



# Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel

Hosted by Somerset County Council Democratic Services



## Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel

4<sup>th</sup> February 2020

### **Present:**

#### **Local Authority and Independent Member Representatives:**

Peter Abraham (Bristol City Council), Richard Brown (Chair/Independent Member), Asher Craig (Bristol City Council), Janet Keen (Sedgemoor District Council), Joseph Mullis (Independent Member), Franklin Owusu-Antwi (South Gloucestershire Council), Alastair Singleton (Bath and North East Somerset), Pat Trull (South Gloucestershire Council), Andy Wait (Bath and North East Somerset Council), Richard Westwood (North Somerset Council),

### **Observer:**

Virginia Golf (OPCC)

### **Host Authority Support Staff**

Jamie Jackson – Scrutiny Manager

Patricia Jones – Lead Officer

### **Police and Crime Commissioner and Support Staff:**

Sue Mountstevens - Police and Crime Commissioner

Andy Marsh – Chief Constable Avon and Somerset Constabulary

Mark Simmonds – Interim Chief Executive Officer

Nick Adams – Interim 151 Officer

Joanna Coulon - Criminal Justice and Commissioning Officer

Inspector Deepak Ninth – Staff Officer to the Chief Constable

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Andrew Sharman (Independent Member), Heather Shearer (Mendip District Council), Josh Williams (Somerset County Council) and Roz Willis (North Somerset Council).

### **2. Public Question Time**

The Panel heard from members of the public concerning allegations of criminality involving Lloyds Banking Group. All statements and questions received were circulated in advance of the meeting

and noted by the Panel. Responses to questions for the Police and Crime Commissioner would be copied to the Panel for information.

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

None.

### **4. Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December**

To be submitted to the 11th March 2020 meeting.

### **5. Chairs Business**

None.

### **6. Chief Constable's Report to the Panel**

The Panel heard a brief statement from the Chief Constable and noted his commitment to investigating allegations of fraud and related crime in Avon and Somerset.

The Panel then received a detailed presentation from the Chief Constable. In summary this covered:-

- Resetting the Constabulary's Identity
- Policing Pressures
- Operation Remedy (Burglary, Knife Crime and Drugs)
- Serious Violence
- Recruitment Programme and benefits to Avon and Somerset
- Finance and Resources
- Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and Tackling Under-Representation
- People Survey
- Increased use of Tasers
- IT Mobilisation and Expenditure
- Automation – Desktop, Business Processes, Automatic and Cognitive

Below is a summary of the discussion that followed:-

- Councillor Craig thanked the Chief Constable for his progressive approach to providing outstanding policing and efforts to instil caring and inclusive values in staff to drive a positive direction of travel. It was reported that BCC had replicated the Constabulary's cultural competency training to enable staff to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across all cultures.
- Councillor Booth commended the hard work undertaken by the Constabulary and reported general improvements in relationships with officers in his local area. The Chief Constable was also invited to comment further on the value created by the robotic automation of Policing. The Panel heard that automation would be a consistent feature going forward, taking away the repetitive tasks that add little business value and enabling officers and support staff to focus on

making a real difference to organisational efficiency and quality of service delivery. It was noted that 66 processes had been identified as suitable for replacement with automation technology.

- Councillor Wale asked if approval of the proposed Precept would lead to more visible Policing. The Chief Constable stated that it was important for tax payers to see a difference, however there would not be an overnight revolution in terms of recruitment and a decision was yet to be taken on the allocation of additional officers. The point was made that the additional funding would allow the Constabulary to build on Operation Remedy and maintain PCSO numbers. The recruitment of Investigators would reduce the existing deficit in teams and release officers to the front line. It was emphasised that approval would make the difference between moving to outstanding in 12 months or 3 years.
- Councillor Wait stated that the positive outcome rate in relation to Residential Burglary remained very low at 6.4%. It was also put to the Chief Constable that the figures suggested Operation Remedy was yet to have a positive impact on drug trafficking and knife crime offences. It was reported that the most up to date figure for Burglary was 6.9% and the Constabulary remained in the top quartile. However, there was mutual recognition by the Chief Constable and the Commissioner that Burglary detection rates were unacceptable and should be well in excess of 10%.

To combat knife crime and drug trafficking, it was reported that increasing focus was being placed on enforcement and prevention activity. Projects and interventions in schools also had the ability to reach vulnerable young people frequently targeted by organised crime groups.

The Panel was advised there was lots of evidence to suggest that Operation Remedy was delivering outcomes.

- In the context of a 6% burglary detection rate, the Chair asked what had happened to Linked Crime Units and how/if Burglaries were being linked to common themes. It was confirmed that all officers followed the same structural model/methodology to map organised crime groups. County Lines amounted to a vast business enterprise and the mobile telephone span was indicative of the extent of the problem. In the case of Bijan Ebrahimi, the pressures of policing at that time meant the available data was not utilised to make the obvious links. A visual predictive system was now in place to identify high risk people.

