

Cheshire Police and Crime Panel Chair's Mid – Year Review 2023

As this is the first review as Chair of the Panel, I will reflect on issues which fall outside of the last six months. I do this in order to give the reader some perspectives of some of the challenges we have faced in the past and reassure the public of our commitment to embrace any we may face in the future. Thereafter my six-monthly reviews will concentrate on the preceding half year period.

Moving away from a remote ways of working using technology, which was necessary during Covid has been very welcome. Getting back in the room and being involved in close conversation is something which cannot be replaced. However, I should like to express my thanks to the Panel Secretariat and members for the way in which we embraced those ways of working and sustained our challenge and support of the Commissioner throughout the most demanding period of Covid. It is a credit to them that we were in fact the first Panel in the country to meet remotely following the implementation of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

On behalf of the Cheshire Panel, I should also like to thank the three previous Chief Constables going back to 2018 who have since moved on. They maintained leadership and continuity, each one facing individual periods of challenge which they may not have thought they would have to navigate when they originally joined the police. We have also since held a confirmation hearing for a new Chief Constable, Mark Roberts who came to us from South Yorkshire.

Following elections in May 2021 we welcomed the new Commissioner, John Dwyer who because of the extended period of Covid is serving a term of three years as opposed to the normal four years. This was due to not being able to hold elections during the period of lockdown and Covid. However, the current Commissioner and his staff, to their credit were able to develop a three year Police and Crime Plan, which has been overseen by the Panel and is now in its closing stages.

This year is my seventh serving on the Panel and fifth as Chair. We are made up of thirteen individuals, ten elected Members who represent the four constituent authorities which make up Cheshire, and three independent Co-opted members, of which I am one. We are gifted in having committed individuals who have a range of skills they bring to achieving our statutory objectives.

The Cheshire Police and Crime Panel's raison d'être, under my leadership is to be a member of the policing family which includes the Cheshire Constabulary and the Police and Crime Commissioner. Our collective aim is: "To Make Cheshire Safer". We each have our own specific role to play which is clearly set out in statute. The Police and Crime Panel take great pride in doing everything within our power to keep politics out of policing. Indeed, I would welcome members of the public to visit our webpages and view the comprehensive questions and answers put by members to the Commissioner as evidence of this.

[Cheshire Police and Crime Panel \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](http://cheshireeast.gov.uk)

In the recent past the Panel and Officers have worked together to develop better systems and governance in the following areas:

Public Speaking Protocol. Encouraging and guiding members of the public to partake in the Panels business and express views and ask questions.

Complaints management Sub Committee. Formulated to streamline and assist, Officers and members of the public in effectively managing and defining issues that could be deemed as a complaint against the Police and Crime Commissioner, and to correctly signpost those complaints that should be directed to Cheshire Police or the Independent Office of Police Conduct.

Question and Answer Tracking System. Developed to ensure an accurate process of recording the challenge and support of the Commissioner and to ensure that the tracking and completion of comprehensive answers are in the public domain. This is a process the Panel has worked very hard on with the support of Officers and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. (Please see link above).

I would like to thank the Commissioner, his staff and senior Officers from the Constabulary for facilitating a regular series of informal meetings with the Panel. These meetings are extremely useful, giving Panel members a real insight into the work of the Police and the challenges faced by Officers and Police staff.

Current new initiatives we are looking to develop and implement are:

A partnership with The National College of Policing Library: To assist Panel members in accessing research and intelligence to assist them with developing key lines of enquiry with the Commissioner.

A partnership with the Department of Criminology, Chester University: To assist the Panel in developing intelligence led questioning initially around specific subject areas such as Right Care Right Person. Thus giving students real life experience and evidence to assist them with achieving their learning outcomes.

It would be remiss of me not to raise one of the greatest challenges faced by the Commissioner and Cheshire Constabulary; that being "Operation Hummingbird" dating back to 2015 and the devastating deaths of young children in Countess of Chester neonatal unit.

Whilst this has been a tragic series of events it resulted in a highly professional and protracted investigation which has taken a terrible toll on all those involved. The Cheshire Police and Crime Panel place on record their compassion and gratitude with those individuals who include families, police officers and the NHS staff who worked closely with the individual who perpetrated these terrible acts. I hope that no other police force has to face a similar challenge. The investigation is ongoing and likely to last a considerable time.

As every household knows we all face a very tight financial situation. This is true across all public sector services. The Panel has a statutory responsibility to work with the Commissioner to set and approve the Policing precept for 2024-25. In doing so we wish to ensure that as diverse a range of communities and individuals are consulted, and that the options put forward reflect the fiscal situation, and that we are in step with other public services who have to meet similar statutory service delivery constraints.

As we approach the up and coming Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024 I wish the candidates put forward in the election every success and pledge the support and challenge of the Cheshire Police and Crime Panel in the future.

I also wish to commend the Commissioner and his staff, the Chief Constable, members of Cheshire Constabulary and the part the Panel has played in improving preventative and support services to the victims of crime, for making Cheshire a hostile place for criminals, and for making "Cheshire Safer".

Evan Morris MBE

Chair of the Cheshire Police and Crime Panel

Vice Chair of the National Association of Police Fire and Crime Panels.