

Minutes

Minutes of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel held on Friday, 29 January 2021 in Virtual, commencing at 11.00 am and concluding at 1.10 pm

Members Present

Councillor Kieron Mallon (Oxfordshire County Council) (Chairman), Councillor Bill Bendyshe-Brown (Buckinghamshire Council) (Vice Chairman), Councillor Julia Adey (Buckinghamshire Council – Co-Opted Member), Councillor Adele Barnett-Ward (Reading Borough Council), Councillor Robin Bradburn (Milton Keynes Council), Councillor David Cannon (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Councillor Emily Culverhouse (Buckinghamshire Council – Co-Opted Member), Councillor Merilyn Davies (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Neil Fawcett (Vale of White Horse District Council), Councillor John Harrison (Bracknell Forest Council), Liz Jones (Independent Member), Councillor Andrew McHugh (Cherwell District Council), Phillip Morrice (Independent Member), Councillor Mohammed Nazir (Slough Borough Council), Councillor Barrie Patman (Wokingham Borough Council), Councillor David Rouane (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Claire Rowles (West Berkshire Council), Councillor Ray Sangster (Buckinghamshire Council – Co-Opted Member), Councillor Dr Louise Upton (Oxford City Council) and Councillor Mark Winn (Buckinghamshire Council – Co-Opted Member).

Officer Present:

Khalid Ahmed (Scrutiny Officer).

Others Present:

Matthew Barber (Deputy Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner), John Campbell (Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police), Paul Hammond (Chief Executive Officer of PCC), D/C/Supt Colin Paine (Head of Professional Standards Department - Thames Valley Police), Anthony Stansfeld (Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner), Ian Thompson (Chief Finance Officer of PCC) and Vicki Waskett (Head of Governance and Compliance – Office of PCC).

If you have a query please contact Khalid Ahmed, Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel Scrutiny Officer (Tel: 07990 368048; Email: khalid.ahmed@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

COUNCILLOR BILL BENDYSHE-BROWN

Councillor Bill Bendyshe-Brown, the appointed Member from Buckinghamshire Council and the PCP's Complaints Sub-Committee Chairman announced to the Panel, that due to ill-health he would be stepping down as a Member of the Panel.

The Chairman and the Panel paid tribute to Councillor Bill Bendyshe-Brown for his positive contributions as a Member of the Panel and as Chairman of the Complaints Sub-Committee, and the best wishes and thoughts of the Panel were passed to Bill and his family.

1/21 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 20 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2/21 **REPORT OF THE BUDGET TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Members were informed as in previous years; the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel formed a Budget Task & Finish Group to assist in discharging its statutory duty to scrutinise the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Thames Valley's proposed Council Tax precept for 2021/22.

Councillor Barrie Patman, the Chairman of the Budget Task and Finish Group presented the report. He thanked Ian Thompson and Linda Waters for attending the Group and updating Members on the PCC's draft budget proposals.

The report provided Members with the main changes highlighted as a result of the Home Office Police Grant Final Settlement announcement and the papers issued for the PCC's Level 1 meeting with the Chief Constable of TVP on 19 January 2021.

The report contained details of Thames Valley's response to the settlement which included:

- The overall settlement and the flexibility that the PCC has been allowed for council tax precept levels was extremely encouraging which demonstrated the importance the government placed on the services delivered by the police service and the difficulties and challenges being faced.
- This was only a one-year settlement and reference was made to the impact of Covid-19, which would impact on all public services. Priorities included:
 - Recruiting and training the additional officers awarded to TVP under the Police Uplift Programme (PUP)
 - TVP as an organisation needed to be adapted to the changing crime patterns and increasing levels of vulnerability.
 - Technology needed to be used to improve the productivity of officers and their ability to respond to and protect the vulnerable is critical. Software such as Pronto, needed to give officers instant information to improve and adapt responses
 - Additional funding would allow TVP to invest for the medium term to achieve ambitions for improving the service delivery such as Neighbourhood Policing and PCSOs, the Rural Crime Task Force, County Drugs Line (CDL) Enforcement, Domestic Abuse (DA) Capability and Cyber/Fraud.
- Additional funding from the full council tax increase would allow additional investments totalling £5.4m, and include Forensic Services and Digital Investigation (£0.5m), Effective Demand Management (£0.5m), Safeguarding and Vulnerability (£1.0m), End to End Investigation Processes (£1.6m) and Operational End User Devices (£1.8m)

