Minutes of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel
Thursday 1st February 2024, 10.30am
John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE

Present:

Local Authority and Independent Member Representatives:

Councillor Andy Wait (Bath and North-East Somerset), Councillor Ann Morgan (Bath and North-East Somerset), Councillor Asher Craig (Bristol City Council), Councillor Jonathan Hucker (Bristol City Council), Gary Davies (Independent Member), Julie Knight (Independent Member), Richard Brown (Independent Member), Councillor Peter Crew (North Somerset Council), Councillor Stuart Davies (North Somerset Council), Councillor Brian Bolt (Somerset Council), Councillor Heather Shearer (Somerset Council and Chair), Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Somerset Council), Councillor Martin Wale (Somerset Council), Councillor Nicola Clark (Somerset Council), Councillor Raj Sood (South Gloucestershire Council), Councillor John Bradbury (South Gloucestershire Council)

Host Authority Officers Present:

Patricia Jones	Panel Lead Officer
Pippa Triffitt	Clerk/Democratic Services Officer
Joshua Barrett	Senior Democratic Services Officer

Police and Crime Commissioner and Support Staff:

Mark Shelford	Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)
Sarah Crew	Chief Constable (CC)
Jon Reilly	Deputy Chief Constable (DCC)
Alice Ripley	Chief of Staff
Paul Butler	Chief Financial Officer (CFO)
Inspector Stuart King	Commissioner's Staff Officer
Joanna Coulon	Scrutiny and Performance Manager
Ben Valentine	Senior Performance and Governance Manager
Neil Bennett	Director of Communications and Engagement
Niamh Byrne	Head of Communications and Engagement

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lisa Stone.

2. Public Question Time

The Chair drew attention to the statement and questions submitted by Mr Colin Barker and Mr David Redgewell which had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting. It was noted that the responses prepared by the Constabulary and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) would be provided to them.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2023.

The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Matters Arising

The Chair highlighted the Action Sheet provided by the OPCC which was circulated to the Panel members in advance of the meeting. At the previous meeting, the Panel had requested for the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) to share a graphic showing the breakdown in Council Tax bands across the force area. In response, the CFO had provided a table showing the breakdown in Council Tax bands across all the local authorities in England and Wales, including the five unitary authorities in the force area. He explained this was the most meaningful way of conveying the information requested by the Panel.

6. Chair's Business

The Chair welcomed Chief Constable Sarah Crew and Deputy Chief Constable Jon Reilly to the Panel meeting.

7. Chief Constable's Presentation

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

The Chief Constable (CC) introduced the presentation, stating that Avon and Somerset were on track to deliver their goal of outstanding policing for everyone, and that significant advances were being made in navigating the force towards this destination. However, the journey was challenging, and progress could not be taken for granted. It was acknowledged that strengthening the public's trust in the police would take time and the Panel played an important part in supporting the Commissioner in holding the force to account.

The force's 5-year plan to achieve outstanding policing would continue throughout 2024. The upcoming year would also include national and PCC elections and the continued pressures of interest rates and inflation, all of which would bring changes to the force. 2024 was also Avon and Somerset's golden anniversary, and the force looked forward to the next 50 years of serving the community.

The Panel was advised that the force's mission, values, vision, and strategy were all underpinned by the Police and Crime Plan. The CC provided an update on the Plan's four main priorities:

- **Priority 1** – Preventing and Fighting Crime
    - The success of Operation Bluestone (under the banner of Operation Soteria) had been nationally recognised and had become the blueprint for every force in England and Wales. It focused on improving the outcomes for victims of rape and other serious sexual offences. There had been a 246% increase in charges since 2021 and the lessons learnt could be applied across offences included under the banner of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
    - Over the previous 5 months, Avon and Somerset had worked with neighbouring forces to complete 3 regionally coordinated drug operations (Operation Scorpion). 83 people had been arrested in Avon and Somerset, and £3.5 million of drugs were taken off the streets.
    - The force had conducted almost 2,500 anti-social behaviour interventions. This work coincided with Operation Hemlock

which targeted anti-social behaviour related to e-bikes and e-scooters. This led to 28 arrests and a 35% reduction in reports of anti-social behaviour.
    - 2,600 drink/drug drivers were charged, and 1,800 uninsured vehicles were seized.

