

Minutes

Minutes of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel held on Friday, 8 April 2022 in Paralympic Meeting Room, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Bucks HP19 8FF, commencing at 11.00 am and concluding at 1.15 pm

Members Present

Councillor Marilyn Davies (West Oxfordshire District Council) (Chair), Councillor Barrie Patman (Wokingham Borough Council) (Vice-Chair), Councillor Balvinder Bains (Slough Borough Council), Councillor Adele Barnett-Ward (Reading Borough Council), Councillor David Cannon (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Councillor David Carroll (Buckinghamshire Council), Councillor Sam Casey-Rerhaye (South Oxfordshire District Council – attended remotely), Liz Jones (Independent Member), Councillor Andrew McHugh (Cherwell District Council), Phillip Morrice (Independent Member), Councillor Richard Newcombe (Buckinghamshire Council - Co-Opted Member – attended remotely), Councillor Claire Rowles (West Berkshire Council), Councillor Dr Louise Upton (Oxford City Council), Councillor Richard Webber (Oxfordshire County Council) and Councillor Mark Winn (Buckinghamshire Council - Co-Opted Member).

Officers Present

Khalid Ahmed (Scrutiny Officer).

Others Present

Matthew Barber (Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner), John Campbell (Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police - attended remotely) and Paul Hammond (Chief Executive 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)

8/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor Robin Bradburn (Milton Keynes Council), Councillor Emily Culverhouse (Buckinghamshire Council – Co-Opted Member) and Councillor Neil Fawcett (Vale of White Horse District Council).

9/21 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 28 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

THEMED ITEM - DOMESTIC ABUSE

The Panel was provided with a report of the PCC which provided details of TVP's operational response to domestic abuse. This serious issue features in the priorities set out in the Police & Criminal Justice Plan and continues to be a Force priority.

The Panel was informed that in addition to the operational response set out in the report, the PCC provided support to victims of domestic abuse through Victims First and through supporting numerous organisations across the Thames Valley.

Reference was made to:-

- Work with Thames Valley Partnership who have been involved in developing covert smart phone apps to help protect victims.
- Funding Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDACs) in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. Discussions continue with the judiciary in Oxfordshire and Berkshire, where it was also hoped to be able to establish similar problem solving courts.
- Support for DA victims would feature heavily on the agenda for the Violence against Women and Girls Partnership Board, which would be chaired by the PCC next month.
- Work continued to try to find effective perpetrator programmes to tackle those who do commit abuse and reduce instances in the future.
- The Domestic Abuse fast track programme, which was now back up and running in Aylesbury Crown Court, continued to demonstrate great benefit. The PCC reiterated that he would continue to lobby the CPS to provide this programme elsewhere in the Thames Valley.

Members' Questions

(1) In paragraph 10 of the PCC report and Civil Restraint and Protective Orders, there is no information on how successful these various orders are and whether they were being used as they were intended to be used?

[The PCC replied that often the issuing of these orders was seen as easier options rather than pursuing the criminal justice route. He commented that the use of Civil Restraint and Protective Orders were effective. They worked as a means of securing a future prosecution. They were successful and the PCC looked at comparisons on their usage with other forces to ensure that TVP made full use of them.]

(2) Reference was made to hidden forms of domestic abuse which sometimes happen in certain "hard to reach" communities. The PCC was asked what training officers were given to deal with this to help victims.

[The PCC reported that this was a difficult and sensitive area to tackle. Reference was made to the issue being raised during a programme in Slough. The PCC said, that whilst respecting the sensitivity, crimes committed in all communities were treated as crimes and were treated in accordance with the law, and there were no exceptions.]

Work took place with the Third sector (Charities), who worked with victims to enable them to have the confidence to come forward to the Police, to report domestic abuse.]

(3) In areas such as Slough, there were up to 16 different communities which would require the Police to be sufficiently trained in the different customs and ways of these communities. However, a problem was some victims not receiving updates and feedback on crimes which have been committed. This would deter other victims of domestic abuse reporting such crimes. What can the PCC do to improve this situation?