Beat managers were also involved in managing dangerous offenders in their areas. The need to work smarter and empower staff with the right information was emphasised. A massive disparity existed in the use of Body Worn Video (BWV) and officers were being routinely admonished if they were not switched on for stop and search and domestic violence incidents. The Panel was assured that the Constabulary's assets and capabilities were being applied to key challenges.

- Councillor Shah reported that community representatives in Bristol were grateful for the Chief Constable's leadership, commitment and local engagement. Referencing the Metropolitan Police's use of live facial recognition technology to tackle serious crime, the Chief Constable was asked who was policing the Police in the use of algorithms. The Chief Constable drew attention to the ethical issues associated with facial technology and reported that this was not a game changing technology in his view at this point in time.

The Chief Constable was also invited to comment on reports of increased hate crime emerging from the spread of the Corona virus. It was reported that all Chief Constables were involved in a weekly conference call linked to the Government's Cobra briefings and local emergency planning

was being led by Assistant Chief Constable Nikki Watson. The Constabulary was reaching out to communities to provide reassurance, however it was emphasised that the level of hate crime directed at the Chinese community needed to be acknowledged and addressed.

- The Chief Constable was asked to comment on recent media reports highlighting the prospect of cost savings of 5% across all Government departments. He stated that he was satisfied that the Constabulary knew how to identify savings. The Commissioner added that the MTFP had accounted for £5.5m in savings.
- Councillor Wale asked if the use of BWV had had a positive effect on the number of complaints against Police officers. The Chief Constable informed the Panel that he was the national lead for this work area and had worked hard to establish an evidence base of what worked and what did not. Research in this area indicated that its use did change the behaviour of the public and the officer for the better and anecdotally gave officers more confidence to make stops.

## **7. Scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial plan and Scrutiny Proposal**

The challenge presented by timings due to the General Election and the delay in Government announcements on departmental grant settlements was acknowledged.

The Commissioner introduced the report and explained the rationale for her proposal to increase the Council Tax Precept by an average of £10.00 per annum for the period 20/21.

The Panel noted that this would generate £6.1m in new funds in 2020/21 subject to a confirmed 1.04% tax base increase, and collection fund surplus of £235k.

With the support of additional Precept funding, the Commissioner informed the Panel that 75 new Police staff investigator posts would be created. The Panel was advised that this would reduce pressure in the Force Investigations Department and bring much needed improvements in case preparation for court. The resulting positive impact on conviction rates and public confidence in the court system was emphasised. Significantly, the Panel heard that that the investment would also release officer capacity to frontline operations to build on Operation Remedy and tackle serious violence and knife crime in communities.

The Commissioner advised the Panel that the additional Precept would also provide an active community-based presence by maintaining the 15 PCSO posts currently attached to schools in the force area. Evidence suggested that this type of dedicated local Policing had the ability to strengthen relationships with the public and reduce levels of youth crime and serious violence.

The Panel was further advised that consultation with the Public and results of surveys undertaken across the year demonstrated continued support for the increase in addition to central funding from the Government.

Before the formal presentation of the report by Nick Adams (Interim 151 Officer), Panel Members expressed the following concerns to the Commissioner:-

- An increased council tax burden would inevitably contribute to the financial pressures experienced by members of the public and the survey results appeared “too comfortable”. It was suggested that many people lacked confidence in the Police and an increase was unlikely to be well-received.

- Significant increases had been proposed and supported by the Panel in 2018/19 (£12.00) and 2019/20 (£24.00). Notwithstanding these increases and the additional central funding from the Government this year, the Panel was being asked to approve a further increase which amounted to £46.00 over four years. It was felt that communities were being asked to step up again for the reduced funding applied by the Government in recent years. It was suggested an increase of £7.00 or £5.00 was a more appropriate proposal in the circumstances.

The Commissioner stated she fully acknowledged the increase was a big ask and confirmed that the Government had assumed a £10 increase in the funding figures presented. It was her view that an increase and resulting benefits would serve to increase public confidence.

Mark Simmonds stated that the 2,500 people surveyed as part of the consultation exercise was not an insubstantial figure and a proportionate amount of time had to be spent on the telephone survey. It was acknowledged that some people were harder to reach than others. It was confirmed that telephone survey participants were selected at random, and included both landline and mobile users.

A brief discussion regarding the current funding formula and its detrimental effect on Avon and Somerset followed.

Nick Adams, Interim 151 Officer, provided an overview of the key assumptions made in the MTFP presented to the Panel. Below is a summary of the key points made:-

- There would be an increase of £12.2m in the main grant funding (7.5%) rising to £43.6m (26.8%) by 2024/25.
- An increase of £10.00 this year (4.5%) and an assumed 1.99% increase thereafter would generate £25.7m in Precept funding by 2024/25.
- The introduction of a new ringfenced grant for the recruitment of Police officers amounted to 137 officers for Avon and Somerset by March 2021. The plan supported the delivery of extra officers locally bringing numbers to 165 by March 2021 and 403 by 2023. It was noted that recruitment targets must be delivered in order to fully claim the additional grant retrospectively.
- Notwithstanding the significant uplift in revenue, capital funding was under pressure at £0.27m in the 202/21 funding settlement. This represented a reduction of 75%. Key assumptions therefore included borrowing and direct revenue funding of £7m in order to continue with capital investments.
- Annual increases to pay costs of 3% per annum reflected the relaxation of the restrictions placed on pay increases for Police officers and staff after several years of freezes
- The cost of pensions reflected the confirmed increases to staff pensions effective from April 2020 with provision for further upward pressure in these costs in future years
- In addition to the specific investments brought by the rise as outlined by the Commissioner, further investments/growth included:-
  - Custody function challenges;
  - Data Science innovation centre/analytics;
  - Outreach support;
  - Robotics; and
  - Tasers.