- **Priority 2** – Engaging, Supporting, and Working with Communities, Victims, and Partner Organisations
    - Work targeting anti-social behaviour related to e-bikes and e-scooters was in response to local demand and recognised nationally.
    - 7,000 people were involved in Farm Watch and Horse Watch schemes.
    - 26,000 teachers/parents/staff were educated by the police on child exploitation.
    - 2,000 vulnerable people were supported by the Be Home Safe Scheme.
    - However, there were still challenges that required attention. For example, it was reported that only 72% of the public felt safe at night.

- **Priority 3** – Leading the Police to be Efficient and Effective
    - The force had achieved its recruitment targets for officers. However, this growth in numbers did come with challenges.
    - The investment in the uplift was paying off: more police constable degree apprenticeship officers were graduating, and the direct entry degree programmes holders were now becoming accredited detectives.
    - Recent workplace surveys had given encouraging results in terms of wellbeing and satisfaction levels. The force compared well with similar sectors, but more work was needed to maintain morale.
    - The force was on track to meet their numerical targets for accredited detectives which was a significant achievement.

- **Priority 4** – Increasing the Legitimacy of, and Public Confidence in, the Police and Criminal Justice System
    - It was acknowledged that improvements were needed in terms of workplace representation. Progress was being made to address disproportionality and the force was committed to reporting back to communities later in the year on the work connected to the National Police Race Action Plan.

- The force was focused on understanding and responding to the fragile relationship between the police and public nationally. Transparency was one of their strategic imperatives, reflected in the recent Channel 4 documentary. It was necessary to show the intent to deal with complaints, the scrutiny the force was under, and demonstrate the need for reform of the police misconduct system.

Other key points made in the presentation are summarised below:

- Nationally, the force was performing well in terms of the Police and Crime Plan. It was not identified as an outlier of concern on any national outcome measures included as part of the Home Office's 'Early Warning System'.

- The latest HMICFRS PEEL Inspection was published at the end of March 2023. Avon and Somerset compared strongly with other forces, particularly considering how comparatively underfunded it was. However, there were several areas which required improvement, namely investigating crime, recording data about crime, responding to the public, and managing offenders.

- The Inspectorate had a new regime which considered performance against a system of victim outcomes. This reflected the growing focus on positive outcomes for the public. The force compared relatively well nationally in terms of bringing justice to victims through charges and summons rates.

- The Inspectorate was due to return this September. There was much to be proud of, but it was acknowledged there was significant room for improvement as the inspection process was rigorous.

- In terms of demands on the force in 2023:
  - The number of 999 calls increased by 13% on the previous year and the number continued to rise.
  - Digital methods of contact were rising e.g. the number of digital forms submitted had increased by 18%.
  - Mental health related incidents were levelling off and the force was improving its response to mental health incidents.
  - Overall crime numbers continued to increase; this was partly driven by improved crime recording.

    - Shoplifting and robbery numbers had risen, which was expected during a cost-of-living crisis.
    - The number of serious sexual and violent crimes had risen by 9%.
    - However, arrests had increased by 10% and rape charges had increased by 68%. The focus on perpetrators through the Operation Bluestone model was paying off.
    - The number of anti-social behaviour incidents had decreased by 4%.
    - Dwelling burglary victim satisfaction remained high at 80%.
    - Public confidence stood at 68%; nationally the force came 20th out of 43.

- The Areas for Improvement (AFI) provided by the Inspectorate were critical challenges to overcome. Failure to tackle these could result in a poor overall assessment.

- Avon and Somerset's AFIs were crime data integrity, protecting vulnerable residents, responding to the public, and investigative standards. The issues in these areas were being addressed with urgency to provide a purposeful response. It was expected that most of the focus areas would be resolved before the Inspectorate returned in September.

- Taken together, these areas presented a challenge, particularly in the face of issues such as officer inexperience, budgetary pressures, and low levels of public trust and confidence. All forces faced such issues, but the CC was confident there was an appropriate strategy to overcome these challenges.

- Avon and Somerset's strategy was launched in September 2023. The strategy was fed by the force's values, supported by its 5 strategic imperatives, underpinned by the Police and Crime Plan, and would ultimately lead to the vision of outstanding policing for everyone.

- The force needed staff engagement across the board; the officers could not achieve this goal alone. The CC shared this video which reflected this ongoing collaborative work.

- The strategy relied on producing a balanced set of outcomes:
    - **Public** – these described how the residents will see, feel, and experience changes in policing.

