



Minutes of the Avon and Somerset Police & Crime Panel 8th December 2022 at 11.15am

Mendip Council Chamber

Present:

Local Authority and Independent Member Representatives:

Heather Shearer (Somerset County, Chair), Richard Brown (Independent Member), Asher Craig (Bristol City Council), Gary Davies (Independent Member), Jonathan Hucker (Bristol City Council), Janet Keen (Sedgemoor District Council), Julie Knight (Independent Member), Alastair Singleton (Bath and North East Somerset), Andy Wait (Bath and North East Somerset).

Host Authority support staff:

Jamie Jackson – Service Manager, Democratic Services

Police and Crime Commissioner and Constabulary/Support Staff:

Mark Shelford – Police and Crime Commissioner

Alice Ripley – Chief of Staff

Paul Butler – Chief Financial Officer

Ben Valentine – Senior Performance and Governance Manager

Jo Coulon – Scrutiny and Performance Manager

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Richard Westwood, Lisa Stone, Peter Crew, Franklin Owusu-Antwi, Pat Trull, Nicola Clark and Chris Booth.

2. Public Question Time

None.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

4. Minutes of the meetings held on 28th September 2022

The minutes of the meeting was confirmed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Cllr Hucker's apologies which were provided for this meeting.

5. Matters Arising

The Panel thanked officers for the information provided on the use of fleet vehicles, however further data was requested to be provided at a subsequent meeting containing estimates as to the split between usage and consumption of diesel, petrol and electric vehicles.

Action - Commissioner to provide a report to a future meeting of the Panel.

6. Chair's business

Host Authority

The Chair advised the Panel that following discussions with Somerset County Council's Monitoring Officer, she could confirm that there will now be no change to the Host Authority before the elections of 2024, which provides welcome stability to both the Panel and officers connected to it.

Annual Conference

The Panel was updated about the recent national conference, which was an excellent networking opportunity as 38 areas were represented and attendees were provided with an excellent data pack. It was reported that many Panels are currently struggling with the realities of national party politics and there is likely to be considerable fallout following the recent Everard report and the 15 recommendations contained within. Additional issues raised in the workshop sessions included performance data and a lack of understanding, the option of having named substitutes at meetings and exit interviews for co-opted members

Action – Lead officer for the Panel to discuss with the Chair and Vice Chair possible ways of taking forward named substitutes for the Panel.

7. Commissioner's Update Report

The Commissioner gave an introduction to the report. Attention was drawn to the following areas:

- New scrutiny arrangements are in place and currently under review, with more televised opportunities but for a shorter time, roughly 20-30 minutes, once per month. Members were encouraged to join the live quarterly Performance and Accountability Board meetings. These are recorded and available to view following the event
- In terms of public confidence, new questions are to be added into the precept survey and also a volunteer recruitment campaign has been launched. Panel members were requested to publicise the campaign wherever possible.
- Councillor forum events have commenced, with 4 taking place so far. Panel members were encouraged to recommend fellow councillors take part in these events.
- Engagement with young people: it will take time to fix issues however positive progress has been made and the knife crime survey results have been very encouraging.
- In terms of reducing reoffending, there are ongoing discussions with partners regarding to reinvigorate the multi-agency Resolve Board.
- A recent Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) review looked into the 'nuts and bolts' of its operations to ensure greater effectiveness. 80% of people going to prison have been in prison previously. Prevention work focused on that 80% and therefore becomes absolutely key.
- A recognised issue is families dealing with addiction issues. Gloucestershire has a 12-week process in place which is proving very beneficial at keeping families together, preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences and achieving financial savings for the Local Authority, which can be as much as £100k per child per year.

Below is a summary of the questions and issues raised by the Panel:-

- The Panel welcomed the engagement with young people and see it as being absolutely critical and highlighted the work of the Local Neighbourhood Teams.
- The Panel questioned the public confidence data that shows a fall from 86% 10 years ago to around 68% now. Panel members were pleased it has been identified as an area to be addressed and requested an update on plans to address this.

- Panel members drew attention to LCJB website being out of date; the Panel was advised this would be addressed imminently and that they would be notified when done.
- The Panel requested an overview of the role of British Transport Police, and specifically their responsibilities in the context of County Lines issues.

Action:

(1) PCC to invite local British Transport Police leads to attend and speak to the Panel on their roles and specifically priorities in the context of County Lines.

(2) Panel to be notified when the LCJB website is updated.

8. Budget Process Update

The report was presented by Paul Butler.

The Panel was advised that this was a sensitive report, with important financial implications. A combination of global events, austerity, and increase in the cost of living should be seen as the context for this report. The Panel heard that the assumptions made were as accurate as they could be at this time, although clearly they are subject to change and there remained a considerable degree of uncertainty.

