



Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel

Hosted by Somerset County Council Democratic Services



Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel 26th October 2021

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 Council), Richard Brown (Independent Member), Nicola Clark (South Somerset District Council), Asher Craig (Bristol City Council), Peter Crew (North Somerset Council), Gary Davies (Independent Panel Member), Jonathan Hucker (Bristol City Council), Janet Keen (Sedgemoor District Council), Julie Knight (Independent Member), Franklin Owusu-Antwi (South Gloucestershire Council), Alastair Singleton (Bath and North East Somerset Council), Pat Trull (South Gloucestershire Council), Andy Wait (Bath and North East Somerset Council).

Host Authority Support Staff

Patricia Jones – Lead Officer
Andrew Randell – Panel Clerk
Pippa Triffitt – Panel Administrative Support

Police and Crime Commissioner and Support Staff:

Mark Shelford - Police and Crime Commissioner
Sally Fox – Interim Chief Executive Officer
Marc Hole – Head of Commissioning and Partnerships
Paul Butler – Interim Chief Finance Officer
Ben Valentine – Strategic Development and Performance Officer

1. Apologies for absence

Lisa Stone, (Bristol City Council)
Cllr Neil Bloomfield (Somerset County Council)

2. Public Question Time.

None received.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

4. Minutes of the meetings held on 22nd September at 10.30am and 12 noon.

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

5. Matters Arising

None.

6. Chair's Business

The Chair advised the Panel that she would be attending the 10th Annual PCP National Conference on 1st and 2nd November 2021 along with Gary Davies and the Lead Officer.

7. Panel Report on the Development of the Police and Crime Plan

The Chair introduced the item and thanked Panel Members Asher Craig and Julie Knight for volunteering to sit on the Police and Crime Plan Programme Board and contributing to the development of the plan.

Below is a summary of the principal points made by Julie Knight:-

- Both the robustness of the governance structure laid out in the Plan, and the strength of the Programme Board's leadership was commended. Attention was drawn to the caring and supportive approach of the Interim CEO who chaired the Programme Board.
- The Board's Plan Development Timeline (Gantt chart) was considered a simple and effective tool.
- The Panel was informed that key officers from the Constabulary were present at the Board meetings and there was clear collaboration between the OPCC and the Constabulary.
- It was appreciated that the Board welcomed the views of the Panel and readily took them into consideration.
- The clarity of the Plan was acknowledged and the leadership team at the OPCC was thanked for the results they achieved under significant pressures.
- The overall experience of participating in the process was deemed very positive.

The Chair thanked the members for their report and acknowledged the transparency their participation brought to the scrutiny process.

8. Scrutiny of the Draft Police and Crime Plan

The Chair introduced the item and opened the discussion for the Panel Members to express their initial thoughts on the draft of the Police and Crime Plan before the OPCC presentation.

Below is a summary of the ensuing discussion.

- It was acknowledged that the process of creating the Plan was conducted very thoroughly. However, on this occasion, it was felt the validity of the survey was undermined by its leading nature and questions which appeared designed to influence and extricate a particular answer, thereby affecting the type of responses obtained.
- The importance of hearing the voice of young people was emphasised, and it was suggested the Board should develop the plan in a way that encourages younger age groups to engage with Police processes in Avon and Somerset. Exploring work to engage young people in future should be a priority. There were good examples of young people interacting with Police and Crime Commissioners all over the country and these examples should be considered to ensure effectiveness of approach going forward. Attention was drawn to Bristol Youth Council and the social enterprise 'Leaders Unlocked', a scheme which aimed to give young people and underrepresented groups a stronger voice on issues such as policing.

The Chair advised the Commissioner and the OPCC that the Panel would strive to provide suggestions and solutions as part of its response to the Police and Crime Plan.

