



Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel

1st February 2023, 10:30am

The Deane House, Somerset West and Taunton Council

Present:

Local Authority and Independent Member Representatives:

Cllr Heather Shearer (Somerset County Council, Chair), Cllr Chris Booth (Somerset West and Taunton Council), Cllr Nicola Clark (South Somerset District Council), Cllr Asher Craig (Bristol City Council), Cllr Peter Crew (North Somerset Council), Gary Davies (Independent Panel Member), Cllr Jonathan Hucker (Bristol City Council), Cllr Janet Keen (Sedgemoor District Council), Julie Knight (Independent Member), Cllr Franklin Owusu-Antwi (South Gloucestershire Council), Cllr Pat Trull (South Gloucestershire Council)

Host Authority Support Staff:

Patricia Jones – Lead Officer
Pippa Triffitt – Committee Clerk
Scott Wooldridge – Monitoring Officer (MO)

Police and Crime Commissioner and Support Staff:

Mark Shelford – Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)
Alice Ripley – Chief of Staff
Sarah Crew – Chief Constable
Paul Butler – Chief Finance Officer (CFO)
Joanna Coulon – Scrutiny and Performance Manager
Niamh Byrne – Head of Communications and Engagement
James Turner – Chief Constable's Staff Officer

1. Apologies for absence

Cllr Richard Westwood (North Somerset Council, Vice Chair)
Richard Brown (Independent Member)
Cllr Alastair Singleton (Bath and North East Somerset Council)
Cllr Lisa Stone (Bristol City Council)

Cllr Andy Wait (Bath and North East Somerset Council)

2. Public Question Time

None received.

3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2022

The minutes were approved as a correct record subject to insertion of the following paragraphs to replace the text set out under Chair's Business and Annual Conference at page 2 of the minutes:-

"The Panel was updated about the recent national conference, which was an excellent networking opportunity as 38 areas were represented. The theme was 'Changing Culture. Moving things forward'. One of the key speakers was from the Independent Office for Police Conduct who authored the [Toxic Cultures Report](#).

This contains 15 recommendations for the Metropolitan Police Service to change policing practice following evidence of discrimination, misogyny, harassment and bullying. Issues and matters raised in the workshop sessions included the lack of performance data to support scrutiny in other areas, induction packs for new members, having named substitutes for Councillors at meetings and exit interviews for co-opted members."

5. Matters Arising

A response to actions had been circulated to Panel Members in advance of the meeting.

The Commissioner introduced the report and updated the Panel on a recent meeting with former ASC chief Constable Andy Marsh. He reported he was encouraged by discussions around leadership, recruitment, immersion training and culture.

6. Chair's Business

None.

7. Host Authority and Panel Costs Report

The Chair invited Scott Wooldridge as Monitoring Officer (MO) for the Host Authority to present the report.

The MO introduced the item by reminding the Panel that Somerset County Council (SCC) had been the Host Authority for the Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Panel since 2017. SCC was now seven weeks away from vesting day and becoming a Unitary authority and was in a good position to offer a withdrawal of its resignation as Host Authority. It was now proposed that the present arrangements were maintained until at least summer 2025.

The Panel asked whether there would be a notice period ahead of summer 2025 if the arrangements were due to change. The MO proposed a notice period of twelve months to allow for discussions to take place between the SCC, the Panel and the constituent authorities

The Panel welcomed the news and requested that the members were sent letters with the official notification confirming the arrangement.

Action: Panel Members to be sent official notification letters confirming the Host Authority arrangement.

8. Chief Constable Presentation

The Chair invited Sarah Crew as Chief Constable to present the item.

The Chief Constable introduced the presentation which focused on addressing police culture and the lack of public confidence in the force. She reminded the Panel that the Police and Crime Plan outlined the force's vision of outstanding policing but acknowledged that elements such as changing technology and public expectations would affect the definition of outstanding policing over time. Whilst the force was focused on what could be achieved over the next five years, it also accepted that it would take time to rebuild public confidence and trust in the organisation, and recent events showed the scale of this challenge. The effect of inflation on finances at the organisational level added to the turbulence they were experiencing; it also affected the number of cases of domestic abuse, social unrest and protests the force was handling.