- Reference was made to TVP receiving confirmation of 361 officers, and the anticipated further 170 - 220 in the third year (2022/23). However, this barely addressed the officer numbers lost since 2011, compounded by the significant numbers of police staff that have been removed from their establishment.
- It was noted, that prior to the announcement of the council tax flexibility, 192 officers of the additional police officers (from the National Uplift Programme) were to be used in areas of policing over the coming years that they would rather not. They would be performing an operational policing function but one that could be and was currently performed by police staff. The cost of not replacing these posts with new police officers and maintaining the current staff, would be around £7.7m over the MTFP period, with £2.5m of this falling in 2021/22.

A recommendation had been put forward which was debated during the next item as follows:-

That the Panel approve the Police and Crime Commissioner's precept for 2021/22 as set out in the OPCC report 'Revenue Estimates 2021/22 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25' subject to satisfactory responses to the questions raised and any other supplementary questions asked at the Panel meeting.

3/21

SCRUTINY OF THE PROPOSED PRECEPT - QUESTIONS TO THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

The PCC responded to the following written questions:-

1. What justification can the PCC give for requesting a £15 increase on Band D for Council Tax when local authorities across the Thames Valley are looking to limit Council Tax increases because of the impact of the pandemic on the economy and residents?

[The provisional police finance settlement for 2021-22 is predicated on the basis that all PCCs increase their Band D council tax by £15 increase in order to recruit the second tranche of 6,000 police officers from the national Police Uplift Programme and also invest in local operational policing and he community safety. The PCC said that he would rather not put it up and h did not have the option of two years.

Unlike local authorities I was not given the option to phase this increase over 2 years which is what, given the option, I would have preferred to do.

Following discussions with the Chief Constable I believe that the extra benefits for council tax payers, in terms of improvements in frontline operational policing is worth the extra £15. This increase equates to £1.25 per month or 29 pence per week.

On average the policing element of the local council tax bill is just over 10% of the total bill.

A short 2 week public consultation on the precept proposal took place which was sent to circa 100,000 residents across the Thames Valley area. 4,372 responses were received of which 2,814 (64.4%) supported the increase.

Most other PCCs in England and Wales are also proposing to increase their Band D council tax by £15.]

2. What would be the implications to the Police service of a “stand still” budget if council tax precept increased by £9.20 or 4.25%?

[The full council tax investment of £15 will enable additional funds of £5.4m to be invested into long term increases in capability. This will include establishing a Rural Crime Task Force, supporting PCSOs in neighbourhood policing and increasing enforcement against county lines drugs gangs. In support of these front-line investments, the increase in council tax will enable improved investigations and ensure that front line officers are able to work effectively to protect the public. These improvements would not be achievable if the precept increase is only £9.20. The key areas for investment are:

- Forensic Services and Digital Investigations (£0.5m) – this will allow investment in new and cutting edge technologies and training to enhance TVP forensics capabilities, including the ever increasing digital forensics requirements. Investment will directly contribute to advancing the delivery of forensic services, improving the Force response in areas including high-tech crime, biometrics and imaging. Enhanced and faster support across the whole investigation landscape (reactive, proactive and digital) will bring offenders to justice in a timely fashion, increase the likelihood of maintaining victim engagement and maximise all investigative opportunities.*
- Effective Demand Management (£0.5m) – this will enable further investment into analysing demand and prioritising how TVP react to and deal with these varied specific and general demands, ensuring that the right resource is in the right place at the right time. Investment is required to continue the transformation of operating practices to meet increasing demand, and to make best use of technical and digital developments. Services will be delivered differently in a multitude of ways, such as improving the management of information force wide (data governance and architecture), managing increased requests for support in an increasingly digital environment (ICT service desk providing a rapid-response to resolve frontline technical issues) and the development of new technologies to achieve future service-improvements for the public and the organisation (robotic process automation in transactional service delivery functions). Further, the force is fundamentally reviewing how all services are delivered and adopting a more agile approach for both public-facing and business support functions, seeking to increase productivity by enabling work to be undertaken at the most appropriate and cost-effective location and time (Working Smart).*
- Safeguarding and Vulnerability (£1.0m) – This is an area which has previously had invested quite significant resource through the Medium Term Financial Plan, and now additional demands require an uplift of staff in these areas to*

