures were still unaccounted for.
- The PCSO recruitment pause and the reduction in police staff investigators and other staff roles demonstrated the work already done to find savings.
- The organisation currently had a directorate model, but this was shifting towards a more geographically rooted model to assign decision-making and accountability to those working more closely with the public they served.
- The Chief Constable reiterated the request to increase the policing Precept by £14 for the average Band D property. She acknowledged the financial pressures on personal and public service budgets and assured the Panel that the funding entrusted to the police force would be utilised responsibly to serve the public when they needed it most.

The Chair thanked the Chief Constable for the presentation and invited comments and questions from the Panel Members. The following is a summary of the ensuing discussion:

- The Panel raised concerns that the levels of public confidence in the police shown in the survey mirrored the results of the previous survey, and questioned when these levels would see the anticipated increase. The Chief Constable advised that it was difficult to assign a timescale, but systemic changes were being made at pace, but with care. The force was working to improve its engagement and communications both internally and externally and would continue to be open and transparent to obtain better outcomes.
- With the demands on policing and the challenges presented by significant levels of overtime, the Panel asked how assured the Chief Constable was that staff members working remotely were working effectively. The Chief Constable advised that it was important to strike a balance, and that some roles were primarily office-based, some were well-suited to remote working, and many were a combination of both. Time would be a good indicator as to whether the current balance was optimal. The workload demand had meant that some 1-1 meetings were sacrificed, demonstrating the productivity of the workforce, but such meetings were good opportunities to monitor performance and deal with issues as they arose.
- The Panel praised the successes of Operations Soteria and Bluestone but emphasised that violence against women still accounted for 20% of all recorded crime, and that many incidents were not reported due to a lack of trust in the police, largely due to the misconduct of some police officers. The Panel questioned what was being done to address sexual misconduct within the force. The Chief Constable highlighted the role of Operation Bluestone in improving reporting rates of sexual abuse. She acknowledged the importance of tackling police perpetrator abuse, and advised the Panel that the force was investing in internal campaigns on misogyny, such as 'This Is Not Who We Are', and had introduced a sexual misconduct advocacy service. Steps were also being taken to change the language used around such issues to prevent victim-blaming internally.
- The Panel highlighted the rise in knife related crime, particularly in Bristol, and requested assurance that action was being taken to prevent further incidents. The Chief Constable emphasised the importance of early intervention work to protect those at risk. There were also a number of reduction initiatives, such as the introduction of bleed kits. Avon and Somerset's partners also played a vital role in supporting the force as it dealt with the enforcement side of the issue; the Violence Reduction Partnerships were key here. The Chief Constable referenced Operation Hardy and advised that no other major city had witnessed such a

reduction in levels of knife related street crime over such a short time period.

- The Panel raised concerns over the effectiveness of Avon and Somerset's communications with the public, citing the example of the report published a year after the Chief Constable declared the force to be institutionally racist, which received little media coverage and was not tailored to be accessible to the target audience. It was suggested that modern communication channels and platforms could be used to convey simpler, targeted messages. The Panel asked the Chief Constable how confident she was that the force's communication channels were as effective as possible. The Chief Constable advised the Panel that the Director of Communications, Neil Bennett, had 30 years of experience working at the BBC and was helping the force to move towards the use of more effective communication channels. The communications programme was focused on improving engagement with a wide range of communities. It was highlighted that longer communication pieces provided the opportunity for explanations behind actions taken and for questions to be asked. The Panel were informed that the Race Community Network met monthly, and the Independent Scrutiny and Advisory Board brought community stakeholders together. The force was also working with companies and social enterprises that had the expertise to utilise social media platforms to engage with targeted channels.
- It was emphasised that Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) were the public face of the force and helped to improve the visibility of the police. The Panel raised concerns about the public perception of the reduction in PCSO numbers and the simultaneous increase in the policing Precept. The Chief Constable acknowledged the importance of PCSOs to police visibility but advised that the reduction in PCSO numbers was required to balance the budget, and that the current reduced figure was on par with the national average. As police officer numbers were mandated and maintained by funding, their numbers could not be reduced. £100 million in savings had been made over the previous decade, therefore many other savings had been made before it was necessary to turn to staff salaries. It was emphasised that the reduction was achieved through natural attrition and not redundancies.
- The Panel referenced public concerns about an apparent lack of investigations into both low-level and serious crimes and the simultaneous limited visibility of the police. Higher police visibility could help deter low-level crimes and ensure more serious crimes were responded to quickly. The Chief Constable referenced the increasing number of recorded and allocated crimes for each police officer and advised that it was important to identify and allocate high-volume crimes that were more likely to be solved to tackle perpetrators. It was also important to build the investigative capacity of the inexperienced force.