The Chief Constable gave an update on the six areas of focus outlined during her last presentation to the Panel:

1. **Achieve the uplift** – the force was on track to achieve its target of 3,291 officers by the end of March 2023. They would temporarily exceed the target by 80 officers with financial support from the Home Office, which would help to realise the national target of 20,000 officers. The funding to support these extra officers was expected to come to £1.6 million. Since April 2019, 1,500 new officers had joined the force. Around 1,000 of these had joined through the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship and another 300 from the degree holder entry programme, both of which were new programmes as of 2019.
2. **Rebuild investigations** – it was a prevailing challenge to recruit detectives as building the capability was a lengthy process. The direct entry programme for degree holders was used to introduce officers into investigations on a fast-track route. There was also a new entry route by which trained police investigators became detective constables over an 8-week period; Avon & Somerset were the first force in the country to introduce this scheme. The CID branch experienced a 31% growth in numbers, with numbers increasing by 116. 63 new student officers graduating as accredited detectives in the first 6 months of 2022/23. There were 100 more officers and 12 more investigators dedicated to Operation Bluestone, focusing on sexual violence/perpetrator behaviour. 100% of all cyber-dependent crime was investigated and all cyber victims were provided with advice to prevent further incidents.
3. **Manage growing pains** – only 200 of the 1,500 new officers since April 2019 had graduated and they would be deployed into the constabulary. Others would be ready in the coming months and others would filter through after graduation; this trend would continue over the next two years. The force was simultaneously managing the daily demands of policing. The force needed to be grown sustainably; it took time for the recruits to learn and get experience. The growth plans were ambitious and the risks needed to be managed carefully. The quality of the graduates, however, remained high.
4. **Lead culture change** – they had not shied away from having the difficult conversations that were required to change the policing culture. The staff needed to feel safe and supported whilst retaining the trust and confidence of the community. The standards were made clear and inappropriate behaviour was challenged. During the internal Race Matters Week, 350 officers attended the sessions and 83% stated they felt better informed as a result.

5. **Develop our leaders** – the leadership academy was crucial for providing the skills required for leadership. The digital platform for the academy was enhanced throughout the year. Over a series of seven events, 800 leaders came together to explore the meaning of outstanding leadership in policing. The force was also investing in executive leadership; an additional chief officer had been employed as part of the uplift.
6. **Create capacity** – the force was continuing to grow its capacity and efficiency using data. Robotics were used for routine issues so staff could contribute to more high-value tasks. New Enterprise Resource Planning systems were due in April 2024. There were also plans to reduce the time it took to redact audio, video, and written evidence to help speed up investigations and release staff.

Other key points made during the presentation are summarised below:

- In terms of the scorecard, 'feelings of safety' under Priority 2 was highlighted red. The data itself had started to improve, but feelings of safety at night had fallen significantly since 2021, particularly from women.
- Another red element was the issue of disproportionality under Priority 4, which was linked to feelings of safety in the community. The Chief Constable was leading on Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) nationally, which was important for the culture change. This change was decades in the making and it would take between 3 and 5 years to make in-roads due to the size of the issue. The force was expecting incidents along the way that could continue to threaten the confidence and trust in policing.
- Public confidence was critical, particularly when recent events revealed the unfortunate conduct of some police officers. A report on conduct and misogyny within the police was published last autumn as a response to the Sarah Everard case. Avon & Somerset had long been having these conversations regarding investment in vetting and investigative procedures. In the light of a series of recommendations for improvement post the Couzens and Carrick cases, the Home Office had contacted all constabularies for a progress report. The Chief Constable advised the Panel that much of the work was already in train, and as a result, the Constabulary was well placed to meet the recommendations by the stated deadline.
- There would be challenges to face in reaching the end of the 5-year plan, particularly in the first 18 months. The chief officers would have to focus on the growth and its outcomes whilst managing the daily delivery of policing activities. In April, five strategic imperatives would be launched to

create the conditions for success; these were: inclusion, innovation, perpetrator focus, trauma informed, and transparency.