manage the increase in volumes and complexity. This area of policing is widely acknowledged as growing in demand and complexity. Providing preventative, investigative and problem-solving support to the most vulnerable in communities is a Force and PCC priority. Investing to increased resources in this area will assist in meeting demand, and directly support Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs to manage adult and child protection referrals, meet statutory requirements, enhance public protection arrangements, and more effectively manage public-space CCTV to prevent crime and disorder, safeguarding public spaces.

- *End to End Investigation Processes (£1.6m) – This will enable the end to end investigation process to be bolstered, covering investment in Criminal Justice, the Endeavour Investigation Programme, CCTV Management, Intelligence Training and Delivery, Firearms Training and Specialist Search equipment. The Force is committed to improving the quality of investigation, bringing more offenders to justice and increasing victim satisfaction. Investment will support improvements in the provision of medical evidence, Criminal Procedure and Investigation Act disclosure, and delivery of the key elements of the programme dedicated to improving standards of investigation. Within the criminal justice arena, investment will support continued improvements regarding the use of bail and released under investigation practices and maintaining standards in the custody environment.*
- *Operational End User Devices (£1.8m) – Technological and digital advances present opportunities to enhance the policing response by increasing the numbers and capabilities of the devices used in operational settings, such as body-worn video, tasers, specialist search equipment and drones. This equipment is used to support effective proactive policing and contribute to public confidence and legitimacy. Improvements such as increased battery life extend the length of deployment, while camera quality improves image capture for search or identification purposes.*
- *Tasers and Drones were important assets in the future, less use of helicopters. Cost 6,7k.*

3. Included in assumptions is future investment in technology, which is stated as, will need to be funded by revenue rather from capital given the diminishing level of reserves and the very low level of annual capital grant. Was this sustainable in view of the current precarious economic outlook?

[The force is totally reliant on technology for every aspect of its business and it is vital that we maintain and develop the existing infrastructure and invest in the core technologies required to provide innovative digital policing services. This comes at a cost, hence the prioritisation of Direct Revenue Funding (DRF) for the capital programme is built into the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) May be a problem is 2-3 years' time

Home Office capital grant is £0.4m per annum which funds just over 1% of planned capital investment in 2021/22.

The reduction in planned capital receipts reflects the fact that we are reaching the end of the long-term programme to dispose of all police houses unless required for single quarters or other operational requirements. We are exploring the opportunity to generate capital receipts from operational buildings, but these are few and far between.

There is a policy of only borrowing to fund long-term property projects. Borrowing for short-life assets, such as new technology, is relatively expensive in terms of the annual debt charges that would need to be repaid.

Revenue and capital reserves are on a downward trajectory and cannot be relied upon to support an adequate level of investment in new technology, particularly on an annual basis Concern going into the future

DRF of capital expenditure is therefore seen as the most appropriate method of financing annual provisions. The MTFP includes £11.2m of DRF in 2020/21 rising to £13.6m in 2023/24. This level of funding only covers the essential replacement/upgrades of technology (such as end user devices), equipment and vehicles.

This requirement will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the prioritisation of technology is correctly reflected alongside the other priorities in the MTFP and that it does not put an unnecessary burden and financial strain on the annual revenue budget. Other options are available, such as additional borrowing, but this will cost more in the long-term.

4. What will the implications of this budget be in terms of delivering the key objectives in the PCC's Police and Crime Plan, which include reducing crime and improving detection and conviction rates?

[This budget will provide considerably more resources for operational policing which directly support the key objectives in my current Police and Crime Plan]

5. In view of the history of delays and increase in costs of TVP IT projects such as the Contact Management Platform and the Equip ERP Programme what confidence should Council Taxpayers of Thames Valley have in these projects staying in budget?

[We are not embarking on any new, leading edge technological developments such as CMP or Equip so the opportunity for future programme and/or cost over-runs will be significantly reduced]

Whilst I cannot give any guarantees that overspends will not arise in the future, I would expect my successor to maintain a tight grip on all future TVP projects to ensure that similar mistakes are not repeated.