[The PCC replied that the Police received a huge amount of training on domestic abuse and worked with all community groups to make it easier for victims to come forward. In relation to feedback to victims, he was keen to look at this with the new Assistant Chief Constable responsible for Contact Management.

The Panel was informed that once crimes were reported, the Police did pretty well with 80.6% victim satisfaction on all crimes reported. It was acknowledged that there needed to be greater confidence in reporting domestic abuse crimes.]

(4) Could the PCC update the Panel on the progress of discussions with the CPS on the rolling out across the Thames Valley of the fast tracking of domestic abuse cases from Magistrates Court to Crown Court which was piloted in Aylesbury?

[The PCC reported that there would be further meetings to try and push this forward. A meeting was to take place with the Chief Constable and the management team of the CPS. The PCC said he would keep the Panel updated.]

(5) The HMICFRS 2019 inspection of TVP, highlighted that the force made less use of the domestic violence disclosure scheme (DVDS), than most other forces. Could the PCC provide an update on progress made in using DVDS which prevent further harm to victims?

[The PCC replied that this was a work in progress but he acknowledged that there was more to be done around this. Training internally was required as well as increased public awareness. A meeting was taking place in a couple of weeks, with the Force's performance team. There was an opportunity to spread the use of DVDS with local authorities, where they could come in use for social workers etc.]

(6) Reference was made to Clare's law (para 9.2), and how this worked. Anybody living with a partner who had previous historical offences, should be informed as soon as possible. However, this only applied when they were not charged. Should this be used more widely?

[The PCC commented on the use of those powers when charges are not brought and said that there were still other tools available. The Home office was looking at introducing a register of domestic abuse offenders. The volumes involved would mean a register would operate differently to the sex offender's register. This could end up overtaking Clare's Law.]

(7) The PCC was asked for his views on the current sentencing powers for domestic abuse and whether he believed these needed to be increased?

[The PCC replied that generally it was the use of those powers and making sure the powers were used to their full extent. For example, using Restraining Orders, as part of a sentence. There were a number domestic abuse cases where there was an argument for charging offenders in custody, which the CPS was reluctant to do.]

(8) Could the PCC explain what was being done to educate the victims to come forward?

[The PCC referred to various publicity campaigns, which included the poster campaign in toilets and on social media. Sometimes victims did not recognise themselves as victims.]

(9) Reference was made to the 55% of cases where prosecutions can take place without witnesses. However, there were a number of these where the prosecution time limits had expired. What can be done to improve this?

[The PCC reported that sadly, not all cases for prosecutions were successful. Prosecution time limits can expire for a number of reasons, one reason could be caused by an officer not getting a "sign off" from a supervisor. Sometimes mobile phone downloads took time. The PCC said it was important for evidence to be obtained early; early written statements and videos.]

(10) The report shows a massive increase in the armoury of the Police for dealing with domestic abuse, however, there were a large number of cases which did not reach a conclusion. The statistics in the report do not look at the victim's journey and there was not much emphasis on victims who have been the victim of multiple cases of domestic abuse. Should there be a holistic view on the number of occasions a victim reports domestic abuse?

[The PCC reported that there certainly was a focus on repeat victims of domestic abuse. The report was very much a Police focused report and the Panel was informed that there was a 75.4% conviction rate.

The Chief Constable commented that domestic abuse were complex crimes for the Police to investigate. They were difficult cases to prosecute without witnesses. The Community, friends and family of the victim all had a responsibility in terms of supporting the victim and giving them confidence to report such crimes. TVP Officers were trained to spot the signs of domestic abuse and the Police responded quickly to reports of domestic abuse and as part of a multi-agency response, prosecuted quickly.]

(11) The PCC was asked about the work which took place at The Hub in Reading and whether more information could be provided at a future Panel meeting?

[The PCC replied that Victims First provided a number of specialist services which include help for victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse. It was agreed that an item on Victims First would be brought to a future Panel meeting.]

