

Minutes

Minutes of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel held on Friday, 19 November 2021 in Paralympic Meeting Room, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Bucks HP19 8FF, commencing at 11.00 am and concluding at 1.30 pm

Members Present

Councillor Marilyn Davies (West Oxfordshire District Council) (Chair), Councillor Balvinder Bains (Slough Borough Council), Councillor Adele Barnett-Ward (Reading Borough Council), Councillor Robin Bradburn (Milton Keynes Council), Councillor David Cannon (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead) Councillor David Carroll (Buckinghamshire Council), Councillor Sam Casey-Rerhaye (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Emily Culverhouse (Buckinghamshire Council - Co-Opted Member), Councillor Neil Fawcett (Vale of White Horse District Council), Liz Jones (Independent Member), Councillor Andrew McHugh (Cherwell District Council), Phillip Morrice (Independent Member), Councillor Richard Newcombe (Buckinghamshire Council - Co-Opted Member), Councillor Barrie Patman (Wokingham Borough Council – Vice-Chair), Councillor Simon Rouse (Buckinghamshire Council - Co-Opted Member), Councillor Claire Rowles (West Berkshire Council) (attended remotely), Councillor Dr Louise Upton (Oxford City Council) (attended remotely) 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), Paul Hammond (Chief Executive Office of PCC) (attended remotely), Catherine Marriott (Head of Partnerships and Community Safety, PCC) (attended remotely) and Helen Wake (Office of PCC) (attended remotely).

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)

42/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor John Harrison (Bracknell Forest Council) and Councillor Richard Webber (Oxfordshire County Council).

43/21 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr Andrew Hill, attended the meeting remotely, and through the Chair of the Panel, asked the Police and Crime Commissioner the following question relating to agenda item 8 – Contact Management Performance:

(1) Her Majesty's Inspectorate rated Thames Valley Police as "inadequate" in their 2017 report on crime recording and said that your performance was "not acceptable". The 2019 re-examination found improvements but also that "the recording rate for violent crime are still too low". Its audit found five sexual offences against children that were not recorded as such.

In your call monitoring report today, we see that there was a sudden ten-fold increase in the number of calls longer than 10minutes in April 2021, and yet almost 25% of crimes audited were still apparently not properly recorded under Crime Data Integrity (CDI) rules.

What does the PCC understand to have triggered the ten-fold increase in April? And, given that the previously recommended "CDI delivery plan", and "comprehensive training", is still failing up to 1-in-4 victims – what steps does the PCC advise the Chief Constable to take?

["The PCC replied that CDI was an important but complex area. Reference was made to the previous Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection which reported that Thames Valley Police had been mis-recording sexual offence crimes as if a person had been subjected to sexual offences several times, each offence had to be recorded separately.

The PCC reported that call handling staff had been trained to record each offence separately, although this was challenging on occasions as some crimes had been over-recorded.

In relation to almost 25% of crimes audited not being properly recorded; there were 75% which were properly recorded which indicated victims were not being failed. There had been improvements made since the inspection.

In response to a supplementary question from Mr Hill relating to whether there was any evidence to suggest that victims were being delayed in speaking to Victims First, the PCC replied that despite the challenges around CDI, on first contact with call handlers, Police Officers were despatched, even if the report was not recorded as a crime. Victims would be recommended to contact Victims First if they had been a victim of crime.

The PCC expected Thames Valley Police to meet HMICFRS standards at the next inspection.]"

Mr Andrew Hill also asked the following question, through the Chair of the Panel, to the Police and Crime Commissioner relating to agenda item 5 – Violence against Women and Girls.

(2) The report notes distressing figures for sexual offence allegations against serving officers at a rate of more than one a month (some internal, some public complainants). Your report appears to state that key details are not being recorded:

“The data does not specify if the officers were on or off duty at the time the alleged incidents occurred.”

“In eight cases the sex was recorded as unknown”

It is hard to see how even a cursory investigation could fail to identify such core facts. Has the PCC sought or received an explanation regarding the process followed in such investigations, and has the PCC received assurances that all TVP staff have now been assessed relative to the 2006 national guidelines as required under HMICFRS’s July 2020 deadline?

[The PCC replied that TVP have met the vetting requirements under the 2006 national guidelines as required. The question relates to a report in the Oxford Mail. Reference was made to the Professional and Ethical Standards Panel who review the processes and provide assurance to the PCC.]

45/21 **THEMED ITEM - VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

The PCC reported that his Police & Criminal Justice Plan set out a number of priority areas, both within policing, across the wider criminal justice system and with local authorities that aligned with the Government’s definition of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The definition included:- Rape & Sexual Violence, sexual harassment, Stalking, Honour Based Abuse, Female Genital Mutilation, and Forced Marriage, Domestic Abuse, VAWG in public places, VAWG carried out online and prostitution and sex work

The PCC informed the Panel that whilst there was not a separate priority for VAWG in his recently adopted Police and Criminal Justice Plan, other priorities in his plan, covered VAWG and addressed the issues.

Discussion took place on the VAWG becoming a major national issue, and although the PCC’s Police and Criminal Justice Plan was endorsed by the Panel at its meeting in June 2021, there were concerns expressed at the omission of VAWG as a key priority.

The PCC informed the Panel that VAWG was an important issue which TVP took very seriously and although it was not one of his five key priorities detailed in his Plan, he asked that women across the Thames Valley be reassured that TVP considered the prevention of VAWG as a priority.

Members’ Questions

1. How is the PCC holding the Chief Constable to account to tackle the rise in drink “spiking” of young women in bars and nightclubs? Reference was made to a cluster of incidents within Cherwell District and the PCC was asked whether he thought these offences were underreported.

[The PCC replied that this was a complex area, particularly around needle spiking and he was not aware of there being evidence of such incidents occurring in Thames Valley. He encouraged all women who had been concerned they might have been needle or drink “spiked” to contact the Police. TVP were equipped with test kits which could identify if an offence had been committed.]

The PCC said that generally there had not been an increase in sexual assaults as a result of “spiking”, which could be due to lack of reporting, but he acknowledged that there could be a fear of this crime for women.]

2. As the Chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board what improvements will need to be made to bring perpetrators of Violence against Women and Girls to justice?

[The PCC reported that conviction rates in Thames Valley for Rape, for example were good, although this crime could be a difficult crime to get convictions for. The PCC acknowledged that there needed to be improvements made to bring perpetrators of violence against Women and Girls to justice and referred to the recent change of Chief Crown Prosecutor for Thames Valley. The PCC informed the Panel that he would hold a meeting with the Chief Crown Prosecutor to discuss the possible expansion of the recent pilot scheme operated in Aylesbury to speed up domestic violence prosecutions. The approach of the judiciary needed to be looked at to improve outcomes for victims.]

The PCC agreed with a comment made that timeliness was important as well as the quality of investigations at the outset. There was a problem with disclosures, so file quality had to be improved. During lockdown there had been improvements made but this needed to be maintained.

The PCC noted the comments made around the Crown Prosecution Service and a Criminal Justice Plan to make improvements. The Panel was informed that this would be the responsibility of the Local Criminal Justice Board, but the PCC said he would raise this and report back to a future Panel meeting.]

3. A Member referred to some domestic violence which was not reported but was tolerated, particularly in certain communities. However, there was a problem of victims not being kept informed in a timely fashion on reported domestic violence and this needed to be improved.

[The PCC agreed with the statement and said he would take up the matter with the Chief Constable. It was obviously important that Police Officers attended domestic violence incidents promptly, however, resources were sometimes the issue, however, victims had a right to receive timely updates on cases, although some cases were complex.]

4. How is the PCC holding the Chief Constable to account to ensure the restoration of trust in TVP Police Officers following recent media coverage of crimes committed by Met police force officers, particularly the murder of Sarah

Everard? How will the PCC hold the Chief Constable to account the enable women to report crimes against them?

[The PCC replied that performance needed to be driven up and support for victims had to be improved.]

5. Could the PCC give the Panel assurances that TVP have robust vetting procedures in the appointment of Police Officers?

[The PCC reported that HMICFRS would be undertaking an inspection of police capability and capacity to vet and monitor officers and staff. Members were informed that every potential police officer recruit goes through a thorough vetting stage as part of their application process. This included disclosing checks on family and friends. The vetting process also included measuring the person against the College of Policing's Code of Ethics.

The PCC commented that the inspection would look at whether the present standards were sufficient. Reference was made to the difficulty in ensuring that all existing Police Officers upheld the required standards, although in TVP, unacceptable behaviour was generally reported by fellow officers, although this could not be 100% guaranteed.]

6. Does the PCC have Freedom of Information statistics for the number of sexual offences committed by TVP Officers in recent years?

[The PCC reported that in 2018 there had been 14 investigations into sexual misconduct, with 7 complaints from the public. In 2019, it was 12 investigations and 4 complaints; 2020 9 investigations and 9 complaints; 2021 16 investigations and 4 complaints.

The OPCC Governance Team, which is responsible for undertaking formal reviews of police complaints on behalf of the PCC, have an oversight on performance and outcomes of the Force's Professional Standards Department.