For information, there are a number of national systems (such as ESMCP) being developed by the Home Office which will have implications for local forces in the future these are being monitored nationally by the police service but are not within the direct control of local forces.]

6. In relation to the Treasury Management strategy with almost £100m of investments earning negligible interest and underspends in other areas such as transport (£895k). Why cannot these monies not be channelled towards some of the areas of pressure on the policing service?

[The £100m figure reported in the Treasury Management update report is a combination of core cash reserves and cash flow (i.e. grant and precept income received before payroll and other routine costs are incurred). It is not available to support ongoing expenditure.]

The separate report on reserves balances and provisions shows that total cash reserves will fall from £67m on 1st April 2020 to just over £34m by March 2025 and this includes £18m in general reserves and £11m in the insurance provision which is required to fund incurred liabilities. Earmarked revenue reserves will be less than £5m and capital grants and reserves less than £1m. There is therefore very little, if any, scope to fund additional policing pressures from reserves irrespective of whether they are revenue or capital, or one-off or ongoing commitments.

The £895k underspend on Transport is part of the current year's monitoring which is forecasting a yearend overspend (as at the end of December) of just £19k. This underspend on transport, which primarily arises from a change in working practices due to Covid-19, is helping to mitigate the overspends, partly caused by Covid-19 such as police overtime and the reduction in income levels.]

7. What rationale will be used to decide where the extra police officers will be deployed across the Thames Valley?

[The initial 183 additional officers funded in 2020/21 have all been allocated to LPAs as this was seen as a priority to mitigate the reductions over the last 10 years and the increasing demands.]

The next tranche of 171 officers will allow the expansion of capability in those areas of most concern to ourselves and the public as a whole. This includes:

Rural Crime Task Force.

TVP's current Neighbourhood Teams work hard in this area but having the scale to respond to patterns of criminality and be visible to the many, can be difficult. Confidence in our approach varies across the Force. ACC Local Policing is currently developing options around a dedicated Task Force that would provide increased visibility, enforcement and prosecution in relation to crimes affecting the rural community in particular. The Task Force made up of Uniform and CID, would be highly visible and deployable to locations across the Force. The public would see and feel the difference. The Task Force would support the local long-term problem solving but with scale. They would target Serious and Organised Acquisitive crime, hare coursing and other criminal activity such as organised fly tipping. Clearly, they would have a role to play in enforcement activity in respect of unauthorised encampments in rural communities.

County Drugs Line (CDL) Enforcement:

The disruption of such CDLs is a Force priority and is clearly a priority for Government. They are quick to establish, and significant damage follows.

The Force's response to County Drugs Lines has a number of layers. The Serious Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) target the organised medium level dealers with success. More recently, in an effort to take advantage of the diminishing CDL footprint during Covid-19, we have developed a more agile approach to disrupting CDLs and creating a hostile environment for dealing to take place. Using a combination of covert and overt tactics, results have been positive. The methodology is now being adopted across the region. The current team itself is modest and is made up of a variety of seconded officers. Indeed, to maintain the capability, one of the SOCU crime teams has been dedicated to this work over the summer, which does impact on their 'medium' level activity. Additional officers would allow TVP to 'industrialise' our approach and resource a central capability as well as developing and increasing numbers within LPA based Stronghold/Tasking teams.

Domestic Abuse (DA) Capability:

We have had some success over the last 18 months with increased attendance and arrest rates and outcomes now up by some 38%; that's an additional 650 offenders brought to some form of justice.

However domestic reports are also rising with an increase of 23% compared to this time last year. That's an extra 3.000 crimes. Moreover, experience suggests that during economic downturns and increased unemployment, domestic abuse will further increase, so having increased capability in this area is very important. Local Policing is reviewing its DA response and examining the roles and responsibilities of DA units who own and deal with high risk and LPA's. Domestic Abuse is now a high-risk volume crime. Whatever the structure we anticipate more resources required in this area. Increasing officer numbers would protect more vulnerable members of the community and bring more offenders to justice.

Cyber/Fraud:

Fraud is significantly under reported and national processes lack credibility. TVP has a capable Force Economic Crime Unit which has been previously reported upon. The Force works closely with the Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU) and their Cyber Capability has been previously reported upon. The Force assesses that 80% of Fraud is preventable. In that regard prevention is a key area of development for the Force and would be enhanced by additional officers.