    - **Organisational** – these described how individuals in the force would underpin the success of the strategy through their work.
    - **People** – these described how individuals in the force would feel supported, equipped, and included as they served their community.
    - **Finance** – these described how the force would plan and use scarce resources to reach the destination of outstanding policing.

- There were four mechanisms for delivering these outcomes:
    - **Change portfolio** – the portfolio of 8 Change Programmes would drive the transformation work over the next 5 years.
    - **Continuous improvement** – the force needed to be enhancing and growing continuously.
    - **Business as usua**l – the force needed to support its teams every day in facing their daily challenges.
    - **Leadership development** – this was vital to putting the strategy into action and turning vision into reality.

- It was important that Avon and Somerset had the appropriate ethical and inclusive culture to achieve higher levels of public trust and confidence. It was leadership that built and maintained such a culture; it could rebuild pride and morale, but also confront issues that required change. The workforce was highly educated but inexperienced; leadership therefore continued to be a focus for 2024 as leaders were needed to nurture and develop the skills of the workforce.

- The need for a culture change was demonstrated by the declining levels of public confidence in Avon and Somerset. There was a small window of opportunity to redress this trend.

- Officer numbers were rapidly increasing. They were given a difficult target but ultimately overachieved; by the end of March 2023, the force had 99 more officers than their target of 456.

- The growing pains associated with this uplift had been prolonged due to the rapid growth. Over 40% of the officers had less than 5 years' experience. The peak of the influx of new officers had passed, but there was a long tail. Developing the capabilities of the leaders was therefore a primary objective.

- The Target Leadership Model (TLM) had been signed off a year before and it set out what leaders should be aiming for in their own practice of leadership. It was a progressive model and was rooted in the force's values and reflected in the strategic imperatives.

- The First Line Leaders programme developed from the idea that new police constables needed first line leaders to build high performing teams. This programme was dedicated to future, new, and existing leaders, as well as those in an acting capacity. A similar programme was being developed for middle leaders in the organisation. Furthermore, the top 50 leaders in the organisation had been marshalled into a strategic leadership group. The force welcomed investment in new police officers and would continue to invest in their leaders in so far as the finances would permit. The CC shared this video on this topic.

- However, the force faced a significant financial challenge as Avon and Somerset received well below the average funding per head of the population when compared to other forces nationally. Overall, the organisation received £53 million less than the national average and £113 million less compared to other force areas that contained major cities. If the Metropolitan force was removed from the calculations, Avon and Somerset still received £50 million less than other force areas with major cities.

- The MTFP showed the organisation's revenue position over the next five years. There was a long-term deficit forecast which would require further savings. Savings had already been identified and made, but even with a Precept proposal of £13.00, there would still be tough financial decisions to make. However, the figures in the Report were based on a £10.00 increase.

- A £13.00 increase meant an extra £1.8 million in funding above the £10.00 Precept level. 80% of the budget was spent on salaries, therefore significant savings required a reduction in police staff headcount (police officer numbers were ringfenced).

- One of the planning principles was to plan sufficiently ahead to maximise the opportunity to achieve the necessary savings through natural turnover rather than redundancies.

- There would be no further recruitment of PCSOs throughout 2024/5. Avon and Somerset currently maintained higher numbers of PCSOs in comparison to other forces, but this could not be sustained. There would be a reduction in police staff investigators of around 86 people over the next 12 months.

- In January 2022, there was an audit of all police staff posts. As a result of this, 44 posts were removed through vacancy management, resulting in £2 million in savings. Natural attrition would likely see another 36 posts removed over the course of the coming year.

- The financial situation meant the force's ambitions to grow their neighbourhood, early intervention, and road safety teams had to be paused. This would have a direct impact on police visibility in communities. The force needed more funding to keep these posts viable and maintain police visibility and proactivity in the community.

- Operation Hemlock demonstrated what the force could achieve when responding to the issues identified by the communities it served. It was a force-wide response led by the Neighbourhoods Team and resulted in 28 suspects arrested, 17 community protected warnings, 3 community behaviour orders, 27 lost or stolen vehicles recovered, and a 35% reduction in anti-social behaviour reports.

- A recommendation from the Panel of an increase in the Precept by £13.00 would enable the force to deploy similar operations across the force area when required.

The Chair thanked the CC for her presentation and invited comments and questions from the Panel members.

