

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the **Cheshire Police and Crime Panel**
held on Friday, 12th March, 2021

PRESENT

Councillors:

Cheshire East: Councillors JP Findlow, L Jeuda, and M Warren

Cheshire West & Chester: Councillors R Bisset, M Delaney and L Riley

Halton: Councillors N Plumpton Walsh and D Thompson

Warrington: Councillors J Davidson and P Walker

Independent Co-optees: Mr B Fousert, Mrs S Hardwick and
Mr E Morris MBE

Officers: Mrs D Nickson and Mr Smith, Cheshire East
Council

47 APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

**48 CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATION OF INTERESTS. RELEVANT
AUTHORITIES (DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS)
REGULATIONS 2012**

No declarations of interest were made.

49 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public speakers.

50 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Norman Plumpton Walsh noted a minor typographical error in relation to the dates of two future meetings; the dates of meetings were confirmed as being:

Friday 11th June 2021 (Annual Meeting)
Friday 17th September 2021
Friday 26th November 2021
Friday 4th February 2022
Friday 29th April 2022

Councillor Lynn Riley noted that she was yet to receive a response to her question relating to Covid -19 testing in custody suites; the Panel's Secretariat were asked to follow this up with the Commissioner's Office. Councillor Paul Findlow noted that he too was awaiting a response to his question on the number of Detectives serving in Cheshire Constabulary.

The Chair noted that it had not been possible, at what was relatively short notice, to arrange speakers on the issue of Police and Crime Commissioners assuming responsibility for the governance of the Fire and Rescue Service. He did note that an announcement on this issue was expected shortly from the Home Secretary.

RESOLVED:

That with the minor amendment noted above, the minutes be approved.

51 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr Evan Morris noted that along with the Chair of the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels he had met privately with members of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee to discuss issues related to the Emergency Communications Network.

The Chair thanked the Task and Finish Group chaired by Mrs Sally Hardwick for the work that they had undertaken developing a draft Memorandum of Understanding, that would following the elections in May, be shared with the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner.

52 SCRUTINY ITEMS

Cllr Lynn Riley enquired if an online version of the performance dashboard was available. The Panel's Secretariat were asked to follow this up with the Commissioner's Office.

53 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel's future work programme was noted. Cllr Lynn Riley noted that many members of the Panel would appreciate hybrid meetings, where individuals, could if they wish, attend meetings virtually.

54 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

The Chair welcomed the Commissioner to the meeting.

Members of the Police and Crime Panel questioned the Commissioner on a wide range of issues, including:

Mr Bob Fousert:

- Asked the Commissioner if it had been premature to have announced the name of his chosen candidate for Chief Constable before the Panel had conducted its Confirmation Hearing. The Commissioner indicated that he had been delighted to have been able to announce the name of his chosen candidate. He noted that he had followed the national rules to the letter, having taken relevant advice from both his Monitoring Officer and the College of Policing. He welcomed the Panel's statutory role in the process.
- Queried the amount of time taken at the Commissioner's Scrutiny Board meetings addressing issues related to fox hunting, when other issues such as burglary and rural crime, which some would see as more important, appeared to receive less attention. The Commissioner indicated that the issue of policing fox hunting was seen by many as being very important and had received a lot of attention nationally over recent years. He reaffirmed his commitment to addressing such things as rural crime, giving the Panel a number of examples of initiatives he had introduced that had helped combat the issue.

Cllr Lynn Riley:

- With reference to the performance data that had been included with the Panel's papers, asked whether it would be possible to add a caveat to some of the data, outlining that the data applied to a time when the country was subject to lockdown. In response, the Commissioner noted that data had to be recorded in a consistent manner, and that it would be wrong to assume that the impact of Covid -19 on such things as crime and anti-social behaviour had been consistent over the last twelve months.
- Referring to information on expenditure on serious and organised crime contained in the scrutiny reports that had been included with the Panel's papers, asked why it had taken so long for equipment to be procured and other purchases to be made. She also sought reassurance from the Commissioner that the Chief Constable had reconfirmed plans to combat serious and organised crime, recognising the opportunities afforded to criminals by a protracted period of Coronavirus.

In response the Commissioner noted that the reports referred to were Constabulary reports and that the Panel had no role in holding the Chief Constable or Constabulary to account. He also noted that the specific information referred to by Cllr Riley only painted a partial picture of the overall work of the Constabulary in combatting serious and organised crime, and that plans for any given year always took time to deliver.

