



# Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel

Hosted by Somerset County Council Democratic Services



## Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel

4th February 2021 (10:30) ('Remote' meeting held under the provisions of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020

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### **Present:**

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

Chris Booth (Somerset West and Taunton Council), Asher Craig (Bristol City Council), Janet Keen (Sedgemoor District Council), Franklin Owusu-Antwi (South Gloucestershire Council), Afzal Shah (Bristol City Council), Heather Shearer (Mendip Council), Alastair Singleton (Bath and North East Somerset), Pat Trull (South Gloucestershire Council), Andy Wait (Bath and North East Somerset Council), Martin Wale (South Somerset Council), Richard Westwood (North Somerset Council), Josh Williams (Somerset County Council) Roz Willis (North Somerset Council)

#### **Host Authority Support Staff:**

Patricia Jones – Lead Officer/Governance Specialist  
Jamie Jackson - Strategic Manager, Democratic Services  
Andrew Randell - Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

Sue Mountstevens - Police and Crime Commissioner  
Andy Marsh - Chief Constable ASC  
Mark Simmonds - OPCC Interim Chief Executive Officer  
Paul Butler – Interim Chief Finance Officer  
Ben Valentine – OPCC Performance Officer

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

Apologies was received from Richard Brown (Chair) and Councillor Peter Abraham. The Vice-Chair took the Chair for the purposes of this meeting.

## **2. Public Question Time**

The Panel heard from Andrew Pope who read out his statement (circulated in advance of the meeting). The Panel was urged to refuse the Precept increase and to consider if the survey was representative of the population of Somerset.

## **3. Declarations of Interest**

There were no additional declarations of interest.

## **4. Minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

The minutes of 8<sup>th</sup> December were approved as a correct record.

## **5. Chairs Business**

The Chair made reference to Richard Brown and passed on good wishes on behalf of the Panel following his apologies sent in advance from the meeting. There was no further business to report.

## **6. Chief Constable Presentation**

The Police and Crime Commissioner introduced and presented an update in relation to funding. There was no increase for inflation from central government funding, responses to a survey showed 66% were in favour of some level of increase, 29.5% wanted no increase.

Savings of £7million were considered deliverable and had been included in the budget. Progress had been made with services and outcomes and improvements in public confidence. 69 additional officers would be recruited as a result of the increase.

Offender management teams would be put into each local authority to tackle persistent offenders as well as being more proactive and targeting levels of concern set out by members of the public. Replacement of Police radios and other IT systems were planned.

Increase of unemployment, homelessness, poverty and adverse impact of mental health due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant that a strong and resilient police service was needed.

Andy Marsh intended to show a video from his 2021 roadshow but IT challenges meant this could not be shown at the meeting. He urged members to attend the Roadshow on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

The Panel received a verbal presentation in support of the budget making the following points:

Details and responses of breaches attended during lockdown were set out. A fixed penalty notice was issued to one in four incidents attended during this third lockdown. 765 had been issued in Somerset.

The Constabulary needed to be people focused, inclusive, dynamic and empowered. The staff survey conducted in September had a 60% response rate; the highest to date. The results showed increasing values in the 3-year profile of growing the Constabulary's four values. Changes in BAME employees across the organisation was set out.

The growth to achieve 20,000 officers could not continue until the precept was agreed. The Police and Crime Plan 20/21 was set out alongside the National Policing outcomes. Driving performance through data remained the ambition for the force. The supervisor app could assess investigation numbers and set out the breakdown of crimes. High workloads were experienced in the investigations department.

Op Remedy crime satisfaction levels set out, 15 PCSOs focused on Schools and intervening with a new offering to schools to help children at risk. Police staff investigators had dealt with 75% of those arrested, which assisted special investigation officers and response officers.

The call rate for answering 999 calls continues to improve, increasing from 78% in 2015 to 98% in 2020 for calls answered within in a certain time. The Control Room is nationally-recognised.

The community would see and feel a difference as a result of the investment.

100 officers would focus on serious sexual offences and it was acknowledged this area needed a greater focus. Results in this area had suffered the most as a result of austerity.