- The Panel thanked the CC for her presentation and suggested it would have been useful to view the presentation slides in advance so they could read the figures and detailed text on the slides more easily.

- The Panel advised caution around the word 'victim' in the phrase 'victim of our own success' when discussing sexual violence. The Panel suggested that, although Operation Bluestone had improved the statistics around rape and serious sexual offences, the consequences of this success had not been anticipated, as the force was behind on its scheduled sex offender visits. The Panel therefore requested reassurance that the offenders were being effectively managed. The CC

reaffirmed that Avon and Somerset had a perpetrator focus and that they were the national lead on dealing with rape and serious sexual offence cases. In terms of Operation Bluestone, the 246% increase in charging volumes was a significant achievement. The speed at which this was achieved had not been anticipated, but the force knew it needed to grow its capability to manage offenders; the uplift catered for an increase in the integrated offender management team, for example. However, nationally, the demand had outstripped the current capabilities, therefore difficult decisions were being made within the integrated offender management teams over what needed to be prioritised. The scheduled sex offender visits were mandatory therefore they would continue, utilising resources from non-statutory areas.

- The Panel mentioned the promises made to improve neighbourhood policing when the Precept was increased in 2023; there had been little tangible evidence of such improvements, and local authorities were stepping in to fill the gap. For example, Weston Town Council had increased their Precept in order to contribute to the costs of a new CCTV system which had helped target anti-social behaviour in the area. Furthermore, there had been incidents where young people on e-scooters had run through red lights and overtaken police cars and there was no response from the police. The CC conveyed her gratitude for the support received from the local authorities and reiterated that community safety was a shared partnership responsibility. E-bikes and e-scooters were presenting new problems, and the police were still learning how to respond to them. However, a collaboration between the force and the community was needed. Operation Hemlock was a good example of how innovation and the effective use of resources could help to tackle such issues.

- The Panel felt the Channel 4 documentary, *To Catch a Copper*, could act as an important motivator for change within the force as there was much to learn from the presented narratives. The Panel praised the CC for her courage in committing to such a high level of transparency and for opening the force up to scrutiny; however, it was important the CC brought the organisation along with her on this journey, and it was hoped it would serve as a step forward in improving the culture of the force. The CC informed the Panel that the Deputy Chief Constable chaired an online meeting the morning after the first broadcast of the first episode which was attended by almost 400 force members. The attendees expressed a range of emotions, but the response was generally positive and echoed the Panel's feedback.

- The Panel recalled the lack of compassion shown for victims by officers in the documentary. With 40% of officers possessing fewer than 5 years of experience, there was an opportunity to redress these issues early in their careers. Furthermore, the documentary showcased the issue of mental health support for the officers themselves. The Panel asked what support was provided. The CC stated the force occupational health unit had been under review, and there would be a shift towards psychological support. A business case had also been approved by the Commissioner for a £500,000 investment to develop intensive support. There was a danger that the daily trauma faced by the officers could de-sensitise them, but part of the five-year plan was to ensure that the service provided by the force was trauma informed. Therefore, this was a priority and needed to be progressed further.

- In response to a statement made by the CC in the documentary, the Panel requested clarification on how her hands were tied in terms of instigating changes to the culture of the force, and asked whether there would be a communications plan and national campaigning to compensate for this. The CC stated that, as a rule, she did not chair disciplinary panels. In terms of communications, there was media interest around the remaining episodes which involved ITV news, Daily Mail interviews, and other publications. This media interest would help to stimulate discussions around the flaws in the system; namely, that the CC was held responsible for the culture of the force, yet she was not able to remove individuals when necessary. The CC added she had little control over the selection of footage and editorial of the documentary, and that the decision-making processes were not shown as much as they could have been. Furthermore, the incidents presented took place between 2017 and 2021, and many changes had been made since then in response. The PCC added that, since the CC was not permitted to do so, he had been strongly lobbying the Home Secretaries on her behalf and advised that changes to the Police Dismissals process were forthcoming.

- The Panel asked whether the CC could campaign through her network to receive improved central funding for Somerset that would redress the current inequitable funding formula. The PCC confirmed the CC had been active on this issue, and that he had successively lobbied to receive a fully funded pay award for the force. However, Avon and Somerset required more substantial support from central government. The CC added that they had been promised a full review of the funding

formula, but no date had been given for this. She could not campaign as an individual, but she had invited the Home Office civil servant managing the formula review to the Constabulary Management Board to witness the hardships experienced by the force.

