



Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel

Hosted by Somerset County Council Democratic Services



Annual Report

April 2021–
March 2022

*Providing effective Scrutiny and Support to the
Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner*



Table of Contents

	Page
Members of the Panel _____	3
Chair's Introduction _____	4
Roles and Responsibilities _____	6
Key Activities _____	8
Proactive Scrutiny/Inquiry Day _____	12
Reflections of Panel Members _____	15
Challenges ahead and looking to the future _____	20

Members of the Panel

There are 9 Local Authorities in the Avon and Somerset Force area, each of which must be represented on the Panel by an elected member. It is the responsibility of each authority to ensure that the member appointed has the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience for their role on the Panel. The overall composition of all Police and Crime Panels should form a "balanced appointment" objective which takes account of, as far as is practical, both political and geographical proportionality. Reaching the balanced appointment objective is a collective responsibility of the component authorities and the Panel itself.

Somerset County Council and the Somerset District Councils each have 1 seat. The former Avon Unitary Councils (Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset) were allocated 2 seats. Bristol was allocated an additional third seat based on the city's population size and comparatively high crime levels.

They are joined by three Independent Co-opted Members, recruited through a competitive selection process, who have the same voting rights as the Local Authority Panel Members. In total there were 17 Panel Members in 2021/22:-

Bath and North East Somerset	Cllrs Alastair Singleton and Andy Wait
Bristol City Council	Cllrs Asher Craig, Jonathan Hucker and Lisa Stone
Mendip District Council	Cllr Heather Shearer (Chair)
North Somerset Council	Cllrs Richard Westwood (Vice-Chair) and Peter Crew
Sedgemoor District Council	Cllr Janet Keen
Somerset County Council	Cllr Neil Bloomfield
Somerset West and Taunton	Cllr Chris Booth
South Gloucestershire Council	Cllrs Franlin Owusu-Antwi and Patricia Trull
South Somerset District	Cllr Nicola Clarke
Independent Member	Richard Brown
Independent Member	Julie Knight
Independent Member	Gary Davies

Contact the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel:-

Patricia Jones,
 Governance Specialist
 County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY
 Tel: 07855284506
 Email: PLJones@somerset.gov.uk

Chair's Introduction

I am pleased to introduce the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel's Annual Report for 2021/22 and reflect on the Panel's challenges and achievements over the last year. In the wake of Covid 19 and the biggest challenge this country has faced in decades, Policing remains in the spotlight. We have seen escalating concerns from communities about stop and search, the criminal justice system, management of protests and all types of serious violence. In response, the Government committed to expanding the role of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), raising standards and improving accountability to ensure all members of the public are getting a good service. The second part of the review has focussed on longer-term reform, assessing what extra powers PCC's need to better fight crime in their areas. This review is likely to shape Police governance over the next ten years.



The Public must have confidence in the Police service and that is why the role of PCC and the scrutiny carried out by the Panel is so important. Outside of the four-yearly election cycle, the Panel continues to provide the key scrutiny and accountability mechanism for the decisions and activities undertaken by the Commissioner.

We have delivered a challenging work programme over the last year and incorporated our work into 12 public meetings. The Panel's review of the Commissioner's new Police and Crime Plan 2021-25 was very positive and the Commissioner and his officers were commended on its four key aims, long term perspective and an ambitious and consistent view of what the Commissioner wishes to achieve for the public. The areas of focus in the plan align well with the themes of the National Police and Crime Measures which all Police forces are expected to tackle as a priority. Implementation of the many objectives under each priority will require focus, careful monitoring and appropriate funding. The Panel also actively supported the development of local Crime Plans for each area.

The Panel conducted 5 confirmatory hearings for new staff appointments, including the new Chief Constable, which has enabled the Commissioner to secure the senior leadership required to deliver his new Police and Crime Plan. Time was also needed within and outside public meetings to fulfil the proactive and developmental elements of our role. Positive collaborative work emerged from this in the form of training for new members and proactive inquiries into offender management and serious violence which

we detail later in this report.