The PCC commented that the key thing was the processes which were in place, although there was an issue assuming that all allegations made were true, which was incorrect. TVP had a good record of dismissing officers if they have committed a crime.]

The Chair of the Panel commented that it was important to note that the overwhelming majority of Police Officers were honourable and the recent events which had diminished the public's confidence in the Police had been demoralising for the Force.

RESOLVED - (1) That the information provided in the report and from the witness session be noted.

(2) That the PCC be asked to consider adding Violence against Women and Girls as a sixth key priority in his Police and Criminal Justice Plan, in view of recent national developments on the issue. [Action: PCC]

UPDATE ON "BLUE LIGHT" AND LOCAL AUTHORITY COLLABORATIONS

The PCC submitted a report which provided the Panel with details of collaborations which TVP were involved with other "Blue Light" Emergency Services and with Local Authorities.

Members' Questions

1. The PCC was asked about progress made in relation to the Government pushing forward the amalgamation of Police and Fire Service Governance, particularly with the difficulties this would involve in the Thames Valley with three separate Fire Authorities.

[The PCC said he did not know, although he acknowledged that one day it would happen. The PCC reported that on an operational basis there was good collaborations already taking place with the Fire Authorities on procurement and equipment. The single Fire Control had been in operation for a number of years and work was taking place looking at how the Police and Fire Service collaborate over fire investigations.]

2. Reference was made to the PCC attending Fire Authority meetings which would be useful should there be joint governance in the future.

[The PCC acknowledged the usefulness of his attendance to enable him to understand the service and what goes on on the ground. As PCC he had the right to request to attend Fire Authority meetings, although he was not sure how this worked with Oxfordshire Fire Authority being part of the County Council.]

3. The PCC was asked about the linking of the various CCTV systems throughout the Thames Valley and the benefits this would bring.

[The PCC commented that it would be difficult to fully integrate all the CCTV systems in the whole of the Thames Valley. The problem would be around funding and getting all partners to provide funding. Buckinghamshire Council has provided TVP with opportunities, Oxford City Council were in discussions about linking their CCTV.]

The PCC said he would provide more information should there be more developments on this.]

4. The partnerships which take place with local authorities strategically work very well, however, on a day-to-day basis there were issues. An example was given regarding the closure of a brothel by TVP where there had been no joint working or collaboration with the local authority.

[The PCC informed the Panel that there needed to be better collaboration around data interaction and consultation. Work needed to take place with local authorities on implementing community triggers.]

RESOLVED – That the report and information provided be noted.

47/21 **MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF POLICE OFFICERS**

The PCC submitted a report which provided the strategic context and accountability for the mental health and wellbeing of Police Officers. The PCC reported that ensuring an effective and resilient workforce and exercising a duty of care over officers and staff was part of the ongoing accountability arrangements between the PCC and the Chief Constable.

Concerns about mental health conditions has been growing in society generally and the pressurised and often traumatic nature of policing leads to obvious additional risks within the profession. The PCC said the welfare of officers, both mentally and physically, was important not simply because the Chief Constable has a duty of care to officers and staff, but also to ensure the effectiveness of policing was not adversely affected by sickness absence. Significant efforts were made with the Force to ensure staff welfare, through both proactive and reactive means.

Members' Questions

1. Reference was made to the morale of the Police generally being low because of recent well publicised events. This was impacting on their mental health and on their families. The report provided by the PCC sets out specifics on the support offered to officers, however, how does the PCC ensure that the Chief Constable exercises a duty of care over officers, particularly around mental health problems such as stress? Police Officers were an important resource and there should be resilience to ensure the retention of officers.

[The PCC acknowledged that retention of Police Officers in Thames Valley was a challenge, however, there were other reasons for this. There was a duty of care to officers, who put themselves in harm's way to protect the public and there was a duty to look after their wellbeing.]

One of the challenges around mental health was there was no one size fits all. Historically there were people who joined the Force as new recruits or apprentices who realised perhaps that the job was not for them.

In 2020, there were not many officers that did leave, particularly because of Covid and a sense of duty and because the economy was on hold. There were the usual reasons given why officers left the Force, the perennial issues in Thames Valley such as the higher cost of living, shortage of affordable housing etc.]

2. How was the PCC holding the Chief Constable to account about the impact of the activities the Police were involved in and are there performance indicators for this?

[The PCC replied that key areas to look around were sickness levels. These were low last year but they were beginning to increase. The challenge was working out the hours lost for psychological reasons. There had been a slight increase, but it was

difficult to assess whether actions taken to support the mental health and wellbeing of Police Officers were having an effect.]

3. Could the PCC explain why TVP have an above average rate of resignations amongst police officers, compared to other Forces?

[The PCC reiterated that there were a variety of reasons; cost of living in the Thames Valley, officers transferring to other Force areas with affordable housing, officers moving back to areas they were from, the lure of the Metropolitan Police Force and the higher salaries.]

4. In relation to retention of officers, was flexible working offered, for example for female staff with families, Job Shares? In addition, TVP funded the training of officers, e.g. Firearm officers who then moved to the Metropolitan Police for higher salaries. What can be done to improve retention?

[The PCC agreed with the comments made on retention. TVP generally had a young workforce which causes challenges in terms of retention. Reference was made to the change in pension rules which do not make it beneficial to stay past retirement age. In 25/30 years from time there will be many Forces facing officers retiring at the same time which would be challenging.]

In response to a comment regarding ethnicity and workplace gender profile, the PCC commented that TVP's workforce as almost at 50/50 in terms of gender profile. For ethnicity there was still much work to be done with around 6.2% of the work force being from a BAME background.]

5. The PCC was asked about the work which was done with Armed Forces' veterans who were suffering with PTSD and from experiences of the health service and whether TVP could use similar support for Police Officers. Military charities play an important part in supporting Armed Forces' veterans and in some cases, help turn lives around.

[The PCC replied that there was support from Police charities, but he was not aware what the Force provided for retired Police Officers. The PCC said he would look at the work of the charities.]

RESOLVED – That the report of the PCC and the information provided at the meeting be noted.

48/21 **MONITORING OF CONTACT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE**

The Panel was provided with a report of the PCC which provided monitoring information on the Contact Management Performance.

Improving 101 and other contact services was one of the success measures in the PCC's Police & Criminal Justice Plan and formed part of the performance monitoring regime being put in place to hold the Chief Constable accountable for delivery of the Plan.

Members' Questions

1. The call handling of 101 calls had deteriorated. What was the reason for this and when was the PCC expecting a return to a better performance? In addition, how was public satisfaction measured and what were the statistics for abandoned calls?

[The PCC replied that there were a number of factors that have affected call handling performance over the last 12 months. Demand on 101 call had reduced by 12%, however, there had been there has been a 70% increase in online contact. Reference was made to an increase in Crime Data Integrity (CDI) performance which had resulted in longer handling times for crime calls.

The PCC was expecting a positive shift in performance and a return to normality. From April 2021, the average time a 101 call was answered in was 25 seconds. More realistic targets needed to be set which were achievable.

*In relation to data on abandoned calls, the PCC said he would circulate this information to Panel Members. **[Action: PCC]** In response to a followup comment on residents who abandoned 101 calls and called 999, the PCC admitted that there were challenges.*

More use could be made of technology, for example using WhatsApp.

The Panel was informed that contact management staff prioritised 999 calls, which impacted on 101 calls. 999 calls on average, were answered within 7 seconds which was a good performance. The PCC said that it would be difficult to measure the quality of calls.]

Reference was made to Reading Borough Council who use a reportable app for reporting Anti-Social Behaviour and the PCC was asked to look into that.

Discussion took place on on-line reporting and the Panel asked that greater publicity be given to this.

The Panel asked that the PCC provides updates on the performance of both 101 calls and on-line reporting twice a year. **[Action: PCC]**

RESOLVED – That the report of the PCC and the information report be noted and the PCC be asked to submit update reports on the performance of 101 calls and on-line reporting twice a year.

49/21

CONSULTATIONS ON THE POLICE PRECEPT FOR COUNCIL TAX.

The Panel received an oral report from the PCC on the proposed consultation process for the Police Precept as requested by the Panel's Complaints Sub-Committee held on 23 April 2021.

The PCC reported that there was usually an on-line survey but looking ahead there would be an on-going rolling survey which would be open all year round. Residents

would be asked for their experience of policing. There would be a questionnaire which would include CSPs.

Work would take place with professional polling companies.

The PCC said that paper copies of the consultation would also be available in public libraries.

RESOLVED – That the information reported be noted.

50/21 **PROFESSIONAL & ETHICAL STANDARDS PANEL ANNUAL ASSURANCE REPORT 2020**

The Panel noted the Professional & Ethical Standards Panel’s Annual Assurance Report.

51/21 **REPORT OF THE COMPLAINTS SUB-COMMITTEE**

The report of the Panel’s Complaints Sub-Committee was noted.

52/21 **CHAIR/PCC UPDATES/TOPICAL ISSUES**

Noted.

53/21 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Discussion took place on the Panel’s work programme and the following items were raised for inclusion in the work programme:

- PREVENT – Was it fit for purpose?
- Criminal Justice System and Probationary Service
- CCTV
- Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs
- Prison Leavers

..... in the Chair

Date of signing