The Commissioner introduced the presentation and highlighted the following:-

- the importance of a collaborative approach in creating the Plan was emphasised. This method was fundamental to how the plan would be driven forward in the future.
- the thread running through the manifesto and the plan revolved around the Police changing their culture from predominantly resolving crime to preventing crime.
- the metrics of success for the plan had been set in consultation with the Constabulary and determined that improvement must be shown across all aspects of policing.
- the Commission drew the Panel's attention to the four priorities in the Police and Crime Plan:
 - Preventing and fighting crime
 - Engagement, supporting, and working with communities, victims, and partner organisations
 - Leading the Police to be efficient and effective

- Increasing the legitimacy of, and public confidence in, the Police and criminal justice system
- the Panel was reminded that it was the OPCC's responsibility to ensure the content of the plan complied with specified PCC statutory duties. The Commissioner concluded by summarising the three key aspects of the drafting process - the direction of the Plan led by the Commissioner, the design of the Plan led by the Commissioner and the Chief Constable, and the delivery of the Plan led by the Chief Constable

The Panel received the following detailed presentation from the OPCC:-

- The Programme Board was formed in June 2021 to support the production of the Police and Crime Plan. The Panel was informed of the role of the Programme Board in providing oversight and scrutiny whilst the draft Plan was created, and that its use would continue during the creation of local Police and Crime Plans.
- The starting point for forming the draft Plan was the Commissioner's manifesto, the priorities and objectives of which were adjusted and amended until the final draft was created.
- A twelve-week consultation followed. The importance of consulting the public on these matters was acknowledged, and the Panel was advised that the team also worked with the Constabulary to develop the targets and tactics that would be included in the draft.
- The survey that fed into the Plan was disseminated in various ways, such as online, via the post, and through tracked links. The survey invited comments from the public, of which 9,000 separate comments were received.
- The postal survey was used to target different ethnic groups in two tranches. This method overlapped with a survey of the more deprived areas of Somerset. Bristol was targeted in particular, as the city returned the lowest percentage of votes at the last election.
- The Panel was informed there was a 30% drop out rate for the online survey, raising questions over its length. The completion of the survey at focus groups was limited, resulting in a limited youth engagement with the Plan. There was also a formatting error in the layout of the postal survey, rendering some of the questions about ethnic background null and void.
- There was limited engagement from the Avon and Somerset workforce, with only 10.5% completing the survey. This issue was brought to the Programme Board to enable the Senior Leadership Team to provide an explanation. It was suggested the workforce had already been consulted heavily on the thematic aspects of the Plan, therefore they perhaps believed their voice had already been heard.

- The return on the postal survey for the Precept was 13%, so the postal survey was thought to be a valuable tool. However, the postal survey on the plan secured a 5% return rate. Furthermore, dissemination through the Board's partnerships had not driven the response rate up as much as the team had hoped. However, the target number for online responses was exceeded.
- Significantly, 65% of those who responded had been a victim of crime, which was 83% higher than in 2018, meaning their voices were in the majority. 27% hadn't voted in the PCC election. Overall, the responses received were broadly representative of the populations.
- The rates of approval for the objectives were highlighted, which ranged from 62.8% to 90.9%. These figures gave the team an idea of how to prioritise the objectives, as well as information on how to focus the local Plans appropriately.
- It was evident the public didn't prioritise one of the Commissioner's most prominent objectives, therefore communication regarding this required improvement.
- The themes the public felt were most important could be grouped thematically: legitimacy, ineffective response, partnerships, law and order, visibility, and the importance of partnerships.
- The Panel was reminded that the content was developed with the Constabulary, and that draft priorities were shared with their strategic partners; however, the engagement with the partners was more limited than the team had hoped.
- The Commissioner emphasised that the force always had room for improvement, particularly with regards to efficiency and public confidence in the system. This was evident from the number of responders who had been victims of crime. He stated collaboration with their partners was key for this.
- The Panel advised the Commissioner that caution should be taken when describing policing as 'simple', as it had in the past proved anything but. The Commissioner acknowledged the challenges that lay ahead but assured the Panel that the force was making progress.
- The Panel was informed that the structure of the Plan had evolved to focus on four priorities, each with six areas of focus. The resulting twenty-four areas of focus fed into the twelve key objectives.
- The measures that would be put in place to monitor the force's progress were highlighted. These measures were developed with the Avon & Somerset Police force and designed to monitor all the areas of focus. The results would form the basis of the quarterly performance reports. There was the expectation of a sustained improvement in policing in Avon and Somerset.

- The next steps in the process were laid out. The team at the OPCC would continue to receive feedback from the public and their partners until 8th November, which would feed into the final product which was due to be completed on 9th December. The Plan would then feed into the local Police and Crime plans.
- The Commissioner highlighted to the Panel the importance of the regional work that was taking place simultaneously, namely the work on narcotics, rural crime, and road safety.