One of the Panel's core duties each year is to scrutinise the Commissioner's proposed Council Tax precept. The Panel represents the residents of Avon and Somerset and our focus at these annual meetings is to ensure that the Commissioner's Precept proposal will assist in delivering a low crime environment where people feel safe and secure, and where communities can flourish. Essentially, this requires the Panel to reconcile the effect of the increase upon some of the most vulnerable in our communities and balance that against the increasingly complex demands of modern policing and the funding needed to deliver this.

It remains a time of great uncertainty, but the Panel was satisfied that a Precept increase this year was justifiable and should be supported. Our expectation is that the strategies and vision outlined to the Panel by the Commissioner and the Chief Constable will deliver the step change required to transform the service within a reasonable timeframe.

Public confidence has been on a downward trend in recent years and this is pivotal to the Policing model in this country which relies on the public's consent and trust. This trust is not only based on the competence of the Police in tackling different crimes and maintaining order, but also on how the public perceive that they are treated by the Police. The Panel welcomes the Commissioner's recognition in his new Police and Crime Plan that there are people and communities in Avon and Somerset who have lost confidence in the Police service and that this needs to change.

The Panel continues to recognise the outstanding work that Police Officers, Special Constables and support staff carry out every day to support communities and it remains for me to express the Panel's thanks to all those that strive to make our communities safer.

Heather Shearer, Chair.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "H Shearer", enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Roles and Responsibilities

In each Police force area, there is an elected Police and Crime Commissioner. The role of the Commissioner is to be the voice of the public and to hold the Chief Constable to account. The Commissioner is responsible for setting the strategic objectives of the Police force and deciding how funding for local policing and crime reduction activity is allocated. Mark Shelford was elected on 6th May 2021. It is worthy of note that this term of office will run for three years rather than the usual four year term due to the postponement of the election in May 2020.

The purpose of the Police and Crime Panel is to support and challenge the Commissioner's work and the decisions he takes. The Panel is made up of Councillors from the 9 Local Authorities in the force area and 3 Independent Panel Members who bring a variety of skills and experience to the role. Somerset County Council currently acts as the Host Authority for the Panel and is responsible for its administrative and officer support arrangements.

The Commissioner's plans and objectives are set out in a document called the Police and Crime Plan. This is the most important document any Police and Crime Commissioner will produce during their term of office. The Commissioner is required by law to consult the Panel on the plan and other duties connected to his role. A summary of the Panel's core responsibilities is set out below :-

- **Review the objectives set out in the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan**
- **Scrutinise and vote on the Commissioner's proposed Council Tax Precept**
- **Hold a Confirmatory Hearing for the Commissioner's proposed appointment of a Chief Constable and other senior officers. The Panel has the ability to veto the Chief Constable appointment if this is considered necessary**
- **Consider and resolve complaints in relation to the Commissioner's conduct**

The Panel's primary function is to hold the Commissioner to account but it is important to remember that the Panel does not hold the Chief Constable, Sarah Crew, to account. If the Panel has a particular issue of concern, for example an increase in violent crime or a perceived deterioration in neighbourhood safety, the Panel's role is to establish how the Commissioner is addressing this at a strategic level for the benefit of the public. In turn, the Chief Constable has responsibility for implementation of the Police and Crime Plan and day to day operational matters in our communities. She is accountable to the Commissioner.

In carrying out the above duties, it is essential for the Panel to stay well informed on policy and issues affecting Policing and the Panel has dedicated officer support and appropriate developmental training to assist with this.

Key Activities

Development and Review of the Police and Crime Plan 2021-25

The Panel was assisted in its review of the plan by the Commissioner's invitation for two Panel Members to be involved in its development. Focussing on consultation, content, performance and assurance, the Police and Crime Plan Programme Board provided meaningful and collaborative space for the OPCC, the Constabulary and the Panel representatives to develop the plan. From a governance perspective, the structure worked well, and the Panel was given the opportunity to offer advice and expertise in a number of areas including opportunities to engage more diverse communities.

The response to Public consultation launched in the form of 20,000 postal votes and a 12 week online survey saw a significant improvement on previous years. One of the most important parts of a survey process is the creation of questions that accurately measure the opinions of the public. This makes the design and wording of questions crucial. The Panel felt the validity of the survey was underserved by some of the questions posed and the Commissioner readily took this on board. The Panel also welcomed the Commissioner's commitment to establish how the mechanisms and reach of the survey could be extended in the future to better capture the views of young people and the diverse communities which make up the population of the force area.