We have to be realistic about when the additional officers will start to make a contribution to priority areas. The additional officers need to be recruited and trained and frequently the specialist teams will require experienced officers, so we need to balance the requirements of the specialist teams against the LPA's. Our intention is to continue to develop the capabilities described above during 2021 and then add additional resources as they become available to the Force to increase their impact.]

8. Police Community Support Officers are an important resource for local policing throughout the Thames Valley in terms of visibility to the community. What more can be done to recruit this useful resource as they are 41 down on establishment?

[PCSO recruitment intakes had to be reduced in the current year from 19 per intake to 10, in order to maintain social distancing. At this time, we do not have a timeframe for when we will be able to lift these restrictions, but we are planning to increase the number of recruitment intakes.]

We are also looking at ways of improving the retention of PCSOs. In the past many individuals have seen PCSOs as a route to becoming a police officer and we have seen a high turnover because of this. We are now looking at further ways to recruit those individuals who see PCSOs as a permanent career rather than a transition phase and also whether we can develop the PCSO career pathway to aid retention. The last 6 months has seen an improvement in the retention rates although in this most unusual year it is too early to determine the cause of this positive development.]

9. Covid 19 has impacted on many public services and has meant many projects and plans have been paused, however, can the PCC assure residents of the Thames Valley that “Blue Light” and local authority collaborations with TVP will continue to be looked at to ensure efficiency savings?

[The force already works closely with police and local authority partners to ensure that services are delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible.]

TVP has a joint ICT, information management and Operations team with Hampshire Constabulary. Regional organised crime and other specialist services are provided on a regional (SE basis) with TVP leading many of these functions

TVP also leads the Chiltern Transport Consortium which provides fleet management services to Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, British Transport Police and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary

TVP seeks opportunities to share buildings with local authorities, including the fire service.

From an operational perspective the force works very closely with other emergency, blue-light services through the local resilience forums. This close working relationship has ensured an efficient and effective operational response throughout the last 12 months when we have all been badly affected by the pandemic.

TVP and the OPCC continues to actively engage with the Thames Valley Collaboration Board which brings together all three fire services, the police and SCAS. We continue to seek financial savings through better procurement and use of buildings, with several tri-service stations having already come on stream. In addition to the financial benefits of collaboration the partnership has also overseen several operational developments that improve the resilience and effectiveness of all our emergency services.]

The following additional questions were also asked:

10. The proposed Council Tax precept is raising more than £13m which, according to the report, will ensure neighbourhood policing is strengthened with PCSOs playing

a key role. Will part of this funding be used to appoint PCSOs to fill the 43 current vacancies?

[The PCC reported that he expected PCSOs to be back to full establishment.]

11. With income uncertain and reserves being reduced, what is the long-term plan for TVP budgets?

[The PCC replied that he envisaged Police budgets being cut in the future and if the Police precept was not increased and with pay inflation, there would have to be cuts made.]

12. With many public sector IT Projects being over budget, what lessons have been learnt in relation to the proposed investment of £4.3m in technology?

[The PCC acknowledged the comment but pointed out that the recent CMP project had come in budget. Reference was made to the Home Office IT projects which had encountered delays and increased costs.]

13. What work is taking place on future TVP collaborations with other Forces and other “Blue Light” services to deliver the key objectives in the Police and Crime Plan, which include reducing crime and increasing convictions and reducing costs and producing efficiency savings?

[The PCC replied that there had been a huge amount of savings been made, with £125m taken out of Police budgets. This had not reduced Police capability. The increase in the Police precept provided an opportunity to get more Police officers on the street and to reduce crime even further. Reference was made to the introduction of modern technology such as drones, and the savings which would be brought about by not using Police helicopters in the future. There was use of better IT which improved performance and produced savings.]

14. In view of the historical problems in relation to the recruitment of new Police Officers, what new approaches will take place to make TVP more attractive to applicants?

[The PCC reported that the Chief Constable was making a tremendous effort with regards to recruitment. The Chief Constable informed the Panel that PCSOs would be recruited to deal with the natural turnover which takes place. There had been success in the recruitment of Police officers from the BAME community as it was important to have Police officers representing the diverse population they served. The number of applicants from the BAME community had doubled and he commented that it was important to have officers from a diversity of background as they brought a diversity of thought.]