RESOLVED - That the report of the PCC be noted, together with the responses given to the issues raised by Panel Members.

11/21

CONTACT MANAGEMENT CALL HANDLING PERFORMANCE – THAMES VALLEY POLICE

The PCC informed the Panel that there had been challenges in the last 12 months in relation to Contact Management call handling performance.

The report provided context to the performance of Contact Management. The Panel was informed that there had been a big shift in on-line reporting with a 99% increase. However, this increase had also posed a challenge for the call handling staff, as it was the same staff who answered 999 calls and dealt with on-line reporting. Investigations were taking place into using automatic / robotic responders to ease the pressure on the call handling staff.

Reference was made to the highlight information on the data results. Currently the 999 calls answered within 10 seconds was at 87% and average speed to answer for 101 calls at 03.02 minutes. There have been significant increases in demand for emergency calls in 2022 (February seeing an increase of 42% compared to last year) which had impacted on TVP's ability to meet service levels

The complexity of calls had increased, together with the additional responsibilities of staff for Crime Data Integrity, understanding prioritising etc.

In relation to recruitment, the PCC continued to scrutinise the Chief Constable and to continue the positive action to increase the diversity of the department to replicate the communities TVP served.

Members' Questions

1. Could the PCC provide some details on the recruitment and retention plans to minimise the turnover in Contact Management staff and to improve the response times to 101 calls, and could there be regular information provided to the Panel?

[The PCC replied that regular updates could be provided on progress made in recruitment to improve the performance of call handling. The average speed to answer non-emergency calls was under 3 minutes, which the PCC hoped could be lower. Reference was made to local authority emergency calls which were answered on average within 7 seconds.]

There was a challenge around handling residents' expectations and of course, residents did not comment when something went well. On-line reporting had seen a 99% increase in usage and work was taking place on using Facebook and WhatsApp as a form of communication for residents.]

2. Reference has been made to the huge increase in the volume of on-line reporting to TVP, the PCC was asked if there was any performance data on response times to this form of reporting crime?

[The PCC replied that there were some cases where there was a non urgent response given to an enquiry so it would be difficult to give an accurate picture. However, time critical issue data which was reported on-line could be provided.]

3. The PCC has previously mentioned the use of Social Media, WhatsApp etc. as an alternative means of contacting TVP. What progress has been made in implementing these initiatives?

[The Panel was informed that discussions were taking place with suppliers regarding what was on offer. It was hoped that some progress would be made on this by the end of the year.]

4. Reference was made to a case where a victim of a non-violent crime had called 101 to report a crime but the call had been abandoned on two occasions. This risked reputational damage as the 101 service was the “front desk” of TVP.

[The PCC reported that it was important to know of bad experiences of using the service. He noted comments made about resilience issues and referred to there being three call centres with discussions taking place to reduce to two. Resilience was key and that calls could be switched to other call centres if capacity was stretched at one.]

5. Reference was made to calls to 101, whereby callers had CCTV evidence of crimes committed. There were occasions where the Police did not turn up, but merely gave victims crime reference numbers.

[The PCC reported that unfortunately there was an element of triaging reported crimes and crime reference numbers were sometimes given out. There were issues around intelligence gathering. TVP were looking at the Crime and Assessment Team in Berkshire who were taking lower priority reported crime and referring them to the Hubs Team. The intention was to take the pressure off the uniformed officers and to improve the speed of response.]

6. The effectiveness and efficiencies of call handling should be tracked and staff should be measured on competencies. The PCC was asked for his view on this and what could be learnt from the private sector.

[The PCC reported that there needed to be a more holistic approach to contact management. Reference was made to the new Assistant Chief Constable and the new governance arrangements which would help in this area.]

RESOLVED – That the report of the PCC, together with the issues raised during discussion be noted.

12/21

PCC GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE OVERSIGHT AND SCRUTINY OF MAJOR FORCE PROJECTS

The report of the Police and Crime Commissioner set out the governance arrangements by which he exercised effective oversight, scrutiny and challenge,

where necessary, of the management and delivery of major Force projects, including projects undertaken in collaboration with other forces and/or public and private sector partners.

