

Minutes

Minutes of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel held on Friday, 22 November 2019, in Aylesbury Vale District Council Offices, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 8FF, commencing at 11.00 am and concluding at 13.05pm.

Members Present

Councillor Kieron Mallon (Oxfordshire County Council) (Chairman), Councillor Trevor Egleton (South Bucks District Council) (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Robin Bradburn (Milton Keynes Council), Councillor David Cannon (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Councillor Nigel Chapman (Oxford City Council), Councillor Steve Good (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor John Harrison (Bracknell Forest Council), Councillor Sandra Jenkins (Substitute – Aylesbury Vale District Council), 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 Jonathan Waters (Chiltern District Council) and Councillor Howard Woollaston (West Berkshire Council).

Officers Present

Khalid Ahmed (Scrutiny Officer).

Others Present

Matthew Barber (Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner), John Campbell (Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police), David Colchester (Support Officer, Local Criminal Justice Board), Paul Hammond (Chief Executive Officer of PCC), Anthony Stansfeld (Police and Crime Commissioner) and Ian Thompson (Chief Finance Officer, Office of Police and Crime Commissioner).

Apologies

Councillor David Carroll (Wycombe District Council), Councillor Sophia James (Reading Borough Council) and Councillor Mark Winn (Aylesbury Vale District Council).

25 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 6 September 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

26 UPDATE ON THE ALLOCATION BY TVP OF THE ADDITIONAL £8.5M PRECEPT FUNDING

The PCC reported that from the additional £8.5m of additional precept funding there would be a total of 212 new posts, consisting of 69 Police Officers and 143 staff. It was estimated that £6.6m would be allocated for the salaries of these new posts, likely to increase to £8m for the following year.

The Panel was informed that the residual funding of around £2m in the current year would be invested in technology to improve the information and communications available for officers and to improve the services provided.

Reference was made to the £1.3m which would be allocated to the Contact Management system. The PCC reported that the calls to the 101 service were much improved; however, there were times of high demand when there were still considerable delays.

The PCC reported that £2.5m of the extra funding would be allocated to recruit front line Police Officers which would increase visibility for communities and respond to increasing crime. There would be an additional 26 Police Officers in Local Police Areas and the case investigators temporary contracts would be extended until the end of March 2020.

Questions

(1) Could the rationale be explained behind the proposal to appoint more police staff than police officers and what impact will this have on the number of police officers on the streets?

[The PCC reported that a number of the extra Police staff were civilians and comprised of investigators and detectives who helped solve crimes, together with an increased number of call handling staff for the Contact Management system. The Chief Constable explained the importance of the additional staff for the Contact Management system which was to improve the average time to answer 101 calls; working towards an average of two minutes in 2020/21.]

The PCC reported that the appointment of investigators and detectives had resulted in some success with an increase in the solving of crime. In response to an enquiry regarding data around the number of people calling 101 which had their calls dropped, the Deputy PCC responded that as of Monday and Tuesday of this week, the average time for 101 calls to be answered was 25 seconds. The information regarding the number of dropped calls would be provided to Panel Members.]

(2) With regard to the recruitment of more investigators to combat the increase in organised and crime such as cybercrime, what work is taking place with investigators to enable the Police to tackle this crime?

[The PCC informed the Panel that the prevention of fraud was an important issue and referred to high level fraud against people and business costing £190 billion nationally. Police forces did not have the resources to tackle the problem. Prevention of fraud was important; together with the education of the public to enable people were not left vulnerable to cybercrime.]

(3) Could details be provided of what recruitment and retention strategies are in place to ensure TVP were competitive in the Police job market?

[The PCC reported that TVP was considered an attractive Police Force to work for, however, the Thames Valley region was an expensive area to live, with a lack of affordable housing for new Police recruits. Other areas of the country were more affordable for would be applicants. Reference was made to the recent uplift in Police Officers coming at an opportune time as the

Force had just launched a new careers website. In addition, a lot of good work had taken place on recruitment and retention, together with improvements to working conditions, such as in Slough, where there was more parking provision for Police Officers, rest rooms had been improved at Police Stations at Abingdon and Maidenhead. Work was taking place with the Police Federation on improvements which could be made to improve working conditions for officers.]