In realising the objective "to reduce the negative environmental impact whilst maintaining operational efficiency", the Panel understood there is a balance to be achieved. The Panel took the view that Prevention is crucial to reducing negative environmental effects and recommended that the commentary in the plan should be expanded, using the abundance of qualitative data available, to include mitigation and actions in respect of the estate, operational activity and the fleet. The Panel also 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. Waiting for a cheaper solution and a decrease in price in the coming years would not, in our opinion, seem reflective of the size of the problem or the weight the public attaches to environmental risks and in particular carbon emissions.

The Panel shares the concerns of the Commissioner around the criminal justice system and the importance of people feeling safe in their local communities. The system is under tremendous pressure, and it is an unfortunate fact that its shortcomings are often wrongly attributed to the Police. We wish the Commissioner every success as Chair of

the Criminal Justice Board and believe that this role will require a realistic approach to the many failings which are outside of his control.

We were in agreement on the importance of the role played by the neighbourhood teams in the prevention of drug crime and the intention to add eight new local proactive teams to address this area of demand was therefore well received. The Panel also acknowledged the need to develop the detective branch, which in turn strengthens neighbourhood policing.

The Panel unreservedly welcomed the Commissioner's determined and ambitious approach and his clear intent to improve Policing in Avon and Somerset.

Recruitment and Retention

The Panel continues to retain oversight of Police officer and PCSO numbers by way of a timeline report to each Panel meeting on recruitment progress and levels achieved. The Panel also received a presentation from the Chief Constable which was helpful in clarifying "the journey" ahead, enabling members to consider what is required to achieve an outstanding force. This includes realising the officer uplift, rebuilding the Constabulary's investigations element, developing leaders and leading a cultural change that commands both the trust and confidence of all communities. The Panel was reassured that officer uplift would continue throughout 2022/23, with the Constabulary on course to achieve the target head count of 3,291 officers by March 2023. This represents an increase of 552 officers in comparison to the headcount in April 2019.

The Panel acknowledges that the full benefits from the uplift in staff will not be realised for some time given the need for training and development, and it will take some time for the detective vacancies and specialist capabilities to be filled.

Confirmatory Hearings

The appointment of senior staff in the Commissioner's Office requires the endorsement of the Panel in the form of a confirmatory hearing. Five hearings took place across 2021/22 as the Commissioner assembled his new administration, and the appointments of Temporary Chief Constable, Chief Constable, Deputy Commissioner, Chief of Staff and Chief Finance Officer were duly confirmed by the Panel. Fair proceedings are key to the ability of the Panel to uphold its confirmatory duties and the Panel is pleased to report that in all cases, the Commissioner undertook an open and transparent recruitment process in line with best practice and the recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee on Standards in Public Life. The Panel also welcomed the opportunity to

observe and report on the selection processes as an extra layer of assurance.

Complaints

The Panel is required to resolve complaints from the public that relate to the Commissioner's personal conduct. An individual Panel Member leads and maintains an overview on complaints to the Panel with advice, guidance and support provided by the Panel's Lead Officer. This provides a filter for the less serious complaints and ensures that meetings of the complaints sub-committee are only held when necessary. The complaints handling process and background information the Panel requires from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) has been aligned for this purpose for a number of years.

This year the Panel has also taken steps to review its handling and communications processes with the OPCC. In practical terms, the Panel's objectives are clear and that is to ensure recording obligations are adhered to, delays avoided and appropriate resolutions to complaints reached as soon as possible. To strengthen the approach, the process has been mapped and strict response time scales have been agreed to ensure that all complainants receive a timely response.

The reform of the Police Complaints system has resulted in the Commissioner having an explicit statutory duty to hold the Chief Constable to account for the performance of the complaints system locally. The Commissioner is therefore responsible for handling appeals by members of the public which were previously dealt with by the Chief Constable. These are called complaint reviews and this reform introduced a duty for the Panel to retain oversight of how the Commissioner is delivering this function. Given the enhanced role of the Commissioner, the expectation was that the Panel would see a significant rise in the number of complaints it directly receives against the Commissioner from individuals who are not content with the outcome of their review through a genuine belief that it has been dealt with improperly.