Members' Questions

1. Reference was made to what lessons had the PCC learnt in relation to Multi-Force IT projects and how in the future would the PCC manage the risk assessment, the governance and the exiting of these projects. This should be included in the draft report.

[The PCC agreed to take the comment away and be more explicit on the points raised in the proposed good governance framework. Collaborations should not be shied away from because of the opportunities they provided, however, there needed to be better governance.]

2. The PCC was asked whether it would be appropriate for the Police and Crime Panel to receive an annual report on major projects around the budget planning period?

[The PCC replied that he did not think this was necessary as the Joint Independent Audit Committee of the PCC had an oversight, however, he agreed that a report providing an overview of major projects could be provided for the Panel.]

3. The PCC was asked how a judgement was made that all Forces working on collaborative major projects are all working to the same outcomes?

[The PCC replied that from his experience, decisions were made collectively, with all Forces working towards the same outcome. The governance framework would provide protection for TVP and minimise risks.]

RESOLVED – That the report of the PCC be noted and in particular that the governance framework will facilitate a consistent approach and understanding of the PCC's expectations regarding the management of major Force projects.

13/21

REVIEW OF CCTV PROVISION AND ESTABLISHING A NEW CCTV PARTNERSHIP FOR THAMES VALLEY

The Panel was provided with a report on CCTV provision across the Thames Valley.

The PCC reported that CCTV provision across Thames Valley was varied, with each Local Policing Area (LPA) and local authority working to provide CCTV as a joint approach.

There was an issue across Thames Valley regarding the ownership of the equipment, where it was housed, and who employed the staff. Reference was made to the previous Local Policing Dept. who owned the CCTV strategy and negotiated a new Funding Formula, but this was not adopted in all areas.

Significant efforts have been made to progress both the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire hubs.

The PCC reported that there was a lack of clarity on who was responsible, and that there was no statutory requirement to provide CCTV, which meant it was discretionary for all partners.

The PCC outlined his vision for the future. The PCC recognised that CCTV existed primarily for the benefit of policing and the wider interests of community safety, however, it did not generally form part of the core function of local authorities. It was acknowledged that policing had the main responsibility for providing the CCTV capability within the Thames Valley, but this would take time to implement.

The PCC's long-term vision was for TVP to own the equipment/contracts, be responsible for maintenance and to employ staff to monitor the service. However there needed to be a Thames Valley CCTV Partnership arrangement, with contributions from participative local authorities, both financially and in kind. This partnership would enable principle local authorities, with parish/town councils; BIDs; private businesses to contribute financially to increase coverage in their locality.

The PCC reported that funding to the partnership would likely be based on a funding formula, similar to that used for the Community Safety Fund, to provide baseline coverage and additional charges based on extra provision that may be provided.

Reference was made to discussions which have already begun with Milton Keynes Council and councils in Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire was the area which seemed most likely to be able to make a change first, should all partners be willing, and this could form the model for the rest of Thames Valley.

Thames Valley Police currently has a capital budget of £472,000 available to support moves to a new model, and the PCC said he would create an earmarked revenue reserve of £1m.

Discussion took place on elements of the funding of such provision, and in particular, the funding which would be required for the personnel who would be required to monitor the CCTV screens. The PCC replied that there would be a considerable financial burden on the Police, and local authorities would have to provide funding. There could be an option of transferring all staff to the Police to centralise the service.

Members' Questions

1. Reference was made to West Berkshire, where the Council and Parish Councils were concerned regarding the sustainability of the proposed model.

[The PCC reported that the proposal was an ambition, and the partnership arrangements would be primarily with upper tier local authorities, although there was nothing precluding Town and Parish Councils becoming involved and providing finance for local coverage.]

2. Reference was made to the aspiration of the Central Hub and the partnership with Buckinghamshire Council and the availability of the joint control room, and the PCC was asked whether CCTV doorbells would be a useful tool for the Police.

[The PCC replied that doorbell CCTV worked very well in Lancashire, where householders registered their CCTV systems with the Police. This would be a good resource for the Police to use.]

3. The PCC was asked how big a challenge was getting Councils onboard?

[The PCC commented that it was a challenge getting every local authority to sign up for the contracts funding. In Oxfordshire, local authorities were already looking at a centralised control room and this would be a good model when focussing on other parts of Thames Valley. Further down the line, the systems could be brought together to get Thames Valley wide coverage.]

The PCC commented that there were great benefits on centralising, not least costs, but there had to be good joint working from all parties. TVP taking the lead role would take away any conflicts which local authorities may have as the primary role of the CCTV would be for preventing and fighting crime.]

4. A Member referred to the partnership working very well in Oxford City, with the visuals from the cameras being excellent. There were experienced officers, and it was important that these were retained. The Council had coverage in towers blocks and this made communities feel safer.

[The PCC commented that for the CCTV partnership to work, there needed to be a continuation of funding from Councils. CCTV in tower blocks gave Councils improved community safety for their residents.]

5. The PCC was asked about Windsor where the Council had invested over £1m in CCTV in public spaces. The level of monitoring of the cameras needed more localised control. There was difficulty getting the Police to contribute. There could be an option of enforcement by camera.

[The PCC replied that partnership work would be challenging, there was the need for negotiation on both sides. There would be operational challenges for the Police in terms of capacity. Enforcement by camera could be an option.]

RESOLVED – That the report of the PCC be noted, together with the information provided at the meeting.

14/21

PROCESS FOR APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY PCC IF MANDATED BY THE HOME OFFICE

The PCC provided a report on the process which would be adopted if the PCC was mandated by the Home Office to appoint a Deputy PCC.

The report was noted.

15/21 **REPORT OF THE COMPLAINTS SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Panel noted the outcome of the complaint made against the Police and Crime Commissioner which was considered at a meeting of the Complaints Sub-Committee on 28 February 2022.

16/21 **UPDATES FROM THE CHAIR OF THE PANEL, FROM THE PCC AND TOPICAL ISSUES REPORT**

The Panel received a report from the Scrutiny Officer which provided details on topical issues on policing and crime.

Members' Questions

1. Is the PCC undertaking an impact assessment on the budget of the rising inflation rate and the impact this will have on TVP budget?

[The PCC replied that there were concerns at the implications of the cost-of-living crisis in many areas, such as the impact on the workforce, on recruitment and retention and the pressures this placed on budgets would be monitored.]

2. The PCC was asked what impact the merging of Chiltern and South Bucks and Wycombe Local Policing Area's (LPAs) had had on the service to the public. Reference was made to the changes in Wycombe and South Bucks, where the public had not been informed of the changes. Councillors had an important role to play in informing residents.

[The PCC replied that there had been no significant impact as the teams which sit within those teams will police the same areas. There was an open border for policing so the public should see no changes to the policing service they receive.]

The Chief Constable acknowledged that the messaging of the changes had not been undertaken correctly and he apologised for this. There would no change in the service the Police gave to the public.]

3. The PCC was asked what would TVP be doing to combat the increasing theft of diesel and fuel from rural areas?

[The PCC commented that he was not sure if the cost of living crisis had had more of an impact on any one area than another, but he acknowledged that within local policing areas, the Police would look to understand what the local pressures were and what the impact of this would be on particular crimes.]

4. The PCC was asked whether the Chief Constable would be accompanying him to future Panel meetings as Members found the Chief Constable's attendance useful, particularly when discussing localised policing and crime issues.

[The PCC replied that the Panel's role was to scrutinise him and not the Chief Constable, but he understood the important role the Chief Constable had in advising him and the Panel on operational policing matters.]

The information provided was noted.

17/21

WORK PROGRAMME

Discussion took place on the Panel's work programme and it was agreed that there should be an item included in the work programme on Retention of staff and mentoring BME officers.

The work programme was noted.

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Date of signing

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Date of signing