The Chair thanked the OPCC team and invited the Panel to raise any questions or comments. Below is a summary of the ensuing discussion:

- The Panel considered the plan to be very ambitious and that the implementation of numerous objectives under each priority would require focus, careful monitoring and the appropriate funding. Having expressed previous concerns about what appeared to be regular and routine abstractions of specialist resources from their core functions in order to manage the high number of calls for service from the public, the Panel welcomed the intention to review Operation Remedy. It was felt current practices could impact the ability to support the preventative or enforcement elements of the plan.
- The ambitious nature of the plan was impressive but could make it challenging to deliver. The Plan needed a greater focus on criminal damage to public and private property, particularly in Bristol. The OPCC thanked the Panel for the feedback and advised that the issue of property damage was already under discussion with the Elected Mayor. There was general agreement that this issue highlighted the importance of the local plans.
- The Commissioner advised the Panel that the team was working to find the balance between an encompassing and a focused Plan. The strategy also allowed for adjustments to be made at a later stage if needed.
- The Panel expressed an interest in the survey's focus on the areas where the Commissioner received the fewest votes. The Panel advised the Commissioner that voters did not necessarily vote for someone else purely because they disagreed with his manifesto. The Commissioner acknowledged this but stated it was a good starting point for the survey.
- The Panel recommended that a reference to making the public "feel safe" should be added to the Commissioner's vision statement along with a brief explanation of how this will happen.
- Attention was drawn to the Commissioner's aim to address the environmental impact of policing whilst maintaining operational efficiency. Prevention was key to reducing negative environmental effects, but the draft Plan did not sufficiently address this. The Panel recommended that the commentary could be expanded to include mitigation and actions in respect of the estate, operational activity and the fleet.

The Panel recommended that the feasibility of running a trial of electric cars for operational response should be considered using an environmentally focused company such as Tesla.

The Commissioner highlighted the importance of achieving a balance between efficiency and reducing the impact of environmental impacts. The force's priority was operational efficiency and keeping people safe, but some research into improving the environmental impact of buildings and vehicles, particularly alongside Avon and Somerset Fire and Rescue, was taking place.

The Panel added that infrastructure was put in place 2 years ago for electric vehicle charging points at Taunton Police Station and the final connections had not been made. It was suggested that the Constabulary could be considered out of alignment with public and partner expectations given the extent of the force area in mileage terms and because vehicles are the greatest contributor to greenhouse gases.

The CFO advised members that the Plan did not map out every ongoing project, so the absence of content on a particular topic did not mean it was being ignored. The revitalised sustainability plan that was currently in progress was stated as an example. The Panel advised that as this information not in the public domain, it would be prudent to reconsider the content in the plan.

- In the context of Priority 1, the Panel considered the offence of drink spiking and the current plans to introduce drink-spiking kits. In order for successful prosecutions to proceed, it was recognised that a collaborative partner approach was key to addressing this prevailing problem across the force area. The Panel recommended that the issue should be given a strategic focus in the local plans. There was general agreement that the British Transport Police should maintain a zero-tolerance approach to these offences.
- The Panel raised the issue of anti-social behaviour as detailed under Priority 1 and requested the plan include more statistics and information on the Community Trigger to give a more detailed account on how it could be improved. The Panel was informed that Part 2 of the PCC review conducted by the Home Office included the Community Trigger and the findings were awaited before further steps were taken. The Panel recommended that collaborative work with councils would be needed in order to strengthen the process.
- The Panel acknowledged the OPCC's commitment to equality and inclusivity as laid out under Priority 4 but requested more detail on the plans in place to ensure these values are upheld. The importance of the Equality Impact Assessment in ensuring such matters received the appropriate attention was noted.
- The OPCC confirmed that the Avon and Somerset Independent Advisory Group had been consulted on the plan.

- The Commissioner assured the Panel the OPCC would work with the Constabulary on each area of focus, scrutinising what it meant to be better in each area of concern and finding both qualitative and quantitative answers.
- Attention was drawn by the Panel to the Plan's intention to add eight new local proactive teams to address drug crime, as laid out in Priority 3 in the Plan. The Commissioner was invited to comment on the viability of this approach. The Commissioner emphasised the important role that Neighbourhood Teams play in the prevention of drug crime in addition to patrols. He acknowledged the need to develop the detective branch, which would in turn strengthen the neighbourhood branch.