- The Panel asked how the proposed reductions in staff numbers would impact on the mission to become an outstanding police force. The CC stated their ambitions would not be realised for many more years if sufficient funding was not provided to support the workforce. Cllr Craig informed the CC that she was a member of the Safer Communities Board for the Local Government Association, and that she would raise the issue of funding at their next meeting; they could lobby central government directly. The CC thanked Cllr Craig for her offer of support.

- The Panel praised the recent investigative work that had taken place in response to the Knowle West murders. The Panel recalled the murder of Taunton resident Barnaby Webber in Nottingham and how it affected national public confidence in the police. The victim's immediate family received delayed support, and his grandparents were excluded from receiving any support. The Panel asked how confident the CC was that the partnership approaches for Avon and Somerset were of the highest quality to provide the protection that the public was seeking, how confident she was that warrants issued for the arrest of violent individuals were actively pursued until a successful arrest, and how confident she was in the wider support given to victims of such violent crime.

- The CC stated that its partnerships could always be strengthened but that the force had good relationships with its partners, and these were strengthened by lessons learnt from past cases. It had strong relationships with mental health services and these services ensured that potentially dangerous individuals with mental health issues were referred. Mistakes had been made in the past where cases were not pursued because such individuals were incorrectly deemed not criminally responsible. However, in response to this, the force was signing a new duty protocol which included all mental health trusts in the force area. They also intended to continue supporting the national programme of Right Person, Right Care. Furthermore, high-intensity users would have a Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA), plus a management plan constructed through a collaboration between the force and mental health services if necessary. In terms of active dangerous offenders, the force used a combination of analytics

and intelligence to track them. In terms of providing support to the family of homicide victims, this was a requirement under the victims' code of practice. All aspects of the family were included, and the force should work alongside charities and support services to support the extended family. It was highlighted that the role of the Family Liaison Officer was started in Avon and Somerset.

- The Panel highlighted the focus on developing leadership in the mission to improve policing culture, and recalled the importance that was placed on this in the Precept discussions of 2022 and 2023. The Panel acknowledged that improving public confidence was a lengthy process but asked what tangible improvements had been made in the last three years, how had the leadership training evolved, what was the plan to improve public confidence in communities, and how confident was she that this could be achieved. The CC stated that leadership was a continuing investment. The Leadership Academy was award-winning and encompassed all aspects of effective leadership. Furthermore, the Fine Line Leadership program had now emerged after a year of intensive planning, during which time it had to be woven into the existing work programme. There was also the Target Leadership Model which had been constructed with the assistance of external consultants. Investment in leadership was needed to provide them with the skills and knowledge to drive the force towards its goal of outstanding policing.

- The Panel recalled the concerns of some officers in the wake of the CC's announcement that the force was institutionally racist, a statement which carried, for some, an implication that all officers in the force were racist. The CC stated that the complaints and discipline process showed that racism did exist within the force.

- The Panel queried the attrition rate of police officers within the first two years; the CC responded that it stood at around 11% and was reducing. Feedback from officers had suggested that the new recruits were not sufficiently trained in conflict management but still progressed, but that no action was taken if officers documented this concern. The Panel asked for clarification on this, and on the application process. The CC stated that progression through the force was monitored closely by assessors and that the right person for the job would be permitted to advance. She confirmed that in-person interviews for new recruits had been reintroduced after the pandemic, and that the application process was not restricted to an online application form and interview.

- The Panel requested up-to-date figures on crime against businesses, including anti-social behaviour and cybercrime. The OPCC agreed to provide these. The CC agreed that more action was needed to protect businesses, as there had been a 46% increase in shoplifting but positive outcomes stood at only 16%. The increase was due to the cost-of-living crisis, organised crime, and repeat offenders. The Panel voiced concerns over the effect the reduction in the number of PCSOs would have on this. The CC acknowledged that PCSOs were greatly valued by communities but stated that financial realities meant difficult decisions had to be made to balance the budget. She reassured the Panel that although recruitment was being frozen, there were no plans to make redundancies.

