



Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel

Hosted by Somerset County Council Democratic Services



Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel 22nd September 2021 Confirmatory Hearing - Chief of Staff

Present:

Local Authority and Independent Member Representatives:

Heather Shearer (Mendip Council, Chair) Richard Westwood (North Somerset Council, Vice Chair), Chris Booth (Somerset West and Taunton), Richard Brown (Independent Member), Nicola Clark (South Somerset District Council), Peter Crew (North Somerset Council), Jonathan Hucker (Bristol City Council), Janet Keen (Sedgemoor District Council), Julie Knight (Independent Member), Lisa Stone (Bristol City Council), Pat Trull (South Gloucestershire Council), Andy Wait (Bath and North East Somerset Council).

Host Authority Support Staff

Patricia Jones – Lead Officer

Pippa Triffitt – Panel Administrative Support

Police and Crime Commissioner and Support Staff:

Mark Shelford - Police and Crime Commissioner

Alice Ripley – PCC candidate for the position of Chief of Staff

1. Apologies for absence

Alastair Singleton (Bath and North East Somerset), Franklin Owusu-Antwi (South Gloucestershire), Gary Davies (Independent Member) Asher Craig (Bristol City Council), Josh Williams (Somerset County).

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Confirmatory Hearing – Chief of Staff

The Chair outlined the Panel's responsibilities to review Senior Staff Appointments in accordance with Schedule 1 Part 10 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. At the request of the Chair, the Commissioner provided an overview of the recruitment process and following was noted:-

- a rigorous and transparent appointments process had taken place, managed by an independent recruitment consultant.
- members of the Police and Crime Panel (Councillor Clark and Councillor Booth) participated as observers to provide extra assurance and feedback on the candidates.
- four candidates proceeded to the interview stage. Three candidates were interviewed following the withdrawal of one candidate.

The Commissioner advised the Panel that the candidates demonstrated aptitude and skills in a range of areas. However, Alice Ripley (AR) was the strongest candidate and the Commissioner had full confidence in her ability to carry out the role of Chief of Staff. The decision to appoint was driven by AR's understanding and proficiency in partnership working, a sound Ministry of Justice background, personal stamina and experience of developing and promoting practices to encourage diversity.

The Commissioner was asked to explain the distinction between the role of Chief of Staff and that of Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The Commissioner acknowledged the military association of the term Chief of Staff – described as someone capable of leading a grouping and delivering, as opposed to the role of CEO which was more aligned to the business and financial aspects of business.

AR was invited to join the meeting and was welcomed by the Chair.

Below is a summary of the questions put to AR by members of the Panel and the responses she provided:-

Q: What skills, experience and qualities do you feel you would bring to the role of Chief of Staff, which would enable you to support successful delivery of the Police and Crime Plan?

A: 15 years experience of working in the justice sector and a member of the City of London Police Standards Committee on a voluntary basis. Experience of running an independent and busy Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC). A large part of that role is advising the Chairman across a range of responsibilities and working to overcome challenges and issues, all relevant to role of Chief of Staff. Recently delivered a joint plan across a range of different partners in the justice system that delivered a 4 fold increase of judges across England and Wales. Can bring experience of partnership working, governance, transparency and wide outreach engagement.

Q: How would you demonstrate that you are achieving value for taxpayers' money?

A: Need a clear idea of what we have been asked to achieve, monitor and demonstrate this against efficiency performance indicators and key objectives of the plan.

Q: How do you intend to develop and innovate effective relationships with stakeholders to make the best use of limited resources?

A: Invest time early on in getting to know and build key relationships with partners. PCC doing a lot of outreach work – already existing forums in place. Looking to strengthen those and fill gaps.

Q: What do you see as the single most significant change or challenge that will need to be addressed within the next 12 months and why?

A: A number of existing challenges for OPCC and Policing more generally. The impact of Covid is without measure at this stage and how it will continue to unfold is unknown. Potentially significant impact on demand and potential for another wave – resulting capacity impact and wider social economic impact. Key challenge in the first 6 months.

Q: How do you envisage the relationship between the OPCC and the PCP should work? How would you seek to develop that relationship?

A: Panel has an important oversight function which I see in terms of a Parliamentary Scrutiny Committee that scrutinises the government. Openness and transparency – Panel should receive all information it needs to carry out its role.

Q: What would you identify as the key challenges in maintaining effective engagement with the residents of Avon and Somerset? How would you seek to overcome these barriers?