However, this has not been the case and this is likely to be a reflection of the robust and fair handling practices adopted by the OPCC.

Performance Monitoring

National Crime and Policing Measures - Police forces are now ranked in league tables according to their success in cutting serious crime. Forces will be measured according to their effectiveness in combatting six types of crime including homicide, serious violence, the supply of drugs, Neighbourhood crime, cyber crime and improving

satisfaction for victims.

This links to the Specified Information Order which places a duty on PCCs to publish certain information within specified timeframes, to ensure the public have the information they need to hold their Commissioner to account at the ballot box. The Home Office now requires PCCs to provide a narrative on force performance against the Government's crime measures mentioned above, and full performance reports of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services. The Panel was helpfully consulted by the OPCC on the format for the presentation of the performance data and has been receiving reports since December 2021.

New Governance Arrangements –from 5th May 2022, the Commissioner has introduced new governance arrangements which enables the Panel and the public to see him publicly holding the Chief Constable to account to increase public confidence and transparency. This takes place in the form of a Performance and Accountability Board, a public meeting held quarterly via Teams. The Panel welcomes this development, particularly the introduction of a public meeting <https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/news/2022/05/watch-pccs-performance-and-accountability-board-live/>

The Panel will continue to monitor the assurance reports that emerge from the board meetings.

Proactive Scrutiny/Inquiry Day

This work tends to take place outside of the core meeting cycle and provides opportunity for greater insight and inform the broader role of a Panel Member. It can also enable Members to draw on their knowledge and expertise and contribute to the work of the Commissioner in key areas of business.

Serious Violence Inquiry Day

This method of scrutiny strengthens accountability and transparency and enables the full Panel membership to report back to the Commissioner on a key strategic area of business. The purpose of the Inquiry Day on 30th March 2022 was to determine the Commissioner's strategic understanding of serious violence across Avon and Somerset in the context of Domestic Abuse (DA) and Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO). In doing so, the Panel sought to establish:-

- an understanding of the problem, including that of partner organisations and victims
- the plans to remedy the situation, including evidence of best practice
- current gaps in terms of delivery and identified outcomes

The session also sought to provide the Panel with an opportunity to improve their technical knowledge on DA and RASSO in order to articulate a response which relates to high level Priority 1- Preventing and Fighting Crime.

The Commissioner delivered a presentation, together with representatives from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Specialist Officers from the Avon and Somerset Constabulary. The Panel also arranged for the following contributors to attend and provide presentations:-

- Vicky Gleave, Head of the Crown Prosecution Service RASSO Unit
- Sarah O'Leary, CEO at Next Link, Safe Link and Missing Link
- Claire Bloor, CEO at Somerset and Avon Rape and Sexual abuse Support (SARSAS)

The Panel will be sharing its full report in the coming weeks and this will be made available along with its recommendations on the Panel's website.

Integrated Offender Management

The Panel received a detailed report and presentation on Integrated Offender Management (IOM), introduced in 2009 to bring a cross-agency response to crime and

reoffending threats faced by local communities. Its aim was for the most prolific and problematic offenders to be prioritised and jointly managed by Police and the Probation Service with the support of other partner agencies including Local Authorities through the commissioning of services.

Avon and Somerset conducted a Review of IOM in September 2020 followed by a series of recommendations to establish the most effective pathways and intervention, advocating a local approach to IOM at Local Authority level with the Reducing Reoffending Resolve Board (set up in 2018) sitting above for governance purposes.

The Panel was keen to see the variation across the patch and if Panel Members could assist in encouraging improvement.

The Panel was advised that the workforce is central to the successful delivery of probation reform as the service they provide changes the lives of those they support and keeps the public safe. We recommended that a transition to a new probation service presents an opportunity to invest in the workforce, recruit from the under-represented demographics and build a diverse well trained workforce representative of the communities served.

Evidence clearly shows that those who are homeless or reside in temporary accommodation are more likely to reoffend. Accommodation is therefore a cornerstone to reducing reoffending and essential in providing stability and security for individuals leaving prison.

We learnt that the Southwest Regional Homelessness Team currently funds 34 supported housing beds across Avon and Somerset at Julian House for higher complexity cases. Demand is such that the number of beds will increase from 34 to 57 from October 2022. A Bail Accommodation Support Service provides support in Bristol and Approved Premises in Bristol and Bridgwater.

Homelessness Prevention Taskforce Panels are also embedded in all Probation Delivery Units to develop a joint response for those pre-release prisoners identified as at risk of homelessness and to prevent rough sleeping.

As part of the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy, £6.4m has been invested in a pilot scheme to support individuals released from three prisons (including Bristol) and the first individuals are now being supported into accommodation following release. This accommodation pilot is scheduled to conclude in Summer 2022 and, subject to evaluation, it is planned that through the future probation system, the final service specification will be available to the probation service to deliver future accommodation and wrap around support going forward.

It is clear to us that as much as possible should be done in this area and we are very supportive of the prisoner building homes initiative which equips prisoners with valuable skills pre-release and creates essential housing for those who are most in need.

The topic will be considered again in 12 months time to keep updated with progress and to pick up progress regarding pathways in terms of referring into IOM.

Reflections of Panel Members



Having been elected to Bristol City Council in May 2021, my first year as a representative on the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel has been an interesting and enlightening experience.

The power of the Panel is limited to a few specific areas. We are invited to comment on the PCC's draft Police and Crime Plan and have an opportunity to provide input to it before it is finalised. We are also consulted on the annual police precept and have a right to veto the PCC's proposal. We confirm senior appointments within the OPCC and have a right of veto over the appointment of the Chief Constable.

Although the Panel's powers are limited and specific, the Panel does carry influence beyond those powers. In overseeing the work of the PCC, the collective opinion of the Panel does carry weight and is considered by the PCC. The PCC and the Panel have a constructive and mutually respectful relationship.

Panel membership consists of people from across Avon and Somerset (i.e. the historic County of Somerset, plus South Gloucestershire), which is a large and diverse area. Both urban and rural communities are represented. Panel membership consists of elected Councillors from each local authority, together with independent members. The composition of the Councillor membership is based on political proportionality and deliberations of the Panel are always non-partisan and mutually respectful.

Following the election of a new Police and Crime Commissioner in 2021, this Panel has had a very busy year. There have been many senior appointments within the OPCC to consider, as well as the review and approval of the new Police and Crime Plan. The Panel has also approved the appointment of the new Chief Constable.

Panel meetings often include briefings on a variety of relevant topics, including operational matters by senior officers. As an elected Councillor, I have found that these briefings have provided me with a valuable insight into how our communities are policed. This has strengthened the relationship I have with the neighbourhood police team in my ward. I am grateful to the PCC and the Chief Constable who have accepted invitations to visit my ward. Following these meetings I have communicated with my constituents, which has provided reassurance. I have also met the District Commander for South Bristol. I believe my membership of the Panel has helped me to serve my constituents more effectively.

Gary Davies (Independent Member)



I have responsibility on behalf of the Panel for leading on complaints against the Commissioner. A key element in managing complaints is to make the distinction between a legitimate complaint (one which directly relates to the Commissioner’s conduct) and an expression of discontent with Police operational decision making. Sometimes this can be difficult for a complainant to understand and accept.

Complaints can be time-consuming and complex and as a Panel we have been required to make full use of our powers to resolve the complaints that have been brought to our attention. There have been fewer complaints since the Commissioner took office which has created some capacity to review our practice and procedures to ensure a balanced and proportionate response is given based on the nature of the complaint. A commitment has been made to focus on the timeliness of responses to complainants both in updating and concluding the issue raised.

Cllrs Alastair Singelton and Andy Wait (Bath and North East Somerset)



The past year on the Police and Crime Panel has had something of the feel of a phoney war. We have gradually re-emerged from the restrictions of the Covid pandemic, making face-to-face meetings practical again, and this has affected both the feel and culture of the Panel, and the way we operate, and also the way the Police, and indeed the OPCC, have been able to go about their business.

In operating terms, it has felt like a period of great promise. Our new PCC, Mark Shelford, has quickly settled and begun to stamp his style and energy on the role. He has also built his team, and that has brought a lot of confirmatory meetings to our agenda. He calls them his ‘A Team’, and it is hard to disagree – they are impressive and motivated, and should serve our communities well.

