



Minutes of the Avon and Somerset Police & Crime Panel 1st February 2022

The Deane House, Somerset West and Taunton Council

Present:

Local Authority and Independent Member Representatives:

Heather Shearer (Mendip Council, Chair), Neil Bloomfield (Somerset County Council), Chris Booth (Somerset West and Taunton Council), Richard Brown (Independent Member), Asher Craig (Bristol City Council), Peter Crew (North Somerset Council), Gary Davies (Independent Member), Jonathan Hucker (Bristol City Council), Julie Knight (Independent Member), Franklin Owusu-Antwi (South Gloucestershire), Alastair Singleton (Bath and North East Somerset Council), 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 Constabulary/Support Staff:

Mark Shelford – Police and Crime Commissioner

Alice Ripley – Chief of Staff

Sally Fox – Deputy Chief of Staff

Sarah Crew – Chief Constable

Paul Butler – Interim Chief Finance Officer

Ben Valentine – Strategic Planning and Performance Officer

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Nicola Clark (South Somerset Council), Cllr Janet Keen (Sedgemoor Council), and Cllr Richard Westwood (North Somerset Council, Vice Chair).

2. Public Question Time

None received.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no new declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of the previous meetings held on 25th November 2021 and 9th December 2021

The minutes of the meetings on 25th November 2021 and 9th December 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record.

5. Matters arising

The Panel thanked the Commissioner for the response to the enquiry regarding the green agenda and asked whether it would be beneficial to move the baseline data from its current position of 2009-10.

The Panel requested clarification on the data provided which showed differing total numbers of burglaries in the past twelve months. The OPCC explained that residential burglaries included sheds and garages for example, whereas the lower figure does not include these.

Action:

- 1. For the OPCC to take the suggestion of moving the baseline data for the green agenda away and discuss.**

6. Chair's business

None to report.

7. Chief Constable's report

The Panel thanked the police force for their excellent response to an incident that occurred in Weston-Super-Mare the previous week.

Heather invited Chief Constable Sarah Crew to give her report. Below is a summary of the presentation.

- The Chief Constable began by acknowledging that policing during the previous decade had been difficult with the spending cuts made and decisions taken. She informed the Panel that £86 million had been saved, which was 28.7% of the budget over the period, and that the force received several successive outstanding grades from the inspectorate.
- She reminded the Panel that newly graduated police officers are not always immediately deployable, which sometimes affected response times. There was, however, a growth in the number of officers.
- The progress of the force was slowed by external forces such as guidelines which proved to be an administrative burden to the officers. Articulating this to the policy makers was a priority.
- The Precept from the Panel proved to be a valuable early investment, helping to form a new strategic framework to deliver the mission. The force was aided in this by cutting edge technology and the effective exploitation of data, as well as improvements in officers' education regarding issues such as cultural confidence.
- The Chief Constable indicated that the current route map for the force's progress included six elements. The first three elements focused on an increase in establishment. A growth of 456 police officer posts and 187 police staff posts was scheduled for March 2023 taking the police officer establishment to 3291. Taking into account retirements, this will equate to 1300 new officers over 3 years. By March 2023 40% of police officers will have fewer than 3 years' experience. The force was growing into its additional capabilities and was building up its investigation functions to meet the demand.
- The last three elements concerned the investment in the police staff and officers, specifically investment in leadership development. The staff needed to be educated and equipped to meet the needs of the organisational journey and the cultural changes required. The Chief Constable informed the Panel that they were looking to grow the

leadership academy and remove the barriers and frictions that prevented the leaders from doing their jobs. An important factor in this was the need to boost resilience on the front lines, giving due regard to health and wellbeing and satisfactorily addressing the issue of trauma.