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- Preventing crime and disorder was at the heart of the 5-year plan, but the force was struggling to deal with the influx of demand on its time and resources. The focus on perpetrators was crucial in encouraging early intervention and deterrence. The force was committed to forming and maintaining its partnerships to help with this, such as those with education and health organisations. The sharing of intelligence between them was vital to catching convicts when active. Partnerships also had a part to play in rehabilitation.
- The changed financial landscape of recent months was bringing turbulence to the force's plans and this was due to worsen. The cost-of-living crisis was already impacting the staff and public. The force had a strong track record of absorbing financial stresses, but the scale of this challenge was too great for the standard approach to be maintained. The force required more in terms of savings and funding. Use of reserves was necessary to balance the budget and ensure the delivery of the uplift targets. Savings needed to be released as much as possible in 2023/4 to establish confidence in their 5-year plan going forward. Savings of £3 million had already been identified through procurement savings but this would not go far enough.
- Even with the maximum increase in the precept, there would still be a £3.4 million deficit in 2023/4 and this would rise further over the medium term. Staff numbers would still need to be reduced, primarily in operational areas. There was likely to be a reduction in police staff posts of 250 by the end of March 2025, which was a reduction of more than 8%. Redundancies were a possibility.
- Police officer numbers were protected, therefore Police staff numbers could be impacted. The force needed to revisit the allocations to ensure they had the correct mix to deliver their ambitions and balance the books. The Chief Constable intended to work with partners to ensure the right public services responded to public enquiries so the load was shared between the services. Whilst she recognised the challenges faced by the public during these difficult times, this sympathy needed to be balanced against her responsibility to provide the best policing service. The force's ambitions would need to be reduced if sufficient funding was not in place, which the public likely would not want or deserve.

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

- The Panel requested clarification on the status of the officers recruited for the uplift, whether the extra 80 taken on were all fully qualified, and whether they were on temporary or permanent contracts. The Chief Constable confirmed the officers were permanent members of the force, and that the extra 80 were the same as those recruited during the original uplift and had the same employment conditions.
- The Panel expressed their frustration that it took the Wayne Couzens and David Carrick cases to highlight toxic work cultures within the service and long-standing criminal behaviour of some serving Police officers.
- The Panel enquired into the work that was being done to improve retention rates. The Chief Constable stated that much discussion was taking place regarding retention and reassured the Panel that the attrition rate was being monitored closely. A recent survey showed that over 90% of graduates saw themselves as having a long-term future in the police force.
- The Panel asked whether the 100 extra officers assigned to Operation Bluestone had improved the prosecution rate. The Chief Constable stated that not all the assigned officers had qualified yet, but there were some very strong indicators of change. The charge rates before Bluestone stood at 3% and were now 8%, and up to 10% in the last quarter of last year. 24 out of 25 victims have said they would encourage a friend to report rape to the force if it happened to them.
- The Panel acknowledged that disproportionality presented a constant challenge and appreciated the difficulty in improving this.
- The Panel asked whether there had been any progress on targeting criminal damage in terms of graffiti and tagging on public and private property in Bristol. The Chief Constable stated that a multi-agency partnership was the approach used in Bristol to deal with this. Whilst policing had its role, it required support from its partners in highways for example. The policing aspect focused on the investigation and the intelligence to catch criminals in the act. The long-term approach was to build cases on repeat taggers so they could be charged with damages of over £5,000 as this allowed for tougher sentencing. There was a lot of proactive monitoring in place once the property had been restored. The main difficulties lay in identifying the perpetrators.