(4) Reference was made to the cost of housing in the region and the impact this had on recruitment and a comment was made in relation to whether Key Worker Housing schemes had been considered.

[A discussion took place on Key Worker Housing and it was acknowledged that this was dependent on local housing authorities ring-fencing housing stock for this purpose. This could be an area which could be investigated further between local authorities and the Police.]

RESOLVED – That the report and the information provided be noted.

27 UPDATE ON THE TVP LOCAL POLICING MODEL

The Chief Constable provided the Panel with an update on TVP's Local Policing Model. Members were reminded that at its Panel meeting in June 2019 a progress report was provided on changes which had been made to the Local Policing Model. The Panel requested that a further update be provided, together with details on costs.

The Chief Constable explained that the Model was now simpler and was well established. Neighbourhood Policing was retained across the Force area. Response Teams and Investigation Teams had been increased, to improve detection rates. "Stop and Search" had been increased which had proved successful in terms of preventing drug and knife crime. Reference was made to the use of Section 60 Orders of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act which temporarily allows officers greater powers to stop and search in relation to items connected with violence in a defined location. These powers had been used in relation to recent knife and violent crimes which had taken place in Slough and had proved successful in terms of reassuring the public and reducing the threat of violence.

Reference was made to staff morale being a problem when the original local policing model was first introduced, but it was reported that the reconfigured model appeared to be well received by officers which was reflected in encouraging results from a recent staff survey.

The Chief Constable reported that the Force now had the right model with progress being made. Next year there would be a move to LPA officers and staff being aligned to one of the three 'hubs' in Buckinghamshire, Berkshire or Oxfordshire.

In response to a question regarding monitoring of the Model, the Panel was assured that regular updates would be provided.

RESOLVED – That the update provided be noted and a further report be submitted to a future Panel meeting.

28. THEMED ITEM - INCREASE IN CRIME RATES AND FALLING NUMBER OF PROSECUTIONS/ RESTRUCTURING OF COURTS AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS ON THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The Panel was provided with a report from the Scrutiny Officer which provided Members with the background to the reason for the themed item. The objective of the themed item was for the Panel to assess and understand why with an increasing crime rate in the Thames Valley and nationally has the number of convictions/ prosecutions reduced.

Crime Rates

The Chief Constable presented to the Panel details of crime rates in the Thames Valley comparing them with the national figures.

Compared to last years figures because of proactive policing work there had been a 33% increase in the trafficking of drugs; a 21% increase in possession of weapons and a 20% of possession of drugs. Reference was made to a 44% increase in stop and search which had resulted in an increase in these crimes.

The Chief Constable referred to the recent use of Section 60 Orders under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act which were used where there had been increases in knife crime. This had resulted in increased numbers of arrests for possession of weapons and of drugs.

Overall there had been an increase of crime across the Thames Valley (up 5%) with references made to increases in violence without injury (up 15%), thefts from vehicles (up 11%) and thefts of motor vehicles (up 5%). Criminal damage and violence with injury were stable.

There had been reductions in shoplifting, Burglary of dwellings (down 5%), bilking (obtaining or withholding money from someone unfairly or by deceit; cheat or defraud (down by 6%), Arson (down by 7%), Burglary of shed (down by 9%) and GBH (down by 20%).

The Panel was provided with details of the position Thames Valley was in terms of crime levels compared to similar grouped forces and nationally and Thames Valley was in a favourable position. The Chief Constable reported that the background to these crime figures were improved crime recording, changes to crime-recording rules and increased confidence in reporting all which continued to have a significant impact on the levels of certain crime types.

Reference was made in the report to the Thames Valley PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy programme) assessment of 2018/19 which had stated that after legislation had changed the way in which police bail was applied, the Thames Valley Force did not strike the right balance between the use of pre-charge bail and the released under investigation (RUI) option.

The Chief Constable in response informed the Panel that in relation to Arrest, Bail and Release Under Investigation (RUI), greater awareness had been raised among officers of how to use the bail legislation which had resulted in a 382% increase in the use of bail between October 2018 and September 2019 compared to the previous period.