- The Chief Constable reminded the Panel that the focus going forward would be on the perpetrators of crime, particularly on high-harm crime. They aimed to roll out timely and high-quality investigations and substantially invest in Bluestone. The Incident Assessment Unit would be grown and maintained.
- There would also be an increasing focus on crime prevention by establishing and utilising effective interventions, improving perpetrator monitoring and rehabilitation, and enhancing the rural teams to support the neighbourhood teams. There would be 62 additional officers joining the latter.
- The Chief Constable explained that investing in the force meant giving everyone in the organisation the environment they needed to excel and put their strengths to the best use. The force has progressed in recent years due to the uplift in officer numbers, improvements in technology, and a focus on the organisation's environment and the importance of emotional intelligence, but investment was still required. The force needed to enhance its legitimacy in the eyes of the public and increase public confidence in its work. The force would ultimately pay for itself in its efficiency.
- The final goals for the force were as follows:
 - To have an unrelenting focus on perpetrators, high investigative standards, crime prevention, innovation, and successful collaborations with partners.
 - To have a radical openness and transparency, an openness to scrutiny and constructive challenge for the public good.
 - To lead the field in advanced technology and the exploitation of data, using robotics and artificial intelligence, maintaining visibility in the public using such technology, and learning from experience to achieve the best outcome.
 - To have a diverse and empowered workforce that is trauma-informed, with barriers in recruitment removed and a continually growing leadership academy.

- To achieve high levels of public confidence in the force by creating an empathetic and courageous culture within the organisation to support visible policing.
- The Chief Constable concluded by stating that the maximum increase for the Precept of £10 would be vital in helping the force reach this destination.

The Chair thanked the Chief Constable for her report and invited the Panel to ask any questions they had. Below is a summary of the ensuing discussion:-

- The Panel acknowledged the improvements to the neighbourhood teams that had already been made in North Somerset and commended the new inspector. The Chief Constable assured the Panel that this system would be in place throughout Somerset by the end of October.
- The Panel asked whether the issues regarding response times and meeting demand would continue to be a problem. The Chief Constable acknowledged there would be peaks and troughs in the progress of rectifying this but was optimistic on the outcome.
- The Chief Constable was asked whether the route map focuses too heavily on the offender. She believed the balance had been previously incorrect because they had lost sight of the offender in the process. Early interventions, crime prevention, and rehabilitation was needed to supplement the attention given to the community to address the issue.
- The Chief Constable informed the Panel that changes were in motion within the organisation to remove barriers caused by the Director General's guidelines. The Creating Capacity initiative involved sending business analysts to the front line to gain their insight on how things could be made better.
- The Panel asked for clarification on how the disproportionalities in Policing were going to be rectified. The Chief Constable acknowledged this was an issue and highlighted the importance of improving public confidence in the police force. She reassured the Panel that this was one of the top items on the agenda of items to tackle.

- The Panel voiced their concerns over the conviction rates for violence against women. The Chief Constable informed the panel that this issue related to the whole criminal justice system, but that she had been a leader in the handling of violence against women for the previous three years and knew that the police force could make a difference. There had been significant improvements in treating victims over the past three decades, but the outcomes continued to deteriorate. The force was therefore working with the councils to form a different approach. Project Bluestone itself was a different way of looking at the problem, with academics invited into the organisation to scrutinise their books and data to measure their approach with models that had proved successful internationally. The force was experimenting with using behavioural science and psychology, procedural justice, officer and staff specialisms, and the exploitation of data to determine patterns and repetitions of crime. The results showed that the force could be too process driven and lacked the critical thinking skills required to make progress. To make amends, they have looked to rebuild their staff capacity and divide the workload between teams to increase the attention given to each issue. Project Bluestone required 100 specialist investigators; there were 37 as of now. The Project had attracted the government's interest for their Rape Review, and nationally the force was on an trajectory for making referrals to CPS. The number of convictions was increasing, with a 47% increase in the number of convictions over the previous 12 months.
- The Panel also voiced concerns over the lack of burglaries that were solved. It was highlighted that many victims do not report because there is a lack of public confidence in the police force. The Chief Constable reminded the Panel that one of Operation Remedy's main focuses was burglary, and that statistically the number of instances had decreased year on year by 12.1%. The charge rate had increased to 7.73% from 4% at the start of the process. The data showed that the police attended 72% of cases if it was a main dwelling that was burgled. However, there was clearly still room for improvement in their handling of burglaries, and the growth in capacity would help with this, along with increased investment in intelligence and specialisms and the focus on crime prevention.
- The Chief Constable was asked whether the police force had many police officers dropping out of the training, which would impede the growth in the force's capacity. She assured the Panel that the drop-out trends were monitored but they were slightly higher than the 10% generally seen under the old recruitment scheme. Investigations were

undertaken into who left, when, and why, to see whether the force could learn from it and prevent it from happening again.