- The Panel noted the decline in confidence in the force amongst the public and informed the Chief Constable that there had been many occasions where phone calls from members of the public had not been responded to by the police. It was also difficult to contact the local PCSOs personally. The Chief Constable acknowledged that police customer service was vital to improving public confidence in the force. The force previously had a good track record in answering calls, but there had been a huge upsurge in 999 calls over the last year; the force's good track record meant that calls from neighbouring districts struggling to cope were diverted to Avon & Somerset. Automation and system changes had been put in place, but they were continuing to work hard to get back to where they were in terms of customer service. The Chief Constable stated she would personally investigate the lack of response in South Gloucestershire.
- Noting that a local police database already exists, and that the Police National Database would not be available any time soon, the Panel sought clarification of the legal guidance and permissions needed for a national database?

The Chief Constable clarified they had a police national computer and a police national database; the database was used for intelligence purposes and Avon & Somerset had access to this. Both were due to be upgraded to bring the two together in an update from the Home Office, but this has been delayed. The force used the Niche Technology Intelligence System to manage its records, and this was active in 29 forces across England and Wales. Over the last 6 months, the Chief Constable had become the national lead for Niche forces to work with its provider to join the databases of the South West together.

- The Panel suggested the best success criteria for the police service is catching criminals and preventing crime, but in some police aspirational documentation this appears not to be the case. The Chief Constable reminded the Panel that policing operated by consent, and the force required consent for gathering intelligence and progressing investigations to the next step level. However, the force needed to create the right environment to receive this consent as it was not always trusted at present.
- The Panel asked whether the local specialist neighbourhood teams would be fully operational with all the new staff recruited. The Chief Constable stated that police officer numbers were ringfenced and this would not

change. There did, however, need to be a local remedy. Given the financial situation, the force needed to go back and look at the ambitions set out to see what could be done.

- The Panel suggested the police had been resilient in the face of dipping public confidence in previous years, but the current movement seemed more profound and attracted more media involvement. The Chief Constable acknowledged the bond of trust was close to breaking point and stated the force was aware of this. There was also the issue of low morale within the force under such circumstances.
- The Panel asked whether there was a defined pro-active strategy in place over the next 12 months which promoted the force's positive work, its achievements, and its bravery that could help counteract the negative publicity. The Chief Constable informed the Panel that they were investing in the Senior Leadership Team by adding an additional director and also investing in their communications team; these investments were focused on publicly awarding recognition to its force members. Public award events were more common pre-Covid, but there were plans to revive them to show the good works of the force.
- The Panel asked how the cost-of-living crisis, the reduction in staff members, and the lack of public confidence were affecting the workforce. The Chief Constable acknowledged that their resilience was being tested under the stress and strain of the circumstances. During the pandemic, they were given extra time to spend with their families as a recognition of their hard work. The Chief Constable had maintained her connections with her fellow leaders through the seven leadership events and conducted surprise tours on New Year's Eve. As far as she could ascertain, the morale was as good as it could be given the situation.

The Chair thanked the Panel for their questions and the Chief Constable for her answers, acknowledging the difficulties of carrying out the uplift alongside the daily policing duties and an ambitious Police and Crime Plan.

Action: Panel to be updated on PCSO contact issue raised at the meeting.

9. Formal Scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial Plan and Precept Proposal

The Chair invited the Commissioner (PCC) and Paul Butler Chief Finance Officer (CFO) to present the report.

The PCC informed the Panel that the report had been compiled over the course of several months with due consideration of the challenges the public were facing. The PCC acknowledged the position the local authorities were in and realised that the increased Precept was a big ask on the residents, and duly thanked the Panel for its diligence and support throughout the process.

The CFO introduced the report. A summary of the key points follows:

- The CFO reminded the Panel that the background to the MTFP was covered at the PCP meeting in December. It mapped out the increased performance expectations over a 5-year period until 2027/8. It confirmed that Avon & Somerset would achieve the agreed uplift of 456 additional officers plus the extra 80, the latter bringing an additional £1.6 million from central government.
- The Commissioner's proposal was for a precept of £156.166 million.
- The national context for the budget was set in 2021 by central government's 3-year spending review. PCCs were permitted to increase the average Band D council tax by up to £10 a year for the following three years. The provisional police settlement of December 2022 saw this revised to £15 for 2023. In doing so, the Home Secretary stated there would be a focus on the delivery of the uplift numbers whilst improving productivity and efficiency.
- The government funding package provided additional funding to increase investment by up to £523 million in 2023/4, but this assumed that the PCC utilised the maximum precept increase of £15.
- There would be an increase in core grant funding of 1.8% in 2023/4, with the balance of the increase being related to the uplift. There would be a 7% increase in council tax funding if all the PCCs increased the precept by £15.
- Whilst the settlement was expected to fund the full delivery of the uplift, the police service was expected to continue to realise efficiencies, including savings of £100m per year from force budgets by 2024/5.
- The increase in the precept was required to deliver on the six factors the Chief Constable outlined and the ambitious Police and Crime Plan. The force was aware they needed to sustainably maintain the increase in officer numbers and that the cost of these officers would increase over time.

- In 2009, council tax in Avon and Somerset made up 31% of the total funding; with this increase, it would make up 41%, increasing to 44% in 2027/28.
- The core grant funding for 2023/4 had been increased by £700,000 (0.3%). There would still be a deficit of £3.4 million for this financial year.
- By the end of the MTFP, they planned to have savings of £90 million and the potential for a reduction of 250 staff posts. They had provided for an increase in inflationary pressures, the uplift, growth within the force, investments, and the costs of partnerships, to come up with the most realistic revenue position possible. There would still be unknown quantities to tackle, such as pension increases over time.
- There was an expected shortfall of £6.5 million in the capital plan funding across 2026/7 and 2027/8.
- One key area of capital investment was that of corporate systems; the plan included an estimate of £8.5 million to replace the current system. This was due to go live in April 2024 and would cultivate savings of £1 million a year.
- The main financial risk was that pay inflation was difficult to predict. Other issues related to risk included pensions, national IT programmes, and the expectations of savings within the national context.
- A risk assessment of the budget had been conducted as it had to be sustainable. The CFO was satisfied with where they were in terms of identified savings.
- It was recommended that the Police and Crime Panel accepted and endorsed the council tax precept proposal made by the PCC of increasing the council tax of an average Band D equivalent dwelling by £15.

The Chair thanked the CFO for the report and invited the Panel to ask any questions they had. A summary of the ensuing discussion followed:

- The Panel requested updates from the meetings that discussed issues regarding balancing the budget, to enable the Panel to make an assessment throughout the year of the effectiveness of the investment/budget, to which the CFO agreed. The PCC highlighted that once reserves were spent, they could not be retrieved. If they were going

to be spent, it needed to be on improving processes and making further savings.

- The Panel raised concerns regarding the survey conducted which indicated the public expected central government to contribute more to the force's funding instead of themselves. The PCC stated the results of the survey were finely balanced. When speaking with the public, the overwhelming demand was for more visible policing, which required more funding to achieve.
- The Panel suggested that despite the survey results being close, responses were higher in some areas than others and there is a need to review opportunities to improve the reach and response rate in under-represented areas. The Panel requested a breakdown of results by geographic area moving forward. The OPCC agreed and assured the Panel that improvements were already being planned and Bristol would be a centre of focus going forward in terms of improving public confidence.
- The Panel highlighted the small 1.8% increase in grant funding and asked how this compared with the assumption the OPCC were working on before the amount was announced. The CFO stated the increase was broadly in line their assumption.
- The Panel welcomed the plan for the ongoing replacement of the fleet vehicles and asked how Avon & Somerset compared with its neighbouring forces. The Chief Constable informed the Panel that most of the fleet was purchased through national procurement, and they were currently experiencing supply chain issues. The CFO added that the a number of manufacturers were withdrawing from the market for provision of police vehicles.