Policing operating model: Continue operation remedy and proactively support this and have a footprint in every local authority area and deal with offender management.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised: -

- The Chief Constable commended what had been achieved over the last few years. The increase in precept from last year was questioned, with clarity requested on where the funding had been used. It was acknowledged there would have been an underspend; it was not clearly understood where the remaining recruitment funding had been spent.
- 80 out of the planned 100 officers had been recruited.
- The underspends were set out in respect of slower recruitment and there had been increased costs - in some cases a reduction in income as a result as of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Approach to recruitment was aggressive to meet government targets of the growth of 550 police officers.
- It was questioned if there was room to reallocate spending where there were Covid related underspends. Town Councils had chosen not to increase the precept and

deployed reserves within a budget. It was questioned if there was any possibility in using reserves rather than asking for a considerable increase in the precept.

- Reserves increased next year but there was the anticipation to draw down on this in future years.
- The Panel commended the work around operation remedy and the response in relation to major incidents throughout the pandemic including protests.
- Burglary detection rates had doubled to 8%. It was acknowledged that there was more to be done around targeting this and persistent offenders of this crime.
- The positive impact of operation remedy had been seen in some areas more than others, there were quantitative outcomes to evidence this.
- The Panel also asked about the disparity between the qualitative and quantitative results on the effectiveness of Operation Remedy.
- Rural and agricultural crime was questioned, and a detailed report was requested at a future meeting. This was agreed.
- Bodycam footage had been released around rural crimes and had been useful in investigating.
- Covid-19 restrictions breaches had replaced a lot of traditional crime.
- The increase of the precept was needed to continue improvement and deliver services to members of the public.
- Digital enablement and Cloud intelligence enabled a more effective use of time where processes could be automated.
- There was a commitment to ensure the force was at the cutting edge of user technology.
- Public perception and officers tackling crime was important in sharing stories and the difference it makes to the lives of members of the public.
- A visibility heat map was part of the new technology rollout which had led to more time spend in the public and outside the station.
- Ethical use of data to protect the public continued to be a main drive, reducing the carbon footprint was a recognised ambition.
- When faced with a financial challenge the motivation to be creative remained a focus, to reallocate or free up resources. Where possible reserves were used, but these could not be used to fund ongoing costs.
- Pressure was put on local taxpayers as a result of decisions around funding from central government. The police recognised the need to be agile in respect of funding.
- The uses of proceeds of crime were questioned and if this was invested in the force. CPS, Courts and a central pot received some of the proceeds of crime, it was estimated the force received around 20% of the recovered sums. Stolen property recovery and sales from this is reinvested in supporting charity initiatives across the force area. Funding had been provided to school with the provision of laptops during the course of the pandemic.
- Covid-19 funding was largely directed towards local authorities alongside the proceeds from fines.

**RESOLVED** that the update be noted

## 7. Formal Review of the Budget and Precept Proposal

Paul Butler introduced the report.

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) set out the financial plans for both revenue and capital budgets over the next five years. It had been prepared:-

- Following discussions and consultation with budget holders, there remained some ambiguity around the correct accounting treatment for some of the one-off council tax grants expected to be received in 21/22 and therefore the final budget requirement could be subject to some changes as greater clarity is achieved.
- In conjunction with service and workforce planning; and
- Through ongoing conversations between the PCC and the Chief Constable. This paper reflected the draft police and local government settlement detail (which were subject to ongoing consultation but not expected to materially change) and the council tax position supplied by our local billing authorities which in some cases remained subject to final confirmation.

The final plan reflected an increase in council tax of £15 in 2021/22, representing the maximum increase permitted without incurring the cost and risk of a local referendum. The decision to increase the precept by £15 was reflective of:-