15. Could the PCC provide the justification for the new proposed posts in his office at a cost of £91,000? How does the cost and size of the PCC’s Office compare with other PCCs?

[The PCC replied that the cost of his Office was one of the lowest in the country and the reason for the proposed increase was the increased workload which the Victims First Hub had brought. The Deputy PCC reported that two of the posts; the Analyst and the Project Manager, were previously funded by a Home Office grant. However, the PCC wanted to continue with the posts as they produced good work. The Analyst supported CSPs as some local authorities did not have the expertise which this postholder brought. The other post was to support the increasing volume of complaint reviews to be dealt with by the PCC, caused by the reforms to the national police complaints system.]

16. The budget report, as with last years, highlights the increased contribution from the revenue budget to fund the capital programme. What are the wider implications for the revenue budget of such an approach and is this sustainable going forward?

[The PCC commented that he could not really give an answer as he did not know what the future Home Office Capital Grant would be.]

17. In relation to the health and welfare of Police Officers, what provision is there in the budget for this?

[The Chief Constable replied that the welfare and wellbeing was important to him. There were a number of strategies in place looking at best practice. This last year had been tough for policing but there were dedicated resources for this and there was a moral obligation for the welfare of officers.]

RESOLVED – (1) That the Panel approved the Police and Crime Commissioner’s precept for 2021/22 as set out in the OPCC report ‘Revenue Estimates 2021/22 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25’ having received satisfactory responses to the questions raised.

(2) That the Panel received the PCC’s proposed precept for 2021/22 and noted:

- I. That, subject to final taxbase notifications, the council tax requirement for 2021/22 be set at £213.162m.**
- II. That any variation in the final amount of council tax income be appropriated to or from General Balances or the earmarked reserve for Covid-19 support**
- III. That the police element of the council tax for 2021/22 be set at £231.28 for properties in Band D, with the charge for other bands as set out below. This represents an increase in the band D precept of £15, or 6.9%.**

POLICE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM REFORMS

The Panel was provided with a report and presentations on the recent reforms to the police complaints system which came into effect on 1 February 2020.

Members were reminded that following the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Part 2 of the Act reformed the national police complaints and disciplinary systems.

Colin Paine, Detective Chief Superintendent and Head of Professional Standards Department (PSD) attended the meeting and provided details on the operational impact of the reforms to the PSD.

PSD

The main issues raised were:

- The new complaints system focused on forces not individuals;
- There was a strong focus on learning and improvement
- Introduction of 'reflective practice'. This was the ability to reflect on your actions and improve the way you worked. In order to get the most out of it the participating officer must be willing to continually assess their own practice.
- Officers could directly be referred into Unsatisfactory Performance Procedures
- Misconduct sanctions available now included extended written warnings and reduction in rank
- All complaints/expressions of dissatisfaction needed to be recorded or logged
- All complaints were subject to a 'reasonable and proportionate' investigation. IOPC Statutory Guidance 2020 states forces needed "to complete a reasonable and proportionate investigation". This meant weighing up the matters seriousness and its potential for learning, against the efficient use of policing resources, to determine the extent and nature of the matters handling and outcome.
- A reasonable and proportionate response included providing a clear and evidence-based rationale for any decisions made.
- New definition of a complaint – much broader than before. A complaint was "Any expression of dissatisfaction with a police force which is expressed (whether in writing or otherwise) by or on behalf of a member of the public"
- A formal complaint was one which was recorded under Schedule 3 of the Police Reform Act and was recorded because the complainant expressly wished it to be so recorded.
- Informal Complaints – These were low level expressions of dissatisfaction/underperformance that could generally be resolved at the point of call. There were no fixed processes for dealing with expressions of dissatisfaction and if the complainant was satisfied at the end of the call then the matter was considered resolved.
- Under the new regulations the Home Office have given a provision to deal with complaints outside the formal complaint process. These were Schedule 3 complaints, which meant the rules of schedule 3 did not apply.
- Complaint reviews (formerly appeals) were now carried out by the OPCC

The Panel was informed that the new complaints process came into effect on 1st February 2020. Any matters brought to the attention of PSD before this date would be dealt with under the 2012 regulations. It was anticipated that there would be a need to run two complaint processes alongside each other for approximately 12 months.