A: Key challenges – large geographic area, diverse demographic and crime. Low engagement part of population – young people and minority groups. Approach would be to target outreach and communications and do this through range of channels – face to face and supplement with media and through existing community organisations and networks.

Q: How would you seek to ensure the governance arrangements of the OPCC are sufficiently robust to enable you to monitor, review and make suggestions on improving the performance of the office?

A: Review of OPCC is planned and one of the first priorities. Early days – need to review office in light of new requirements of Police and Crime Plan, making sure OPCC is set up to deliver the new plan.

Q: Can you give an example of where a decision you made led to a negative outcome. How did you respond and what did you learn from it?

A: Part of a senior team making a series of decisions contributing to a digital failure that affected 2,500 people taking a test to become a judge. Very high profile and resulting criticism. Learnt that action has to be taken very quickly and decisively - damage limitation of impact on people. Confidence in the organisation was restored, lessons around digital assurance were needed and broader lessons around communication.

Q: How have you developed your leadership skills whilst carrying out a change programme and what do you feel that you, as a leader, can bring to this role?

A: OPCC will undergo an internal change programme, I see this working well. Before taking up post, will be learning how office is set up, and how it is functioning and what is required of me in supporting the PCC.

Q: Do you agree that Race disparity is symptomatic of wider problems in society and if so what concrete actions can the PCC take to help reduce disparity in Policing and criminal justice?

A: First part – yes. Second part – a great deal. Important element around scrutiny, around use of police powers, stop and search, use of force, and what do to increase effectiveness. Another key focus would be around representation of Police staff – there is much the OPCC can do to scrutinise what the force is doing and how effective it is in recruiting from ethnic minorities and retaining them. Comparisons around the country and examples of good practice.

Q: How would you support the PCC in engaging with residents about his vision and strategy, whilst maintaining appropriate independence in your role?

A: Used to dealing with legal parameters and a compliance framework. Played an important role in challenging decisions and actions.

Q: What would you do if you became aware that the Commissioner was about to undertake an unwise action? Can you provide an example of where you have challenged the course of action set out by a superior?

A: Experience of working closely with a Chairman and challenging decisions. Advised on policy decisions and the application of polices in difficult circumstances - can be sensitive and tricky. Conflicts of interest on current board connected to candidate pool – had to navigate delicate balance to exclude any perception of failure. General approach taken there is relevant here. Upfront, explaining concerns, seeking external advice if necessary, sensitivity around PCC's plans.

AR was further asked what she would do if she considered the PCC's action was dangerous and compromising to the office. Would she go to the Home Secretary to protect the name and integrity of the office? AR confirmed that she would follow statutory procedures.

Q: How would you ensure an open environment where members of staff at the OPCC can express their professional opinion and be heard, even when it may conflict with the views or strategy of the PCC?

A: Create a general culture of learning and improvement which involves leading well. Lessons learnt at management team agenda – so people can share in safe environment.

Q: What contractual severance period do you have with your current employer.

A: Three months.

Q: Have you handed in your notice? If not, could you explain why?

Notice not formally handed in but notified employer of new role. Several elements of the process ongoing – today's hearing and vetting processes. Hope will resolve relatively quickly to enable notice to be given to current employer.

Q: What can the PCC do to speed your arrival in his office.

A: intending to leave current employment in December 2021 and open to getting a head start in joining key meetings, already met some of the OPCC team.

5. Consideration of Panel recommendation on the appointment of Chief of Staff

The Panel resolved to go into closed session to consider its recommendation.

RESOLVED - that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended).

The Commissioner and AR withdrew from the room. The Panel considered the candidate's performance and responses to the questions posed and the background information supplied by the Commissioner. All Panel Members gave their respective opinions on the Commissioner's preferred choice of candidate. At the request of the Panel, a further two questions were put to the Commissioner and AR by the Lead Officer and their responses were notified to the Panel. AR confirmed that she would be fully prepared to step aside from her voluntary position on the City of London Standards Committee, in the event of a conflict in the roles.

Following full and comprehensive discussion, there was unanimous agreement that AR had demonstrated both the professional competence to deliver the role of Chief of Staff and the personal independence necessary to exercise the role.

6. Panel Decision

The Commissioner and AR re-joined the meeting and were notified of the Panel's decision.

RESOLVED - that following full and comprehensive discussion and on being put to the vote, the Panel unanimously agreed to endorse and support the Commissioner's decision to appoint Alice Ripley to the position of Chief of Staff.

(The meeting ended at 11.30am)

Chair