The Panel was informed that there had been a wholesale review of how Thames Valley Police investigated crime. The overall volume of positive outcomes between April and November 18 was down when compared to the same period in 2018 but the last 5 weeks were up 14% on last year, and this would continue to improve.

In relation to court resolutions and particularly around victims of rape and sexual assault, it was acknowledged that collectively better work was required, particularly around disclosure. Members were informed that this was a complex area and reference was made to the work which had to be carried out in relation to retrieval and downloading of data from mobile phones and other devices which was time consuming and complex. The report referred to the average smartphone containing the equivalent of 30,000 pages of A4 paper in information.

Local Criminal Justice Board and Crown Prosecution Service

The Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner attended the meeting and informed the Panel that he was the Chairman of the Local Criminal Justice Board. Local Criminal Justice Boards (LCJBs) brought together criminal justice organisations at police force area level to support joint working and improve services. The purpose of the LCJB was to reduce crime, harm and risk by increasing the efficiency and credibility of the Criminal Justice System. By working in partnership, the board aimed to improve services to the public with the minimum costs, supported by the best available evidence.

The Panel was informed that improving the criminal justice system was a national challenge, not just a Thames Valley challenge. Reference was made to improvements which had been made in Police preparations for trials and that for Thames Valley between July 2019 to September 2019, there had been almost 2,500 court cases, with 73% defendants offering guilty pleas at Crown Court cases. This was proving that good work was being done, with improvements made in disclosure work.

Reference was made to the increase in crime and Members were informed that some of the increase in crime, particularly around sexual assault, rape and domestic abuse, was historic crime. From 2007, this type of crime had quadrupled and was due to people becoming more confident in coming forward and reporting this type of crime and victims being taken more seriously and being supported often through a traumatic experience.

The Deputy PCC referred to the need for more robust statistics on the falling levels of prosecutions and convictions as arrests had increased in relation to crimes such as domestic abuse; however, obtaining convictions was not always easy due to victims and witnesses not seeing the process through. Improvements in this area had to be made and greater support was required for victims of such crimes.

Thames Valley Police had restructured their investigative capability with local Detective Chief Inspectors put into localised areas with CID. There had been investment in technology with an improvement in the transfer of data to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Discussion took place on the work of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Thames and Chiltern Crown Prosecution Service was the main prosecuting authority in England and Wales and was set up in 1986 to prosecute criminal cases investigated by the police in England and

Wales. Thames and Chiltern were one of 14 CPS Areas and covered three police force areas; Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Thames Valley. The Deputy PCC commented that the Police and CPS needed to work closely together to ensure improvements were made in relation to ensuring the effectiveness and quality of prosecutions. This included improving the quality of files and evidence to ensure that court cases did not collapse for reasons such as inadequate disclosure.

The Deputy PCC referred to the restructuring of the Criminal Justice System which had resulted in two thirds of magistrates' courts in Thames Valley being closed over the last decade. He expressed concerns regarding this and the implications this had on the Criminal Justice System, particularly in relation to victims of crime and witnesses attending court hearings, if the distances were too great. Reference was made to court cases collapsing because of the non-appearance of witnesses at cases.

CCTV links to Courts would overcome some problems, but until that system was up and running properly, its effectiveness could not be measured. Reference was made to the work which was taking place on a video conference suite which would improve the process.

In relation to why cases collapsed, the Panel was informed that this was not just due to problems with disclosure. The failure of witnesses to turn up, defence solicitors on occasion deliberately putting cases off to attempt to get cases dropped were amongst other reasons why convictions were sometimes not achieved. This was very frustrating for the Police who had worked towards bringing cases to court and ultimately getting justice for victims of crime.

The PCC commented that crime figures would increase if the Police were being proactive in relation to drugs and weapons, with increased use of stop and search. This was inevitable consequence of increased prevention of crime and a factor which was not reflected in inspection reports.

Questions

(1) With the increase in Police precept funding, will resources be allocated to improve investigations and the disclosure of evidence to ensure positive outcomes for victims of crimes and to ensure justice is carried out?

[The PCC replied that extra Police Officers would be available as a result of the increased Police precept and this would lead to more arrests and convictions for perpetrators of crimes. More training was given to Police Officers on investigations and improving the disclosure of information for cases and this had improved. The changes made to the local policing model would improve the detection of crimes and investigations. Reference was made to rape, and sexual assault and the Police would continue to tackle these offences rigorously and take them to court.]

The Deputy PCC referred to performance monitoring and targets which were set to in relation to completion of investigations within time and producing evidence for cases within timescales.]

(2) In relation to crimes relating to Burglaries in Sheds being down, a Member commented that this could be down to the backlog of calls to the "101" service where these crimes have

failed to be reported and picked up in the crime statistics. A question was asked about on-line reporting of crime and whether this had been successful.

[The Deputy PCC replied that improvements were still being made to the website to ensure that the on-line service was stable and would be able to cope with the demand. Once assurance had been received there would be more publicity given to the on-line reporting of crime. The Chief Constable commented that in some local police areas burglaries from shed crimes had gone up. In relation to "101" calls, the latest performance statistics had shown that there had been an improvement in performance.]

(3) Reference was made to the Cambridgeshire Harm Index which uses sentencing guidelines of England and Wales to calculate the harm score of each crime and the closing of local courts would have an impact on assessing this data accurately if cases were not being heard. The PCC was asked for his view on what impact has the closure of local courts had on the delivery of the key Local Criminal Justice Board priority of increasing the number of effective trials

[The PCC agreed with this assumption and raised the possibility of hosting courts in local council chambers which would assist in terms of accessibility for victims and witnesses. The closure of local courts in the Thames Valley had not been a good decision and had impacted on the Criminal Justice System.]

(4) A Member referred to the problems which victims and witnesses in Buckinghamshire had in terms of travelling great distances to attend court and the PCC was asked if the National Association of PCCs had been consulted and expressed their opinion on the changes to the Criminal Justice System.

[The PCC reported that there had not been any comment from the National Association of PCCs on the closures of courts but informed the Panel that the problem of victims and witnesses having greater distances to travel was mainly a problem in rural areas of Thames Valley].

The Panel in response suggested that similar Police Force areas to Thames Valley must be encountering similar problems in relation to the closure of local courts and asked that consideration be given by the National Association of PCCs to make a statement on this.

(5) In relation to crime figures, A Member referred to the increased use of stop and search and asked the PCC whether this was overused, although it was emphasised that drug dealers damaged communities.

[The PCC commented that the real issue with drugs was the production and import and the distribution out of cities. Reference was made to the market for drugs which had changed, with major users of drugs now being wealthier people. The people who tended to be arrested were the dealers and they were usually the victims.]

Stop and search needed to be used equitably and fairly, but it was an essential preventative measure which had had some success. The perception was that Thames Valley Police use of stop and search was done fairly and there had been positive feedback regarding its use. Crime statistics for knife crime had increased due in some measure to the use of stop and search. The Chief Constable added that good neighbourhood policing was also required with good problem-

solving teams.

The Deputy PCC added that training for Police Officers on stop and search was important to provide confidence for Police Officers to carry out the task sensitively but with authority. The Panel was informed that he had witnessed the use of stop and search near Maidenhead Police Station and Police Officers had received compliments for the way they had carried it out.]

(6) A Member referred to the importance of CCTV within Town Centres which played a key role in the prevention of crime and disorder and that some town centre did not have CCTV.

[The Deputy PCC reported that he would shortly be meeting with the Chief Constable to discuss CCTV and referred to the improved use of CCTV by the Police being a key aim in the PCC's Police and Crime Plan Strategic Priority for prevention and early intervention.]

(7) In relation to the closure of local courts, a Member referred to the problems caused by the closure of Milton Keynes' Crown Court which meant people from the area had to attend the Crown Court in Huntingdon, which was an unreasonable distance. The PCC was asked if he could take forward the issue.

[The PCC said he would pass on the concerns to Her Majesty's Courts Service.]

(8) The PCC was asked to comment on the alarming increase of collapsed court cases due to a failure by the Police or prosecutors to disclose evidence. This was particularly concerning in relation to a number of collapsed rape cases caused by a failure to share evidence with defence solicitors.

[The Deputy PCC reported that there had been problems with file quality and the transferring of evidence which had all contributed to cases collapsing. There needed to be improvements made in relation to improving the filing of evidence and the early release and sharing with defence solicitors.]

The Chief Constable commented that there had been some high-profile court cases which had collapsed and referred to the difficulties of obtaining data from mobile phones of victims because of the intrusive nature of doing so. Criminal Justice requests for increased information was a challenging, difficult and time-consuming process.]

(9) The PCC was asked what could be done to ensure that some Domestic Violence cases did not fall because of the delay in getting cases to court.

[The Deputy PCC referred to the requirement to ensure there was adequate victim support throughout the process to provide reassurance for victims. Nationally, the CPS was looking at this, although there had been some resistance due to the resource implications.]

RESOLVED – That the PCC, Deputy PCC and Chief Constable be thanked for their contribution to the themed item and the PCC be asked to consider asking the National Association of PCCs to issue a joint statement on the impact on the Criminal Justice System, of the closure of local courts.

29 THAMES VALLEY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL ARRANGEMENTS AND RULES OF PROCEDURE

Consideration was given to a report which sought approval of the Panel to amend the Panel's Rules of Procedure and Panel arrangement to enable 4 co-optees and one Member nomination to be appointed to the Panel to represent Buckinghamshire Council thereby maintaining a balanced panel after the number of appointing councils in Buckinghamshire (excluding Milton Keynes) reduces from five to one on 1 April 2020.

The Panel was informed that the proposal to have 4 co-optees and one member representative appointed by Buckinghamshire Council, rather than 5 member representatives, was due to the legislation which prevented more than one representative being appointed by each local authority in areas where there are more than 10 local authorities in a single police area such as Thames Valley. It was therefore proposed that 4 co-optees be appointed to maintain a geographically balanced panel as provided for by the legislation.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Panel arrangements for the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel be updated to reflect the Host Authority for the Panel from 1 January 2020 will be Oxfordshire County Council and the changes arising from local government reorganisation in Buckinghamshire which take effect from 1 April 2020.

(2). That the Panel's Rules of Procedure be amended to include the appointment of four co-opted members from Buckinghamshire Council due to local government reorganisation in Buckinghamshire, based on current geographical areas. The four co-opted members are in addition to the one member nomination to the Panel from Buckinghamshire Council. The changes to take effect from 1 April 2020 and are required in order to satisfy the requirements of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 and produce a balanced panel.

(3) That the Police and Crime Panel interview the Councillors who are proposed as Co-Optees. This is in keeping with the interviews which take place for the appointment of Independent Co-Opted Members.

30 REPORT OF THE COMPLAINTS SUB-COMMITTEE

The Panel received and noted a report of the Complaints Sub-Committee which summarised two recent complaints made against the Police and Crime Commissioner which were considered by the Sub-Committee.

31 PCC/ CHAIRMAN UPDATES AND TOPICAL ISSUES REPORT

The Panel was provided with a report from the Scrutiny Officer which summarised recent topical issues on policing and crime.

The PCC was asked for his comments on recent media reports regarding an allegation that he had abused his position as the Thames Valley Police and Commissioner by getting involved in allegations of fraud involving persons outside his Thames Valley jurisdiction.

The PCC provided the Panel with the background to the allegations and it was noted that no formal complaint had been submitted to the Office of the PCC.

In relation to the Prime Minister's announcement of extra police officers for the Thames Valley (600), the PCC was asked if he was confident that the funding would be adequate to recruit 600 police officers for the Thames Valley. The PCC reiterated his comments that the formula grant was weighted against Thames Valley and referred to Merseyside, where the population was less than the Thames Valley, and yet they had 200 extra officers. He added that he hoped the formula grant would change to be more equitable for all Police forces.

The Member from Slough referred to the recent knife crime in Slough and requested that consideration be given to deploying extra resource into the area. The PCC replied that Slough did have more Police Officers and the Chief Constable referred to the changes which had resulted in 182 new officers who would concentrate on local policing.

The report and the information reported was noted.

32 WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

33 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on 31 January 2020 at 11.00am at Aylesbury Vale District Council offices.

CHAIRMAN