Reference was made to prolific complainants and the Panel was informed that such complainants created disproportionate demand. The IOPC had produced guidance on handling repetitious and vexatious complainants.

The PSD put in place communication plans with the most demanding complainants.

There had been a 57% increase in complaints recorded this year which was similar to other sized forces, although some forces had seen increases of up to 400%.

The PSD had put additional resources into complaints recording, had simplified the recording process and developed robotics to assist with recording. A small 'Complaints Resolution Team' had been established to tackle low seriousness complaints quickly with almost 50% of all new complaints resolved this way.

PCC

Vicki Waskett, Head of Governance and Compliance at the Office of the PCC, attended the meeting and informed the Panel that under the new regulations the PCC had the responsibility for the reviews of the outcome of complaints (formerly appeals)

The review right gave the complainant 28 days in which to contest the findings of the investigation. The review considered whether the investigation and outcome of the complaint was reasonable and proportionate.

The Panel was informed that one year on from the introduction of the new reforms and the OPCC taking on responsibility for undertaking 'reviews' of the outcome of police complaints, there had been 189 requests for a review, with 111 reviews completed and 5 reviews having been upheld.

Examples of types of complaints included:

- Disputes between neighbours, due to COVID restrictions.
- Allegations of Officers breaching COVID restrictions; being too tough, or not tough enough
- Complaints about Custody e.g. detainees' confiscation of mobile phones or not being able to keep their mask on in a cell.

In some cases, where complainants were believed to be, or become vexatious, communications strategies would be put in place. Individuals would be informed prior to any action being taken and the reasons for a communication strategy being implemented. However, where OPCC staff safety or welfare was being threatened due to unreasonable behaviour, the individual may not receive prior warning.

The Panel was informed that the number of requests for reviews received had resulted in extra workload for the OPCC and due to current sickness absence within PSD, this work had now been reallocated to the OPCC.

Questions

1. Reference was made to historical complaints which escalated through the whole complaints process and through to the Police and Crime Panel. The PCC was asked if complainants were given realistic expectations in relation to complaints which were forwarded to the PCP as many were clearly vexatious, and abuse of the process and without merit.

[The Head of Governance and Compliance at the Office of the PCC replied that some complaints were historical and very detailed and it was felt important that the PCP had all the background paperwork for the complaints to enable Members to have the full context of the complaint. It was agreed, however, that consideration would be given to looking at a way of dealing with such complaints which clearly fell outside the remit of PCP complaints and to manage complainant's expectations.]

2. The work of the Complaints Resolution Team within PSD seems key in terms of a quick resolution of some complaints. Does this involve officers speaking to complainants and if so, can this more informal approach be replicated in other areas to resolve complaints i.e. complaints to OPCC?

[The Head of PSD replied that the use of personal contact improved effectiveness and usually would produce a resolution.]

3. Could more temporary resource be put into the PSD to cover staff absences rather than increase the burden for the Office for the PCC? What is the reason for the problem of sickness absence within PSD?

[The Panel was provided with details and Members were informed that other options had been explored for this temporary arrangement.]

RESOLVED – That the officers be thanked for their presentation and the information provided be noted.

5/21

UPDATE ON VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNITS

The Deputy PCC informed the Panel that the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) brought together key partners from across Thames Valley to provide a co-ordinated response to tackling serious violence across the region.

This multi-agency approach involved local authorities, education, policing, health, third sector organisations and members of the community, all working together to understand the root causes of serious violence and focussing on place-based problem solving in order to address them.

The VRU took a public health approach to tackling violence by looking at violence, not as isolated incidents or as a law enforcement problem, but instead as a preventable consequence of a range of factors such as adverse early-life experiences or harmful social or community experiences and influences.

Thames Valley's VRU focussed on four main themes:

- Supporting communities and partnerships
- Early intervention and prevention

- Tackling county lines and the misuse of drugs
- Effective law enforcement and the criminal justice response

The Panel was informed in 2019 the OPCC received £1.16m to support the introduction of the VRU and this funding was renewed in March 2020 with an additional £1.16m.