The Panel discussed the performance of the 101 service which had been affected by the upturn in 999 calls emerging from the relaxation of lockdown, a surge in the night-time economy and general public anxiety. The point was made that the 101 service was essential in supporting victims of ASB and inevitably no record will exist of the attempt to report the matter, without a successful connection. The Panel noted the efforts to problem solve the abandonment rate and redirect calls and recommended that the electronic method of reporting could be advertised more widely for the benefit of the public.

- An increase in the capacity of the detective branch was being introduced alongside proactive teams focused on preventing crime. The Panel acknowledged that the full benefits from the uplift in staff would not be realised for some time given the need for training and development and the time it would take for the detective vacancies and specialist capabilities to be filled.
- The Panel extended its thanks for the collaborative work undertaken between North Somerset Council and technical support officers at the Constabulary, resulting in an upgraded CCTV system that could be rolled out as a blueprint for other authorities across the force area. This had been instrumental in successfully tackling ASB in the area and the Panel recognised the importance of working in partnership with the Police to achieve positive outcomes.
- The Panel expressed reservations regarding plans for the criminal justice system under Priority 2. It was suggested the public was quick to blame the Police for delays in the system which are outside of their control. The Commissioner was advised to be realistic in his efforts to improve the criminal justice system given many of the failings were outside of his remit. The Commissioner acknowledged the extent of his influence but stated there was a greater ambition to work together to achieve better outcomes and his focus was on improving the overall performance of Policing. Where possible, the intention was to connect with partners to influence change,
- The Panel highlighted the absence of a consultation process or policy to address the issues associated with the resettlement of ASB offenders with complex needs.

The OPCC reported that work was required to address this. It was recognised those with complex needs needed increased support and this could usefully be picked up as part of the local plans when an assessment of potential provision could be discussed and developed. The Panel representative welcomed the opportunity to discuss the matter further outside of Panel meetings.

- It was suggested the Plan was amended so the organisational jargon was replaced, and terms and names of organisations were clarified. Some commentary on page 77 would perhaps assist the public in understanding the financial divisions laid out in the charts under Priority 4. The Commissioner suggested the Panel worked with the team at the OPCC to make the necessary improvements and this was agreed. The OPCC reminded the Panel that the online version of the Plan would include hyperlinks to the various organisations named, but that a list of reference could also be added at the end.
- The Commissioner was advised that at the last meeting on 22nd September, he had been asked whether it would be possible to find Avon and Somerset's statistical twin to compare funding settlements in other areas. The Panel reported that constabularies such as Staffordshire and Hampshire were statistically comparable. Given that a number of previous settlements have amounted to a real time cut in funding, the Panel emphasised that any opportunity to make a compelling case and rectify the current formula which disproportionately disadvantages this force area, should not be overlooked.

The Lead Officer clarified that the Panel wished to provide a letter in support, which the OPCC advised they would welcome at the appropriate juncture. The CFO reported that the ongoing review of the funding formula was in progress and last reviewed in 2015. The results of the review were anticipated in April 2022 but there was no certainty on this timescale. It was anticipated there would be a phased implementation over a 3-year period following the outcome of the review, with winners and losers expected.

- The OPCC was invited to reconsider the use of the picture on the front cover and to include South Gloucestershire in the map. The Panel was thanked for the feedback and assured that discussions had already taken place regarding the map. The Commissioner added that discussions were taking place regarding the front cover and suggestions from the Panel would be welcomed.

Action:-

- (1) Panel to submit its formal statutory response to the draft Police and Crime Plan by 8th November 2021**
- (2) Commissioner to take into account any recommendations before the finalisation of the plan on 9th December 2021.**

Operation Remedy

It was agreed that the Panel would continue to receive performance monitoring information on Operation Remedy to enable the Panel to make an assessment of the effectiveness of the investment and your Budget allocation in the longer term.

9. Date of Next Meeting

- 25th November 2021 at 10:30am in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton.

(The meeting ended at 14:02.)