- Asked for clarification about the income received from speed cameras and also how the Commissioner would hold the Chief Constable to account to ensure that the new average speed cameras had the maximum impact on reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads. She also asked what other innovations the Commissioner was developing that would contribute to a reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads, noting that a “joined-up” approach across Cheshire was the best way forward.

The Commissioner responded by saying that the income from speed cameras was returned to local authorities. He saw “yellow box” cameras as only having a limited effect but thought that average speed cameras could contribute to road safety in both urban and rural areas. The roads currently under consideration for average speed cameras were the A41 in Chester, A34 in Macclesfield, A574 in Warrington, and A533 in Halton. Such initiatives were in addition to a range of other activities, such as mobile speed camera vans, which had been introduced to make Cheshire’s roads safer.

Cllr Dave Thompson:

- Referring to a recent meeting of the Commissioner’s Scrutiny Board where the issue had been discussed, asked how support to those who were victims of traffic accidents could be improved. The Commissioner indicated that he saw this as an important issue and was pleased that the number of people killed and seriously injured on the county’s roads was reducing but recognised the massive impact of such accidents on families. He paid tribute to the work of the Constabulary’s Family Liaison Officers but recognised there was a limit to the work that they could do. Unfortunately, national policy dictated that the families of those killed in traffic accidents were often not classed as victims, and therefore had no right to receive support. Through his Victims Fund he was working at ways round this issue, so that a dedicated service could be provided. He was of the view that the introduction of average speed cameras to Cheshire’s roads would contribute to road safety and hopefully reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured.

Cllr Paul Findlow:

- Reminded the Commissioner that the Panel were yet to receive answers to some questions asked at the previous meeting. The Commissioner noted that it had been necessary to consult with the Constabulary to obtain answers to some questions and that the period of time between meetings had been shorter than normal. Answers would be provided shortly.

- Expressed concerns over the detection rates for some crimes that were reported in the Commissioner's scrutiny papers; he raised particular concern over the rates as they related to burglary. The Commissioner drew the Panel's attention to the significantly reduced budgets that had been available to the Constabulary over recent years; these reductions had impacted on the overall effectiveness of the Constabulary. He stressed that the information was presented in a rolling twelve-month format and that the last twelve months had not been typical. He also highlighted the complexity of the issue and the fact that Cheshire's performance was good when compared to other police forces.

Mr Evan Morris

- Asked for the cost implications related to Operation Hummingbird, (an investigation into unexplained deaths and alleged assaults on babies at the Countess of Chester Hospital). The Commissioner noted that this was a live investigation, which very much limited his involvement. However, he had supported an application to the Home Office for additional funding which had been successful, with £952,000 being awarded. He stressed that an application had in part only been necessary due to the overall financial position facing the constabulary after a decade of budget cuts.

Mrs Sally Hardwick

- Referring to the performance reports, asked if it would be possible to improve on the way in which data was presented. The Commissioner indicated that there was an opportunity for a newly elected Commissioner to influence the way in which data relating to what would be a new Police and Crime Plan was presented. He suggested that the issue would benefit from an informal discussion between the new Commissioner and the Panel.

Cllr Laura Jeuda

- Asked the Commissioner what could be done to reduce the number of attacks on women from men. The Commissioner recognised that this was an extremely important issue and something to which he was very committed to addressing, but there was no one solution. Strong leadership was required, as were changes such as treating misogyny as a hate crime. He paid tribute to the work that was being undertaken on this issue by Cheshire East Council.

Cllr Martyn Delaney

- Sought clarification as to how the deployment of Police Community Support Officers fed into the overall local policing strategy. The Commissioner confirmed that he remained committed to providing a PCSO to each of 122 local communities; whilst these did broadly

align to Ward boundaries, they were not always coterminous. He recognised that ward boundaries changed from time to time. As PCSOs left the Service they would be replaced. Continuous feedback on the effectiveness of PCSOs and local policing generally was essential as he recognised that it was always possible to make improvements.

Cllr Peter Walker

- Referring to Cllr Delaney's question on the deployment of PCSOs, suggested to the Commissioner that wherever possible parish boundaries should be used, as these were understood by the public. The Commissioner indicated that the problem with using parish boundaries was that there were significantly more parishes than there were PCSOs. He also noted that not all of Cheshire was parished.