Details of short and long-term activities and interventions which were being delivered by the VRU were provided in the report.

Reference was made to knife crime being down 6% from last year and at its lowest level since 2016. Personal robbery was down 23% and there was a positive outcome rate for Violence with Injury is up 23%.

The Panel was informed that the VRU worked with data from the Police, local authorities and the NHS to enable the identification of key locations and times of serious violence to inform prevention and enforcement activity. A dashboard was available for the Police to link data from all agencies.

There was a Thames Valley wide Drugs Diversion Scheme in place providing specialist support for people found in possession of drugs to prevent prosecution and break the cycle of re-offending. Enhanced information sharing network had been established to help safeguard young people identified as at risk of exploitation through County Lines.

Questions

1. In relation to violent crime which took place as a result of County-Lines which crossed Police Force boundaries; the Deputy PCC was asked what collaborative work took place with other VRUs to ensure consistency in approach?

[The Panel was informed that there was a National County-Lines Co-ordination Centre which had been established which ensured a joined-up approach to cross-boundary crimes. In addition, the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit ensured a consistent collaborative approach to these crimes.]

2. The Deputy PCC was asked about gaining consent from health partners for data and what challenges did this bring.

[This could be challenging at times, particularly as Thames Valley covered three counties which consisted of a number of different health trusts. There had to be a view taken on sharing data in relation to balancing patient confidentiality against prevention of crime.]

3. How much of the work of the VRU is fed back to Community Safety Partnerships?

[The Chief Constable reported that this was done, however, this could be improved, particularly in relation to the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership.]

4. *What work is taking place with the important community groups who are often the key to preventing violent crime such as gang and knife crime?*

[The Deputy PCC referred to the work which took place with MK Dons and Oxford United Football Clubs in terms of working with young people, but he acknowledged that more work needed to be done with community groups.]

RESOLVED – That the Deputy PCC be thanked for the presentation and the information in the report be noted.

6/21

POLICE AND CRIME PLAN STRATEGIC PRIORITY - VULNERABILITY - PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Panel was provided with a report which detailed progress made (Year 4, 2020/21, Qtr. 2) on delivery of the following four-year Police and Crime Plan key aims for addressing vulnerability:

1. Improved recognition across the criminal justice system of mental health distress experienced by both victims and offenders, leading to
 - a) Referral pathways into appropriate support agencies, and
 - b) Improved access to mental health care from those in contact with the criminal justice system.
2. Better understanding by police and partners of the extent and nature of elder abuse, followed by positive action taken to address the issues uncovered.
3. Improved police awareness and robust prosecution of those practising ‘more hidden’ forms of abuse, including coercive control, stalking, harassment, honour-based abuse (HBA) and forced marriage.
4. Improvements in criminal justice experience and outcomes for victims of domestic and sexual abuse.
5. Ongoing assessment by police of the benefits arising from Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs), including the current arrangements of 9 MASHs serving Thames Valley.

RESOLVED – That the report and information contained within, be noted.

7/21

CHAIRMAN AND PCC ANNOUNCEMENTS AND TOPICAL ISSUES REPORT

The Topical Issues report was noted.

In response to a question on national police investigations having been compromised by an error that led to hundreds of thousands of records being deleted from UK-wide databases, the PCC informed the Panel that this was a Home Office data base but he was aware that this had been down to a data error. It was too early to know the impact, if any, this had on Thames Valley.

8/21

WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

9/21 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED - That the public be excluded for the duration of item 13 in the Agenda since it was likely that if they were present during this item there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and specified in relation to the respective item in the Agenda and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

10/21 **UPDATE FROM COMPLAINTS SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Panel was provided with an update on the recently upheld complaint against the PCC.

It was agreed that Councillor Merilyn Davies (West Oxfordshire District Council) and Liz Jones (Independent Member) be appointed to the Complaints Sub-Committee to fill the two vacancies.

The public should be excluded during this item because its discussion in public would be likely to lead to the disclosure to members of the public present of information in the following prescribed category:

3. *Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.*

RESOLVED: That the information reported be noted and the appointments of Councillor Merilyn Davies (West Oxfordshire District Council) and Liz Jones (Independent Member) to the Complaints Sub-Committee be approved.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing