

Division(s): ALL

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13TH FEBRUARY 2012

Background

1. This information has been requested by the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee to clarify the current position regarding preparations for the new police and crime commissioner. In particular, it will outline the existing arrangements for setting up the new police and crime panel and how this will impact on the Oxfordshire Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee.
2. The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 brings in new structural arrangements for policing and policing accountability, both nationally and locally. One of the principal changes will be the election of the police and crime commissioners, the first of which will take place in November 2012.
3. Other than through the ballot box by local people, police and crime commissioners (PCCs) will be held to account by a police and crime panel (PCP) which will be composed of locally elected councillors along with some lay members. The commissioner, in turn, is responsible for holding the chief constable to account.
4. The Government intends that arrangements for the PCP will be developed locally.

Role and functions of the PCP: what is the current situation?

5. The PCP is a scrutiny body. It exists to scrutinise the police and crime commissioner. It will not scrutinise the police force as this is the responsibility of the Commissioner. More specifically, PCCs will be responsible for:
 - securing an efficient and effective police force for their area
 - producing and consulting on a five year police and crime plan
 - holding the chief constable to account
 - publishing an annual report
 - setting the annual force budget and police precept
 - requiring the chief constable to prepare reports on police matters, on request
6. The Home Office is expected to produce regulations and guidance for PCCs around the conduct of these duties.

7. Recent guidance from the LGA and Centre for Public Scrutiny has been issued on how to set up a panel. It advises that these issues are agreed before any decisions are made on composition so that the role of the PCP influences its composition. Some of the key issues are:
 - **What will be the local role of the panel** – will it be a minimal role of reactive scrutiny (meeting minimum statutory requirements) or proactive role in influencing change and enhancing public accountability?
 - **How will the PCP relate to the PCC/ local community safety partners/ local Safer and Stronger communities scrutiny committees?**
 - **Who will be on the PCP?** – it needs to be politically proportionate, as far as is practicable, across Thames Valley executive and non-executive members
 - **Which authority will lead/ chair the PCP?**
 - **How will the PCP be supported and resourced?**
8. The Home Office is providing some limited funding to the host authority to run the panel. This includes £38.3k per annum for providing scrutiny support and PCP member expenses (£920 per member). PCP members will not be paid an allowance. Support costs are likely to be higher depending on what the local role will be. Local authorities have the option of agreeing top-up funding arrangements if needed.

Local panel arrangements: how has the PCP developed in Thames Valley?
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9. There is a legal obligation to set up a Thames Valley PCP. The Home Office will impose arrangements if local agreement cannot be reached. The indicative deadline for councils having agreements in place is July 2012.
10. All 18 councils across the Thames Valley need to work together to agree panel membership and panel arrangements. The Home Office will require some notification of these in due course. There is a maximum number of 20 people on a PCP, which means one member from each of the 18 local authorities plus 2 independent members - it was designed with Thames Valley in mind. Once established, panel members will need to agree 'rules of procedure'.
11. The first Thames Valley-wide meeting was hosted by Buckinghamshire County Council on 13 January 2012. The aim of the meeting was to discuss which authorities are interested in hosting the panel and to share thoughts on how CSPs should engage with the PCC.

12. A letter has been sent by the Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire County Council to all Chief Executives across Thames Valley offering to host the PCP and requesting that any other interested authorities put themselves forward by 8 February 2012. This date is to ensure that there is clarity on who is interested in time for the first Thames Valley-wide Home Office engagement event which will be held on this day (more detail below).
13. Each authority has identified a lead officer who will be the main point of contact for formal decision-making regarding the joint Thames Valley CSP preparation for PCCs. For Oxfordshire County Council this will be Dave Etheridge (Chief Fire Officer, Head of Community Safety).
14. Each authority has nominated a lead officer to help develop a draft proposal for the remit and arrangements for the PCP. Dave Etheridge has initially taken on this role and will work closely with Kat Luddeke to ensure key messages are shared with the relevant committees (TO CHK?)

Looking ahead: where are the opportunities to influence?

15. The Home Office has organised a Thames Valley-wide engagement event on 8 February designed to inform local planning and preparations for the transition and provide an opportunity to learn about and consider the relationship between PCCs and partners. There will be a specific workshop on Scrutiny and this will be attended by Kat Luddeke at Oxfordshire County Council who supports the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee.
16. A Thames Valley-wide Task and Finish Group is being set up to start the process of articulating the added value that partnership working adds to addressing the community safety agenda. Carys Alty (Manager, Safer Communities Unit) has been nominated as the Oxfordshire County Council representative for this group.
17. The Oxfordshire Safer Communities Partnership (OSCP) Board will be developing a Business Plan to focus on engagement with the PCC from November 2012. This plan will ensure the newly elected commissioner will have a clear and concise picture of community safety structures and priorities (both local and county-wide) for Oxfordshire which is especially important given the PCC will need to develop a 5 year police and crime plan by April 2013.
18. Oxfordshire county Council will have a PCP member and consideration will need to be given to the relationship between the panel member and the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee.

Communications with Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee
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19. Dave Etheridge and Richard Webb have presented updates on the development of the PCC to the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee in October and December 2011. A further update will be provided once the official guidance from the Home Office has been published which is due April 2012.

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