In parallel came the confirmation of Sarah Crew as the new Chief Constable. She has impressed us all with her experience, her intellect and her focus. She is a breath of fresh air. Her vision for the future of the constabulary is exciting, and we keenly anticipate seeing her achieve some really good things for the area. The challenges facing the police are as multi-faceted and complex as ever, and the national picture – and particularly elements of it oozing out of London – don’t make matters any easier.

Changes to local government have also impacted the context in which the Panel works. Elections have brought new faces, with the inevitable variation in levels of commitment, and we await news of where our longer term future hosting arrangements may settle.

The year to come looks full of interest. After the phoney war, we expect to see things get back rapidly into gear, with positive progress and fresh initiatives and energy brought to the tasks ahead.

Julie Knight (Independent Member)



I'm one of 3 Independent members on the Police and Crime Panel having been appointed for a 4-year term following application and interview in 2021. I agonised if it was right for a recently retired police officer to apply but truly felt that I had a lot of unique insights to offer given the breadth of my great many roles and responsibilities. These included strategic service improvement and citizen focus - sincerely seeking to place the voice of our communities at the heart of policing. I was also missing the privilege that comes with public service.

I knew the first year would be a busy one. With the new Police and Crime Commissioner comes the statutory duty to issue a Police and Crime Plan. With a number of interim post holders in senior positions in the Office of the PCC and the Chief Constables retirement, this necessitates a number of appointment processes requiring confirmation hearings before the Panel. I was only too happy to get involved in as much as I could to support the Panel in being as effective as possible.

I was overjoyed to be one of two Panel members involved in the Police and Crime Plan Programme Board that oversaw the creation of the Plan. Many of our suggestions were implemented such as a more jargon free Plan. Others were acknowledged like our concerns around the consultation feeling a bit too guided as it was built around the PCCs Manifesto.

I also volunteered to observe three of the five appointment processes and report back to the Panel (Chief Constable, Deputy Chief of Staff and Chief Finance Officer in the Office of the PCC). Again, I genuinely felt that my views were sought with many being implemented, for example, benchmarking clarification that candidates were expected to meet or exceed.

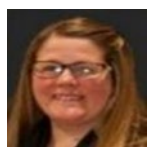
I was also part of a small sub-group that considered and devised the scope of the Panel's Violent Crime Scrutiny day. I've been involved in a number of scrutiny exercises over the years that deeply examined many aspects of policing and led to recommendations but this was very different. It was more of an informative session that probably offered a deeper understanding of its complexity that may have been welcomed by some of my colleagues on the Panel. I sincerely look forward to the follow up day being more about scrutiny. By then, the Police and Crime Plan will more established in policing and other bodies who also hold statutory responsibilities so it will be interesting to explore how the initiatives that were shared are helping to reduce violent crime.

My colleagues on the Panel have a wealth of different expertise and special interests.

I've been truly impressed by the genuine investment of many of our members. Having said that, I strongly believe that the Panel and its purpose would be even better served if every member was as engaged.

This has been an interesting role in a year where all of its functions have been used such as scrutinising the PCC's precepts, plan, conducting confirmation hearings and dealing with complaints. The fact that the Panel was clearly an afterthought in its initial development over a decade ago is evident. Being described as a 'vital role in challenging, scrutinising and supporting each PCC' though little was provided to enable a Panel to do this effectively – an opinion I also share as a resident in this Policing area. I look forward to seeing the outcomes of the current Home Office review in the hope that it will support Panels to add more value to their existing scope on behalf of the people and communities it represents.

Cllr Nicola Clark (South Somerset)



It has been an interesting year as a member on the Police and Crime Panel. As a new member (having joined in May 2021), I've experienced a mix of online, in person, and hybrid meetings. The Panel has met in a number of venues, and I'd like to thank all of the officers involved for their hard work and patience in the facilitation of these.

This year hasn't been without its challenges. A new Police and Crime commissioner was elected in May 2021, and with a new administration, there has come a change of senior leadership positions, many of which have needed confirmatory hearings. As a consequence, the timetable this year has been fairly intense!

I've been impressed with a number of things in my year on the Panel, including the collegiate and non-partisan nature of the members. With a Panel like this, it is important that party politics are left at the door, as we are working for the good of the residents who make up the Avon & Somerset force area.