- The Panel praised the work of Operation Bluestone and hoped it would continue to produce positive results. The Panel also commended Operation Hemlock, and asked how much it had cost. The OPCC agreed to share the figures with the panel. In terms of the number of detectives, the Panel questioned the decision to make cuts when the vacancies mentioned the previous year had since been filled. The CC differentiated between detective constables and police staff detectives. The direct entry programme had helped fill vacancies in the CID, but the financial realities meant that as the number of detective constables increased, savings needed to be made elsewhere, hence the reduction in the number of police staff detectives. It was hoped the reduction would be achieved through natural attrition.

- The Panel suggested that rectifying the lack of public confidence greatly depended on police visibility and the ability to prevent and detect crime, and asked how this would be achieved without Neighbourhood Teams at their full strength. The CC agreed that positive outcomes were needed to drive public confidence in the police. However, prevention and detection accounted for only 30% of demand; response to crime was the biggest demand. The aim to bring offenders to justice and protect the public remained the focal point and a change in the culture would assist in improving the levels of public confidence.

- The Panel asked how much better neighbourhood policing would be with the extra £1.8 million that would be generated with a Precept of £13.00. The CC confirmed that the force would invest in the Neighbourhood Teams to improve their visibility and communications

network, and up to 10 more operations like Operation Hemlock would take place with the extra resources afforded by the funding.

The Chair thanked the Chief Constable for her time and for answering the Panel's questions.

Actions

1. **The OPCC to provide up-to-date figures on crimes against business.**
2. **The OPCC to provide the cost figures for Operation Hemlock.**

8. Formal Review of the Budget and Proposed Precept

The Chair invited the PCC to present the proposal for the Precept.

The PCC introduced the report, stating that he had intended to reset the OPCC's relationship with the Panel at the start of his term to make processes more collegiate. To that end, he had submitted the financial accounting and related documents for a £10.00 increase to the Precept but was bringing the option of a £13.00 increase to the Panel meeting; the CC's presentation showed the need for this increase and the positive outcomes expected from this extra funding. Out of respect for the Panel, the PCC wanted them to be part of the decision.

The PCC recalled that the Panel had approved a £15.00 increase on the Precept in 2023 to meet the extraordinary inflation rates. The plan now was to keep the Precept as low as possible, hence the proposal for £10.00. However, the public consultation survey suggested there was support for an increase above £10.00 across the Avon and Somerset force area. Therefore, he had agreed with the CC to bring the proposal of £13.00 to the meeting.

The Chair reminded the PCC of the limits to the Panel's statutory functions, emphasising that discussion must be restricted to the proposal provided in the Report, which was an increase of £10.00 on the Precept.

The Chair invited comments and questions from the Panel members. Below is a summary of the ensuing discussion:

- The Panel asked whether the extra staff that could be funded by a £13.00 increase were permanent and whether they could be retained

with a £10.00 increase. The CFO confirmed they were permanent positions and could not be retained without a £13.00 increase.

- It was noted that the proposal of £10.00 was an increase of 3.8% and equated to an extra £6.8 million. The Home Office grant had increased by £11.8 million, which was an increase of 6%. Overall, the funding would increase by £18.6 million. Averaged out on a weighted basis, this was an increase of 5% overall, which was above the rate of inflation. Therefore, there would be an increase in funding in real terms if the proposal of £10.00 was approved.

- With a funding increase of £18.6 million, the overall increase in costs was £16.2 million, which was net of savings required. The Panel questioned whether those savings were deliverable and if they could prevent compulsory redundancies. The CFO stated they were confident the savings could be delivered. In terms of redundancies, it was hoped these could be achieved through natural turnover/attrition.

- There was an increase in the income budget of £2.5 million. The Panel questioned whether this was offset against the cost or whether it was included as income. Furthermore, the report stated there would be a contribution of £1 million from reserves; however, this was not included in the table on Page 33 of the Report. The CFO confirmed the contribution from reserves related to two elements: the deferred prosecution model and the increased costs of training the high number of PCDA students in the short term.

- The Panel queried whether the stated job losses in the public consultation survey were genuine. Each of the scenarios in the survey produced a combination of increased income and reduced costs of £13.5 million, yet the assumption was that the average salary for a staff role was £30,000. However, it was apparent to the Panel that the actual average salary was £40,000, therefore the survey was based on incorrect assumptions. Furthermore, the survey should have been clearer that the job losses related to staff roles, rather than police officers. Ultimately, it was felt that the results of the survey should be heavily caveated. The CFO responded to state that the timing of the budget cycles and government spending announcements mean that the Precept survey was necessarily launched in advance of the MTFP and key information such as Council Tax data. The intention within the survey was to present Precept implications with posts as an indicative proxy and could only ever be a guide. Given the focus of post

reductions that were identified as part of the savings plans, it was correct to say that £40,000 represented a more appropriate proxy figure for salaries. The wording of the survey introduction did reference 'police staff', but it was recognised that the public may not have appreciated that 'police staff' excluded officers. Last year, the survey had included a longer introduction that was clearer, but this year it had been made more concise due to feedback that the introductory wording was too long to expect everyone to read. It was a difficult balance, but the OPCC agreed to look at this issue again when drafting future surveys.

- The Panel acknowledged that submitting a proposal for a £13.00 increase in the lead up to the PCC elections would have been a risk. However, it was not for the Panel to make that proposal. The PCC stated he would have introduced the proposal for £13.00 before the meeting if the final results of the survey had been available. The Panel suggested the survey should have closed earlier to allow the PCC to make a considered proposal.

- The Panel expressed concern at the PCC's unorthodox approach of presenting two Precept proposals at the meeting. The proposal on the table was an increase of £10.00 as this was the proposal given in the published Report. In line with the Panel's statutory function, the decision process was not meant to be collaborative. If the PCC had wanted to submit a revised proposal based on the final survey results before the meeting, technically this was possible in the form of a supplementary report, but this did not happen.

- The Council Tax bases across the force area were lower in comparison to other areas nationally, meaning a larger proportion of houses were below Band D. Therefore, it was suggested that an increase of £13.00 was necessary from an operational perspective to allow the force to meet public policing needs and expectations.

- The Panel acknowledged that a £13.00 increase presented the opportunity to deliver more visible policing. The force had been consistently underfunded by central government and would continue to compare poorly with other forces unless it capitalised on local funding where possible.

- However, recommendations made in relation to Precept rises in previous years had not always been met, therefore it was imperative

that the force delivered on their promises this year. The public needed to see a return on the investment, particularly because Council Tax was rising across the board. Furthermore, tangible and visible improvements to combatting rural crime and more general policing in rural areas were required, particularly in relation to anti-social behaviour.

- Significant improvements to neighbourhood policing were crucial if a £13.00 rise was approved. The PCC assured the Panel that a £13.00 rise would allow for more neighbourhood team operations.

- The CFO informed the Panel that the MTFP auditors stated it was the most clear and comprehensive plan they had seen across the forces they audited.

The Chair thanked the Panel for their comments and reminded the members that the substantive motion submitted by the PCC that would be put to a vote was for an increase in the Council Tax of an average Band D equivalent dwelling by £10.00.

The Panel reflected on the two proposals that had been presented. Councillor Smith-Roberts moved to amend the published £10.00 proposed increase to £13.00 and invited the membership to consider the merits of endorsing a higher amount on the basis of operational impact and for the purpose of securing the commitments made at the meeting by the Chief Constable and the Commissioner. This was seconded by Gary Davies, Independent Member, and on being put to the vote, the amendment was carried by 7 votes to 6 (including the Chair's casting vote) with 3 abstentions.

On being put to a vote the Panel **RESOLVED** to accept the now substantive motion to increase the Policing Precept by £13.00 per annum in 2024/25 for an average Band D equivalent dwelling (7 members voting in favour, 6 against, and 2 abstentions).

The Chair advised the Commissioner that the Panel's report would contain a number of recommendations for his attention which would reflect members' considerations.

9. Commissioner's Update Report

The Chair suggested deferring Item 9 to the next meeting but invited the PCC to highlight the salient points:

- The PCC expressed his condolences over the deaths of the two teenagers in Knowle West in Bristol and commended the police force for their response.

- He echoed the Panel's praise for the CC's courage in commissioning the Channel 4 documentary. It was important to maintain transparency as this would help foster public trust and confidence.

- The public also needed to be reassured that force members with criminal intent or unacceptable behaviour would be identified and removed from post. However, changes were required to the Police (Conduct) Regulations to give Chief Constables more influence in terms of sanctions and outcomes.

The Chair thanked the PCC and commended the CC and her team for their commitment to transparency.

10. Standing Complaints Report

Item 10 was deferred to the next meeting.

11. Work Programme

Item 11 was deferred to the next meeting.

12. Date of next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for 10:30am on 20th March 2024 at Deane House, Taunton.