- The Panel requested further information on the neighbourhood policing guarantee. The Chief Constable advised that this would likely be closer to £200 million, rather than the £100 million originally announced. This funding would be ringfenced for neighbourhood policing.
- The Panel praised the introduction of the internal sexual misconduct advocacy service but questioned the favourableness of the results so far given the size of the police force. The Panel asked whether the Chief Constable was satisfied with the progress made to tackle misogyny over the previous year. The Chief Constable advised the Panel that receiving 16 reports in 6 months through the advocacy service was a significant achievement. Only a proportion of incidents were reported, and this proportion was expected to increase as staff members felt more confident to report incidents. Vital to this was the work of Superintendent Sharon Baker in supporting victims to come forward. The Chief Constable was pleased with the changing internal attitudes towards misconduct and acknowledged its importance in improving public confidence in the police.
- The Panel requested that future presentations and financial reports also displayed the raw figures that reflected the percentages stated, to provide more clarity as to the significance of the changes taking place. The Chief Constable and CFO acknowledged the issue and thanked the Panel for this feedback.

8. Review of the Budget and Precept Proposal

The Chair invited Clare Moody as PCC to introduce the item.

The PCC thanked the Chief Constable for the presentation setting out the proposed increase in the Precept of £14 for a Band D property and informed the Panel that the CFO had been working with the Constabulary to review the budget.

The PCC invited Paul Butler as CFO to present the report. The following is a summary of the key points made:

- Avon and Somerset achieved the uplift target of 3,291 police officers, then received funding for a further 40, integrating them into the base maintenance figure to give 3,331 police officers. This represented a significant increase in officer numbers.
- The amendments included in Supplement 2 were partly due to the late submission of Council Tax surpluses and tax bases by the precepting authorities.
- In terms of the national context, central government published their Local Government financial policy for 2025/6 in November, which permitted PCCs to increase the Council Tax for an average Band D property by up

to £14. The government assumed that PCCs would make use of the full precept flexibility.

- The provisional police funding settlement for 2025/6 was published in December, which confirmed the maintenance of officer numbers. The Home Secretary emphasised the need to continue maximising the delivery of improvements in productivity and efficiencies to balance budgets.
- The overall funding package included a 6% average increase in funding, a 3.1% increase in the core grant (3.7% included elements of funding previously ringfenced).
- The precept proposal reflected the government assumption that the full precept flexibility would be taken, the letter from the Chief Constable to the Commissioner demonstrating the demands on policing against a low core grant increase, the need to improve performance in many key areas as outlined in the Police and Crime Plan, the views of the public, and the recognition of the shift of the balance of funding coming from Council Tax.
- The core grant increase was less than the full year effect of September's pay award, which meant the balance and other inflationary pressures needed to be funded by the precept.
- It was noted that 67.6% of properties in the force area were in Bands A-C.
- There was a deficit of £11,212,000 that needed to be addressed over the next 5 years.
- The budget assumed an inflationary pay increase of 2.8%, which mirrored central government's recommendations.
- The neighbourhood policing guarantee baseline figure was set as March 2025 rather than March 2024, which meant the savings made from reducing PCSO numbers were retained.
- The inexperienced workforce due to the recent high volume of recruitment had kept the cost of police officers down. As the workforce gained experience and progressed to higher pay scales, these costs would increase over the term of the MTFP.
- The budget included £2 million to fund overtime pressures, particularly from officer abstractions, over the course of the MTFP.
- Inflationary pressures meant national IT contracts mandated by central government were rising by 21%, and there was a 13.5% increase in the cost to the force for the use of the National Police Air Service in 2025/6.

An additional £600,000 was needed for kennelling costs by 2029/30 as banned dog breeds were detained due to government policy.

- The combined grant and precept funding for 2025/6 still necessitated a further £6.4 million in savings to deliver a balanced budget for the year. Maintaining a balanced budget over the course of the MTFP remained a significant challenge.
- Making savings also included investing in areas to improve performance and relieve cost pressures, such as the Enhanced Video Response (EVR), Digital Evidence Management System (DEMS), and Digital Investigation Platform (SÖZE).
- The Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme was a mandated project costing £6 million, as was the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure across the estate, which would cost £10.3 million. There was no guarantee that specific funding would be secured to support these projects.
- Positively, grant funding to mitigate National Insurance (NI) costs was being distributed based on headcount rather than funding formula, which was an indication that the government was listening to feedback from the police. The government had also requested tailored plans from each force relating to the neighbourhood policing guarantee rather than implementing an arbitrary universal baseline.
- The CFO was confident that next year's budget was balanced and sustainable, and that the force was going into the 5-year MTFP with a reasonable strategy to deliver balanced budgets going forward. However, there remained the issue of having increasing demands on policing whilst the proportion of funding coming from central government was reducing.

The Chair thanked the CFO for the presentation and invited comments and questions from the Panel Members. The following is a summary of the ensuing discussion:

- The Panel was pleased to hear that recruiting PCSOs had recommenced and expressed hope that vacancies due to PCSOs becoming police officers would be backfilled.
- Considering the staff losses, the Panel highlighted the OPCC budget and questioned the planned recruitment of a full-time Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, as the role had been vacant for many months and previous DPCCs had been part-time only. The PCC advised the Panel that her public-facing role required support to carry out its governance and scrutiny functions and other responsibilities and to provide visibility and accountability in Avon and Somerset.

- The Panel highlighted that the last meeting of the South Gloucestershire Safer and Stronger Communities Strategic Partnership was held in September 2024, and that the next meeting was scheduled for March 2025. The Panel questioned the effectiveness of the partnership model considering the infrequency of the meetings. The PCC advised the Panel that the Violence Reduction Partnership's hub and spoke model provided it with valuable links with the communities and partners that were integral to the effectiveness of its operations. The PCC acknowledged that prevention was vital and informed the Panel that good progress was being made in South Gloucester by the early intervention team to respond to the issue of knife crime.
- The Panel referred to the recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of Somerset's multi-agency response to serious youth violence, which criticised some aspects of the partnership arrangements in place, particularly the sharing of intelligence and information. The Panel queried what was being done to change the partnership arrangements in Somerset to protect the most vulnerable. The PCC informed the Panel that she attended meetings on this subject most weeks, and that she was a member of the Home Office's knife-enabled robbery taskforce. She advised the Panel that the issue of data sharing was a national issue but acknowledged that it must be resolved. The Chief Constable added that safeguarding added complexities to the partnership environment. The Chief Constable met with the CEOs of the Integrated Care Boards to review the accountability arrangements. It was evident that a clearer intelligence picture was required to track the movements of trafficked individuals across the force area. Avon and Somerset had offered to lead on the issue of data sharing and skills analysis. The Chief Constable informed the Panel that savings had been made to allow for the appointment of a designated Chief Superintendent to focus on safeguarding in partnerships and to ensure that the partnerships were working together effectively.
- The Panel highlighted that the bulk of the savings were coming from staff salaries and queried whether there were alternative areas that could offer significant savings. There were examples of areas, such as Black Rock Quarry Firearms Training Centre, that were difficult to recruit to. The Chief Constable advised the Panel that Black Rock Quarry was a partnership centre between Avon and Somerset, Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire, and that the latter two were required to provide an allocation of trainers, but the travelling involved meant recruitment from these force areas was a challenge. Avon and Somerset had therefore had to provide extra trainers, demonstrating a possible weakness in the model used. The Panel were informed that £100 million in savings had been made over the previous decade, therefore there were few areas left untouched. However, innovations such as robotic functions had provided savings equating to 80 police officer posts. The use of AI to process digital information was also promising.