The Commissioner, Chief Constable and OPCC staff briefly withdrew from the meeting and re-joined the meeting for the Panel's decision. 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 £15.00 per annum in 2023/24 for an average Band D property (11 members voting in favour). The Chair advised the Commissioner that the Panel's report would contain a number of recommendations for his attention.

The PCC thanked the Panel for their diligence in scrutinising the report and stated he looked forward to seeing the recommendations. The OPCC would also be producing a flyer to be inserted into the residents' council tax bills to show

how the budget was being spent; he requested the Panel members ensured their authorities carried this task out.

Action:

(1) Update on proposed improvements to the survey process discussed at the meeting, a summary of the final survey results/analysis and a breakdown of the results requested around individual LA responses.

(2) Financial updates requested to enable the Panel to make an assessment throughout the year of the effectiveness of the investment/budget

10. Commissioner's Update

The Chair invited the PCC to provide an update. The key points were as follows:

- The PCC recognised the David Carrick case cast a shadow over policing nationally due to the failure of the vetting process. Whereas risk-averse action was frustrating in other areas, vetting should always be risk-averse. It was a process that should be repeated when individuals applied for new jobs and switched between forces.
- The vetting process was a common topic in discussions between the PCC and Chief Constable. There would be a meeting of the Public Performance and Accountability board on 7th February, during which the PCC would be asking the Chief Constable questions on this topic. Vetting inspections and boards such as this showed the PCC was holding the Chief Constable to account in delivering the Police and Crime Plan. Going forward these meetings would be monthly and last for half an hour; these changes were made in response to feedback from the staff and public.
- The PCC discussed the ongoing recruitment of volunteers, of which the force currently had 15. Some of these had already gone through the vetting process. The quality of the candidates had proved to be very high.
- The force had its first meeting to build partnerships between local authority trading standards teams in its effort to tackle economic and cybercrime. The PCC led a national session on fraud using Avon & Somerset as an example of best practice when tackling fraud. The PCC asked Panel members to disseminate the web address www.haveibeenpwned.com to assist the force's efforts.

The Chair thanked the PCC for the update and invited the Panel to ask any questions they had. A summary of the ensuing discussion follows:

- The Panel requested the video links and forward dates that would enable them to watch the Performance and Accountability Board public meetings held by the PCC with the Chief Constable.
- The Panel asked whether there were any social media graphics available related to the land provided by Bristol for pods in the city.
- The Panel mentioned its concerns about the rising trend nationally of money-lending activities and asked whether this was a particular concern in Avon & Somerset. The PCC stated he did not have figures available with regards to this area but believed that 1.6 million people nationally were in debt to money lenders.
- The Panel asked whether there was a timeline around the programme tackling disproportionality. The PCC stated that there had been frustrations at the pace of delivery however a programme team and delivery plan were being put in place and each recommendation did have a named person attached to assist with accountability.
- The Panel suggested the OPCC ask Somerset VRU to investigate the impact of Somerset's high level of school exclusions, and asked to be kept updated about changes to out of court disposals in particular what this means for domestic abuse cases.

Action: Video links/forward dates to enable members to watch the Performance and Accountability Board public meetings held by the PCC with the Chief Constable to be circulated.

11. Standing Complaints Report

The Chair invited Alice Ripley as Chief of Staff to present the report.

The Chief of Staff informed the Panel that the OPCC was currently transitioning between database systems, and the performance information was not currently available. Normal service would be resumed shortly, and the Panel members would receive the regular report on complaints going forward.

At this point in time, there was one further complaint against the PCC which was displayed in the table circulated in the agenda.

12. Date of Next Meeting

29th March 2023 at 10.30am at the Deane House, Taunton.