- The Panel asked whether it was counter-intuitive to both have neighbourhood police officers removed from their posts to support demand at peak times and to appoint new officers straight into the new investigative team. The Chief Constable acknowledged the issue raised but explained to the Panel that lack of capacity and capability in the investigative teams meant that officers in patrol and neighbourhood teams were absorbing some additional complex crimes, making them less deployable. Solutions were under development so this is not a long-term problem as only peak times were affected.

The force also had a dedicated Detective Superintendents to focus on the issue at hand.

- Reference was made to the widening concern in society at what is perceived as the government's unwillingness to take the climate challenge seriously, spawning a growing number of groups who are prepared to test the limits of the law and go beyond in order to promote campaigns. In the context of policing by consent, the Chief Constable was asked to comment on the policing of public protests which will almost certainly be a major theme in the coming years.

The Chief Constable acknowledged Bristol's history of peaceful protests and advised the Panel that protesting is to be respected as part of the democratic process. However, the point was made that balancing of human rights in these situations was challenging. She went on to outline a number of areas that she thought would assist in demystifying the approach to public order and public events:-

- Transparency around training and tactics and why/when they are used.
- Allowing observers into the command room to see high quality decision making and promote confidence.
- Opening up Police briefings
- Replicating the role of the Scrutiny of Police Powers Panel to cover protests. This was currently being developed and could be brought back to the Panel at a later date.

- In the context of Bristol, the point was made by Councillor Craig that recent protests had been undermined by a small cohort resulting in the toppling of the Colston statue.
- The Chief Constable was asked to provide reassurance that the Police will investigate complaints made against Local Authorities without political interference. The Panel was advised that the Police routinely give advice on when and how to report a matter and would welcome details if a complaint had not been recorded. It was emphasised that a complaint would be recorded in the same way if it was made by a Chief Executive or a member of the public.
- The Chief Constable was invited to comment on the Police response to bullying in schools. The Panel was advised that it was necessary to consider each case on its merits. On-line bullying activity was still regarded as an offence provided it reached the required threshold. The Panel was given assurances that reports of bullying would be investigated.
- The Panel raised concerns over the low numbers of people reporting domestic violence. The Chief Constable explained that the data quality for domestic violence is a challenge as people were reluctant to report it. Work needed to be done on the system infrastructure to make reporting domestic violence incidents easier.
- The issue of public confidence in the police force was raised, as press reports of irregularities within the system blighted the public perception of an efficient and dedicated force. The Chief Constable assured the Panel that if a crime was reported and met the appropriate criteria, it would be investigated, and that the public needed to be made aware of this. The members of the public were all treated equally regardless of their position and would only be named as an informant. Concerns over death threats within schools were also raised, as it seemed the police did not take these seriously and instead deferred the issue elsewhere. The Chief Constable stated she would want to look at each case individually to choose the most appropriate action. She also highlighted the challenges the force faced adapting to offences like these taking place online.
- The Panel asked what the Chief Constable intended to do to bring about change in the culture within the organisation. She explained she wanted to make changes in the constabulary, and that these needed to be embedded in the selection and recruitment processes

and the leadership styles of the officers. The positive changes would be rewarded when done well and addressed when not. The goal was to increase public confidence in the force by improving the internal culture.

- The Chief Constable was asked about the yearly assessments of the number of firearms officers needed. The Panel was informed that this requirement had remained stable over the previous five years, and that it had recently been reduced from 95 to 84. The force's shift pattern was adjusted to allow for this, and the extra investment available had gone elsewhere. The counter terrorism group was also shared with neighbouring counties. The Chief Constable was commended on this brave approach which showed encouraging progress.
- The Panel thanked the OPCC for the work they did and requested their thanks be extended to the police force.

8. Formal Scrutiny of the Budget and Proposed Precept

The Chair invited Paul Butler, as interim Chief Finance Officer, to introduce the report. Below is a summary of his presentation to the Panel.

- The error in the supplementary paper in which the deficit of 13.5m was reduced to £8.2m was acknowledged. The error was in relationship to the partnership costs.
- The MTFP looked at the next five years and ended by presenting the precept recommendation.
- The precept proposal was for £144.8 million, which was developed between the OPCC and constabulary and was underpinned by financial sustainable values and progressive modernisation.
- For council tax Band D, this would involve a £10 increase per annum, taking the total to £251.20. This would be 14.5% of the council tax base.
- For Band A, the increase would be £6.67, for Band B, it would be £7.78 and for Band C, it would be £8.89.
- The increase would partly go towards the delivery of the uplift in officers; the constabulary were on track to meet their target by March 2023, which a net increase of 552 officers. This required recruiting 1,300 officers over 4 years.
- The police staff pay was previously frozen; there is now a 3.5% increase forecast.