- In terms of vacancies, the Panel questioned what the equality impact assessment meant in terms of local policing and the communities it served and asked how many police officer vacancies there were. The Chief Constable advised the Panel that the equalities impact assessment was monitored but that vacancies were largely created by natural attrition.
- The Panel asked whether the force was investing in rehabilitation into the force to reduce reoffending. The Chief Constable advised the Panel that the force was a leader in integrated offender management when it was first introduced. There were now conversations around whether commissioning could be geared to encourage partners to contribute to the rehabilitation of offenders. However, the strengthening of the vetting process to enter the police force had presented challenges to rehabilitation within the force itself.
- The Panel asked how the Safer Streets mission was built into the work of the Constabulary. The Chief Constable advised the Panel that this fell under the work of the neighbourhood policing guarantee and assured the Panel that the Constabulary was committed to its delivery. Also important was the aim of halving incidents of male violence against women and girls over the next ten years. Nationally, Avon and Somerset were leading in this area. Incidents were hugely underreported, which presented a challenge, but the work focusing on perpetrators and domestic abuse would have a significant effect.
- The Panel highlighted the projected exponential growth of incidents of internet child abuse and queried whether the current methods of dealing with cybercrime were applicable to help prevent this. The Chief Constable advised the Panel that the growth was largely a function of the accessibility of the images, and that the force was now receiving 40 referrals per month from the National Crime Agency; this number was projected to increase to 100 per month by 2026. This presented a huge societal problem for the Criminal Justice System, community safety, and safeguarding. The cases were challenging to solve therefore specialist investigators were required to assist.
- The Panel raised concerns about the sample size used for the police funding survey, as it represented a very small proportion of the number of residents in the force area. The PCC advised the Panel that a wide range of consultation methods had been used in addition to collecting raw data, such as the focus groups and forums used during the consultation phase of the Police and Crime Plan. The PCC reiterated her commitment to ensuring that communities across the force area had the opportunity to respond and provide feedback.
- The Panel questioned the communications with the public regarding the reducing proportion of funding from central government and the increasing proportion of funding that was therefore required from Council

Tax, emphasising the importance of ensuring the public were aware of this situation. The Chief Constable acknowledged the significance of this issue and the importance of ensuring the public understood the reasons behind the choices made by the police force. Maintaining openness and transparency in communications was vital to this. The PCC emphasised the significant difference that a fairer funding formula would make to Avon and Somerset and how stimulating conversations around this could have positive consequences.

- The Panel asked how the force was using communications to provide a wider context to the work undertaken by the police outside of Bristol. The Chief Constable assured the Panel that the force placed great importance on policing in all urban and rural areas across the force area and highlighted the communications around Operation Harmony as an example of this. The Panel were informed that the force's operating structure would soon move to a more geographic structure, which would help provide a platform for clearer communications and a sense of accountability for the local commanders. The PCC added that the ringfenced funding for neighbourhood policing would help to strengthen the Neighbourhood Teams and improve communication with local communities.

The Panel reflected on the proposal that had been presented. Following discussion, and on being put to a vote, the Panel unanimously **RESOLVED** to endorse the PCC's proposal to increase the Policing Precept by £14 per annum in 2025/26 for an average Band D equivalent dwelling (14 Members present voting in favour).

The Chair advised the PCC that the Panel's report would contain a number of recommendations for her attention which would reflect members' considerations.

The PCC thanked the Panel, acknowledging that the contingencies aligned with the plan and strategy for Avon and Somerset going forward.

The Chair offered the Panel's support to Avon and Somerset in their endeavour to secure fairer funding from central government. The Chair also invited the Chief Constable to attend the Panel's meeting in six months' time, to update on progress/performance against her objectives for the constabulary. This was agreed.

9. Commissioner's Update Report

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

10. Standing Complaints Report

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

11. Work Programme

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

12. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for 10:30am on 25th March 2025 at County Hall, Taunton.