The funding settlement was expected later in December and the draft budget presented assumed a £10 precept increase for each of the next 2 years, followed by a 2% increase. The deficit for next year currently stood at £4.8million; this was lower than the £6.5m stated at the budget briefing, the disparity due to a one-off use of reserves. As a result, the predicted deficit at the end of the Medium Term Financial Plan period would be close to £19million. In terms of the Capital Plan, the report showed two years of balanced spend and then deficits from 25/26 onwards.

Below are the principal points made by members in the discussion that followed:-

- Recruitment targets have been met – 456 new officers, taking the total to just below 3,300 and although there is a national issue of recruitment/retention, the vacancy rate has dropped from 5% to 3%.
- The Panel was advised that there is a £6-7 million underspend forecast for this year, along with an £800k rate rebate. The Panel understood that this was the result of delays in filling vacancies.

- The figures assumed the revenue grant remains the same, however the Panel noted that the pay award has not been funded separately and would need to be found within existing budgets. Council Tax was 31% of the budget in 2009/10, however by the end of this proposed MTFP, that will have risen to a proportion of around 43%.
- The Panel queried the assumption figures used for general inflation at 4% dropping to 2% thereafter. It was confirmed that these are national figures used by all Forces to ensure consistency.
- It was confirmed that reserves will need to be used alongside a savings plan. There will be an impact on staffing due to the scale of savings required. Efficiencies and use of technology will be maximised. It was acknowledged that uncomfortable decisions would have to be made, however this also brings the opportunity for transformation.
- Looking to achieve a balanced budget and aspirations was the focus, but reserves would be utilised in the next year on top of the savings plan if absolutely required. Inflation predictions are realistic and utility bills had risen by around 30%, which was actually considerably less than some regional colleagues.
- The Capital Programme would contain an increasing rotation of IT equipment and in the future, a consideration of harmonisation of buildings.
- In terms of next steps the Spending Review Assessment was due, providing confirmation of the tax base and possible share of any surplus deficits. The Commissioner will meet with the Chief Constable to discuss how to address issues and to agree a suitable strategic plan. Decisions would not be rushed and although consideration would be given to estate rationalisation, that alone would not close the deficit gap.
- Regional work with partners to improve efficiency remained on-going and the OPCC was fully engaged with the on-going formula review.

Councillor Craig left the meeting at this point.

9. OPCC Review Report

Alice Ripley, Chief of Staff, introduced the report and provided a detailed presentation to the Panel. This included the comparison of the previous structure against the new structure and the drivers for the approach and decisions. The Panel noted the following key points:-

- First review since the establishment of the OPCC in 2012, a key objective for the new Chief of Staff role.
- Review took into account the Commissioner's obligations emerging from his national portfolio role, the Police and Crime Plan and the statutory functions of the OPCC.

The Panel made the following comments in the discussion that followed:-

- A marked increase in posts was evident in the new structure. This was understood to reflect the increased responsibilities and expectations placed on the OPCC.
- The Panel requested clarification of the costs associated with the revised structure and an understanding of which posts were new and which are full and part time.
- The Panel heard that all roles had been recruited to and 2 roles had been deleted, while 4 new permanent roles and 2.5 fixed term roles had been created. The Panel welcomed confirmation that the new structure had been benchmarked against other OPCCs across the country and it came out favourably.
- The Panel sought clarification on both whether the structure was now live and the staff consultation complete. After confirmation on both areas, the Panel was advised of the development of a People Plan. Alice Ripley confirmed to the Panel that initially some staff felt very anxious about the restructure, however staff did accept there was a philosophical reason for it to be done in order to achieve the ambitious, creative and happy work environment where they could develop.

Action:

- 1) Business Plan, which is not currently in public domain, to be shared with the Panel.**
- 2) Alice Ripley to provide a summary slide of the new structure, including detail of the costings of roles and full-time equivalence, and circulate this to the Panel.**

10. Performance Report

The Commissioner introduced the report and drew specific attention to:-

- ASC Homicide figures are alarming as evidenced by the last 3 months' worth of data. The national homicide rate has reverted to normal levels and there are no particular connections or themes as to why Avon and Somerset's rates are so high at present.
- In terms of Burglary, victim satisfaction rate are not always reflective of a positive outcome in terms of detection, and are often based on the level and quality of liaison and communication with the victim.

Below is a summary of the discussion points that followed:-

- Public confidence and customer satisfaction both now showing a decline - at what point would the Commissioner take further action and what would that be?
- The Panel was assured that Operation Bluestone and this policing approach will continue irrespective of any budget or personnel changes. Attending training and formulating appropriate casefiles in order to maximise the success of a case proceeding, once referred to the Crown Prosecution Service, were highlighted by the Commissioner as an absolute priority.

Richard Brown left the meeting at this point in the discussion.

11. Standing Complaint Report

The Panel noted the report.

12. Engagement Assurance Report (Information Only)

The Panel noted the report and any specific questions to be emailed to Alice Ripley or Joanna Coulon.

13. Date of Next Meeting

1st February 2023 at 10.30am. It was noted that this meeting will take place at Deane House.

(The meeting ended at 2:30pm.)