I was also fortunate enough to be involved in the recruitment process for one of the senior positions (as an independent observer). One of the things that has greatly impressed me about the relationship between the Police and Crime Panel, the OPCC and the PCC, is its commitment to an open, well scrutinised, and transparent recruitment process – a fact that has been incredibly important throughout the year.

As well as this, the Panel have been fortunate enough to have had informative presentations from serving Police officers, and from OPCC members. As a layperson, these are incredibly useful in making sure that Panel members have sufficient contextual knowledge in order to properly scrutinise the work of the PCC, and I'd like to pass on my thanks to everyone who took their time to do this for the Panel.

I am grateful to be a part of the Panel, and to the other members of the Panel for making this year a valid and constructive one.

Challenges ahead and looking to the future

Work Programme

As the Commissioner's primary "checks and balance" in between elections, the Panel is aware of its important role in challenging and supporting the Commissioner on your behalf. Our shared objective for the future is to influence and impact positively on the decisions that matter.

The Panel has a work programme that is reviewed every 4-6 weeks as part of the agenda planning process with the Commissioner. As would be expected the programme covers the statutory responsibilities of the Panel, alongside other key issues which the Panel wish to scrutinise. The Chief Constable also attends Panel at least once each year to provide an update on key issues.

Below are some of the work areas the Panel will be reviewing as part of our Work Programme for 2022/23:-

- Review of the Commissioner's Annual Report
- Scrutiny of meaningful performance reports and data
- Presentation on Identifying Disproportionality in the Avon and Somerset Criminal Justice System
- Monitoring of the strategy to recruit, retain and lead a workforce which reflects the communities it serves
- Consideration of formal reports on Rural Crime and the Green Strategy
- Scrutiny of the Commissioner's Precept proposal and oversight of the draft Policing budget and its proposed allocation
- Panel Inquiry Day on the OPCC role in commissioning and partnerships

Home Secretary Review

The first stage of the Home Secretary's review of Police and Crime Commissioners, looked specifically at raising standards and improving accountability to ensure all members of the public are getting a good service. The second part of the review focussed on longer-term reform, assessing what extra powers PCCs need to better tackle crime in their areas and how to increase the number of mayors with responsibility for Policing.

In March 2022, the Home Secretary announced a package of measures in support of the commitment to expand and strengthen the role of PCCs, including the findings from the second part of the review <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2022-03-07/hcws664>

The Home Office has worked with the LGA to develop a governance training package for Police and Crime Panels and this is welcomed. However without increased funding, the ability of Panels to keep pace with PCC functions and responsibilities and carry out the appropriate scrutiny will continue to be a challenge.

Fire Governance

Some PCCs have taken on the governance of their local Fire and Rescue Service and as a result, the Panels in those areas have become Police Fire and Crime Panels.

There are two routes for a PCC to have a direct role in the governance of fire and rescue services – either by taking on one of two governance models available or by taking a voting seat on the existing fire authorities. Avon Fire Authority and Devon and Somerset Fire Authority are the two services that fall within the Avon and Somerset force area. However Devon and Somerset Fire Authority also covers an area that falls under the jurisdiction of another PCC. Essentially, this means that the service boundaries are not coterminous with the Avon and Somerset force area and this would need to be resolved before the PCC could make a business case for taking over the governance of the FA if he was inclined to pursue this.

The Home Secretary had intended to consult on making the transfer of fire and rescue functions to the “Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner model” obligatory where boundaries are coterminous, unless there is an option to transfer fire governance directly to an elected Mayor. It was understood that the review would also seek to address the specific coterminosity challenges in the South West referred to above.

However, the white paper has recently been published and the Government is no longer making mandatory changes to fire governance. This suggests a recognition that improvement within the sector and communities will be more successful if local councils and fire services are empowered to decide what their local governance structure will be.

Accordingly, consultation has started on proposals to introduce system-wide reform that will strengthen fire and rescue services in England involving a range of governance models. Plans to replace fire governance with a system of single executive leaders, Police

Fire and Crime Panels, Mayors and Local Authority Leaders have all been mooted as possibilities.

The Commissioner will be updating members at the Panel's AGM on 28th June 2022 and the Panel will also be responding to the consultation. Fire governance will remain a standing item at Panel meetings.

Draft:June 2022