- The budget was adjusted to reflect a 2.5% rise for the following year, in accordance with the guidance from the NPCC.
- It reflected an increase in national insurance.
- Already there had been identified efficiencies of £3 million.
- The chancellor's spending review covered three years, which was welcomed by the OPCC.
- The £550,000 million in grant funding for 2022-23 was set to increase to £800,000 million by 2024-5.
- The impact of the funding package meant the balance of funding shifted from the grant to council tax.
- The decision to increase the precept was made to complete the delivery of the uplift in officers, to accommodate the wider cost pressure of inflation, and to sustain officer pay rises and pensions.
- The OPCC recognised the cost of living challenges faced by many constituents, and the addition represented by the increase of £10 for Band D households.
- An increase of 2%, rather than 4.1%, was considered, which would have provided £2.3 million less in funding and required further savings.
- The supplementary paper showed that they expected to break even in 2022-3, with deficits in the following years.
- The key assumptions for revenue spending were an increase to the core grant funding, the removal of council tax support grants, and an increase in council tax funding of £7.4 million.
- The key assumptions for revenue expenditure were raises in officer pay, increases to the budget to meet officer uplift, increases to pension costs, and general inflationary increases.
- The economic pressures leading to inflation were hard to forecast in the budget.
- There were also increases related to the investment in IT technology and equipment and the costs of partnerships.
- The table for the capital plan sets out £99.5 million over the term.
- The investment in corporate systems would be around £10.4 million.
- The plans are subject to an ongoing review.
- There were several risk reserve and risk management issues; the final decision on risk reserves had not yet been made.
- The funding opportunities for capital were due to be reviewed. Capital reserves would be exhausted by the end of the plan, leaving borrowing requirements of £16.5m.
- A gradual reduction in available reserves was forecast primarily due to expenditure of the capital reserve.

- The key risks involved the level of future grant funding, the planned review of the police funding formula, the increase in pension costs, and inflation overall.
- The one error that occurred in the paper was identified and adjusted. Some risks were more significant than others. The OPCC was satisfied with the plan's reliability and accuracy as it stood.
- The proposal was for a maximum increase of £10 for Band D households, with slower increases in Bands A to C which account for 67.8% of properties.
- The recommendation was for the Panel to accept and endorse this proposal.

The OPCC had consulted the public, and had received over 6,000 responses, the largest response recorded regarding a precept decision. The maximum increase of £10 would boil down to a rise in council tax by £0.83 a month for Band D households.

The Chair thanked the OPCC and PCC for their report and asked the Panel to present any questions they had. Below is a summary of the ensuing discussion.

- The Panel asked how proactive the identified efficiency savings were. The PCC assured the Panel these were a constant conversation within the OPCC, and that they were looking at imaginative and creative ideas across the board.
- The signs of improving interest rates were highlighted as a contrast to the inflationary pressures. The PCC acknowledged that this was the case but informed the Panel that unfortunately the two did not cancel each other out.
- Concerns were raised over the number of vehicles in the police force's fleet and whether the force would be compliant with the climate emergency strategy. The Commissioner assured the Panel that the fleet's sustainability was under review, and that they were currently compliant with the clean air policies with the exception of a few specialist vehicles.

Action:

- 1. The Commissioner, Chief Constable and OPCC staff briefly withdrew from the meeting and re-joined the meeting for the Panel's decision.**

- 2. Following discussion and on being put to the vote, the Panel unanimously RESOLVED to endorse the Commissioner's proposal to increase the Policing Precept by £10.00 per annum in 2022/23 for an average Band D property (12 members voting in favour).**

9. Commissioner's Update

The Chair invited the Commissioner to give his update. Below is a summary of the update.