- Provision had been made within the capital plan for a new response hub and Police station at Shepton Mallet and a range of refurbishments were planned/ongoing
- The capital plan was funded up until 2023/24 when a deficit would occur. The implementation costs of the Emergency Services Network (ESN) programme needed to implement this national airwave replacement programme were high.
- The plan was not without its risk and had not assumed any change in the funding formula. Attention was drawn to the risks set out in the report and plans for mitigation. Reserves would increase in the short term only but decrease as capital planning was implemented.
- Grant wise, the picture was positive for Policing but remained 15% below its cash value in 2010. The expectation of Police Forces was that the shortfall would be made up through a rise in council tax.

Below is a summary of the questions raised by Panel Members and the responses of the OPCC:-

- It was confirmed there was no formal regulation level for reserves. The duties of the 151 Officer and external auditors in this context were explained. The expectation was that between 3%-5% of the revenue budget would be held in reserve and the plan would take reserves to 2.9%.
- The Panel sought clarification of the drag effect on the plan if a Precept increase of £10.00 was not applied. It was confirmed that this would mean the planned investment in PCSO's and Police Staff investigators would be scaled back. The Chief Constable added that without an increase any improvements would be very slow and unnoticeable and emphasised that this was an opportunity for change and for the Public to see a difference. Attention was drawn to the pressure being experienced in the Control Room earlier this morning with 500 reports waiting for allocation. He drew attention to the terrorist attack on Sunday and the significant costs attached to the subsequent review of offenders released in the Avon and Somerset area. He emphasised that a huge engine of general demand existed in the background to Policing which went relatively unseen.
- It was suggested that a recent article indicated that Avon and Somerset Constabulary was likely to receive an increase in grant funding as a result of a review of the funding formula. The Panel was advised that there was no guarantee of a review and there were still savings to be made and a deficit capital programme to address.
- Future deficits predicted included the annual increases to pay costs and the increases in the cost of pensions in staff and officer pension schemes
- There was discussion around the seemingly high interest rate on borrowing. It was clarified that 4.1% was the average rate across all loans - distorted by historic longer-term loans. An interest rate of 2% on new borrowing was possible taken over a shorter time frame but this would create re-financing risks in the portfolio over the long-term. A rate of 3% on loans today should be assumed.
- The Mini Police project was described as successful and a worthwhile investment. A new generation of people were targeted and often in less prosperous communities.
- The new Neighbourhood Policing model had been relaunched in October 2018 and a PCSO attached to every school. Funding for Neighbourhood Policing had been ringfenced and approval of the Precept proposal would ensure that the 15 PCSO posts would be similarly ringfenced.

*There was an adjournment and the Commissioner, Chief Constable and OPCC staff withdrew from the room.*

Following discussion and on being put to the vote, the Panel RESOLVED to approve the Commissioner's proposal to increase the Policing Precept by £10.00 per annum in 2020/21 for an average Band D property (11 members voting in favour and 1 abstention).

The Commissioner and her staff were notified of the outcome of the Panel's deliberations. The first point made by the Chair was that the organisation was in receipt of a sizeable grant settlement this year. The Panel was therefore tasked with reconciling the effect of the increase upon the most vulnerable in communities against the increasingly complex demands of modern Policing. The Chair indicated that the Panel was looking to establish some certainty around the financial plan and scenarios presented to the Panel and would hold the Commissioner to account on the assurances and benefits that would be delivered if the Precept was approved. This included proper performance information that would provide something of measurable value to demonstrate how effectively the organisation was achieving its objectives.

The Commissioner committed to a conversation with the next Police and Crime Commissioner around performance information.

#### **8. Commissioner's Update report**

The Commissioner reported that Government funding of Violence Reduction Units (VRU) would continue with a further £35million agreed for 2020/2021. Avon and Somerset would receive an amount of £1,160,000 and the OPCC would work closely with VRU leads and wider partners to coordinate the application process and performance data required.

#### **9. Police and Crime Performance report – Quarter 3**

The Panel noted the latest performance report with related data which had been developed to enable the Panel to carry out its oversight of performance against the Police and Crime Plan.

#### **10. Work Programme Report**

The Panel noted the items scheduled for submission to the next meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

#### **11. Standing Complaints Report**

The Panel considered and noted a report of the Chief Executive (OPCC) providing oversight of all complaints made against the Commissioner.

#### **14. Date of next Meeting**

- 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 at The Deane House, Somerset West and Taunton Council  
(John Meikle Room)

(The meeting ended at 2.10pm)

Chair