- The need to provide additional funding of £1.2m in 21/22 on top of the extra grant funding (+£9.4m) provided in order to support the plans to deliver the uplift in officer numbers that achieve the government's target by March 2023;
- The opportunity to recruit beyond the national target with a plan which will realise a forecast of 3,221 officers, 115 more than national target, by the end of the 2021/22 financial year, rather than slow down these plans in line with lower than expected national targets;
- The views of the public, as expressed through a range of ongoing public engagement activity. Returns from the online and telephone surveys indicated that a majority of respondents supported an increase, but with a significant minority wanting a freeze. A detailed analysis of opinion, including from the postal survey was provided to the Panel in an additional paper; and the views of the Chief Constable, who expressed his opinion in writing to the PCC.
- In reaching the conclusion to increase the precept by the maximum amount permissible and thereby to deliver the revenue plans set out, alternative options were considered, with the main alternative scenario being an increase of 5% (+£11.39 for an average band d property).
- The difference for an average band d household between the two scenarios is £3.61 p.a. or £0.30p per month;
- A 5% precept increase would initially generate £2.1m less in funding in 21/22 compared to the maximum increase, rising to a difference to £2.3m by 25/26 as a consequence of future increases being against a lower starting point;

- At a 5% increase we would be unable to maintain our current officer recruitment momentum and would need to slow down our recruitment plans, targeting a forecast of 3,152 officers which would be 69 fewer officers than a £15 increase would support;
- The maximum council tax increase would offer some additional security when entering into the uncertainty of a new spending review where difficult decisions will be needed to reset public finances following the consequences of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. From 2021/22 onwards plans were to assume annual increases of 1.99% p.a. The impact on the average band d policing precept over the course of the MTFP period was set out.
- The MTFP considered in December had been updated with the latest information Grants with combined value of £2.6million had been received.
- The uplift in precept was requested to allow continuing focus in capacity in flagship initiatives.
- It was considered where would the savings and cuts would be made if the funding was not increased. Reserves allocated to Hinkley Point were questioned.
- Areas that savings could be made had been looked at, these were initiatives which had been extended and maintained over the last financial year which relied on additional funding, there was a limit to the amount of savings that could be made without impacting officer numbers.
- £7.3million savings had been found from the 21/22 budget. There was a further target to generate another £10million in future savings.
- The growth in officer numbers couldn't be protected and sustained without agreement with the precept increase.
- The VRU funding announcement was anticipated imminently.
- There would be a new Police and Crime plan next year with the new Police and Crime Commissioner which would set out new targets and ambitions.
- The online survey delivery method was set out alongside the police and crime telephone survey.
- Clarification was provided that it was not feasible to restrict the increase to a level similar to the previous financial year.
- The proposal to the panel was set out and the panel had the ability to veto with officers able to return with a revised proposal. The panel considerations were determined as constrained by the process which was a binary choice of approving the recommendations or vetoing them.
- Work with the Communications team and the lead time from the central funding figure was a short turnaround time.
- Concerns were expressed in relation to an underspend in the planned recruitment of 100 new officers following the previous precept increase. It was queried if the funding had been used for alternative purposes with the slowing of the planned recruitment. The allocation of the underspend was not clarified but formed part of the overall financial performance. The Chief Constable reassured the Panel that the outturn of the organisation was monitored closely.

- Concerns were expressed in relation to resourcing around sexual assaults if the precept was not supported.
- Panel members expressed concern about their role in supporting members of the public who were already impacted economically, many of whom were struggling financially as a result of the pandemic.
- The Panel's Precept report to the Commissioner was required by 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021 in the event of a veto. A two thirds majority was required to carry a veto.
- In the event of a veto, the Panel noted that the following process was required :-

The Commissioner must respond to the Panel and publish her response, including the revised precept, by 15 February

The Panel must review the revised precept and make a second report to the Commissioner by 22 February

The Commissioner must have regard to and respond to the Panel's second report and publish her response by 1 March.

The Commissioner, Chief Constable and OPCC staff briefly withdrew from the meeting and rejoined the meeting for the Panel's decision.

Following discussion and on being put to the vote, the Panel **RESOLVED** to veto the Commissioner's proposal to increase the Policing Precept by £15.00 per annum in 2021/22 for an average Band D property (11 members voting in favour and 1 abstention)

(Councillor Williams left the meeting before the vote at 11.33am)

Following further discussion, the Panel **RESOLVED** to defer consideration of the remaining agenda items until the next meeting.

## 8. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled for 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021 at 10.30am

(The meeting ended at 13.37)

Chair