- Crime prevention was key to the process of policing.
- It was the cultivation of the organisation's staff, environment, and leadership, alongside the efficient exploitation of technology, that were key to achieving this.
- Delivering the plan would be a challenge, and the OPCC was keeping a close eye on the drop-out numbers that could affect the officer uplift.
- The new DPCC candidate had been chosen and the Confirmatory Hearing for their appointment would be held on 18th February.
- The Commissioner thanked Julie and Asher for their continued help on the Police and Crime Plan Programme Board.
- The OPCC was looking at disproportionality across the system, and welcomed the recent publication of the Identifying Disproportionality report. This would be presented at the next Local Criminal Justice Board which the PCC chaired, as there were recommendations for each Board member to take forward.
- They were also looking to promote greater accountability to those dealing with cyber and fraud within the force.

The Chair thanked the Commissioner for his update and asked the Panel to present any questions they had. Below is a summary of the ensuing discussion.

- The Panel enquired about how many of the police staff have refused vaccination for Covid-19. The Commissioner informed the Panel that the number of vaccinated members of staff had increased, but there were around 500 out of 6,000 that had declared they had not received the vaccine.
- The Panel queried the increasing numbers and complexity of complaints. The Deputy Chief of Staff explained that the data displayed all contact made to the OPCC, not just complaints; the increased number was not unusual when a newly elected

Commissioner was in post. The change in regulations had also meant more of the contacts were classed as complaints.

- Concerns were raised over the fact that Avon & Somerset was 16th in size of constabulary area but 6th in terms of the numbers of complaint reviews it received. The PCC wanted the public to have greater understanding and confidence to raise these complaint reviews with his office.
- The Panel asked whether the buildings referred to in the current estate strategy were being utilised. The Commissioner assured the Panel they were.
- With reference to the consistently increasing number of leavers in the last 6 months of 2021, the Panel asked whether the OPCC was confident of reaching target for March 2023. The Commissioner expressed disappointment at the number of leavers, but assured the Panel that investigations were underway to see if there was a theme present that could be addressed.
- The Panel highlighted the issues present regarding data sharing between institutions in the area. The Commissioner informed the Panel that they were looking to encourage good relations between institutions to gain the best quality data and be a force for good.

10. Performance Summary

The Chair invited Ben Valentine, as the OPCC's Strategic Planning and Performance Officer, to present the performance update. Below is a summary of the update.

- The OPCC acknowledged the gap between Avon and Somerset and its Most Similar Groups regarding drug trafficking crimes and assured the Panel it was looking into whether this was due to fewer offences or the lack of proactive identification of the issue.
- Higher numbers of robberies were also concerning. This is in part due to the way business robberies are recorded - increasing compliance.
- Bristol experienced 38% of all recorded crime, and 55% of the robberies in the area. This is something that needs to be addressed in their local plan.
- The OPCC was seeing a slight decline in victim satisfaction. Some complex investigations were left to young and inexperienced officers

in patrol due to the demand on police investigators, which likely caused some of the issues.

- Ben suggested the Panel contact the OPCC if there were specific data figures that should be included on the quarterly report e.g., regarding disproportionality.

The Chair opened the floor to questions from the Panel. Below is a summary of the ensuing discussion.

- The Panel expressed their approval of the suggestion to include data on disproportionality in the report going forward.
- The Panel requested that a definition of 'serious violence' was included in the report. The Panel noted that the definition can vary locally between different constabularies but agreed that a definition using their understanding of the term should be included.
- Reference was made to the hindrance of response times due to the young and inexperienced work force. The Panel asked when the OPCC expected this issue to dissipate. The OPCC informed the Panel that they attended a Strategic Planning meeting with the Constabulary where a graph was shown displaying the projection of officers and their experience within the patrol group; the OPCC would be happy to share this with the Panel as an example. The Deputy Chief of Staff said she would take the question away and find some additional projections to supplement the graph.

Action:

- 1. For the topic on disproportionalities and its associated data to be included in future reports.**
- 2. For the Commissioner, Chair, and the Strategic Planning and Performance Officer to attend a meeting of the Commission on Race Equality in Bristol to highlight the work the OPCC intend to do on the issue of disproportionalities.**
- 3. For a definition of 'serious violence' to be included in the report as a reference.**
- 4. For OPCC to provide the Panel with projections for officer experience.**

11. Standing Complaints Report

The report was taken as read.

12. Work Programme

The current work programme was confirmed.

13. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 18th February 2022 at 10:30am.

(The meeting ended at 1:50pm.)