

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cheshire Police and Crime Panel**
held on Friday, 4th February, 2022 in the Council Chamber, Wyvern House,
The Drumber, Winsford CW7 1AH

PRESENT

Councillors:

Cheshire East:	Councillors J Paul Findlow and Laura Jeuda
Cheshire West & Chester:	Councillors Robert Bisset, Martyn Delaney and Lynn Riley
Halton:	Councillors Martha Lloyd Jones and Norman Plumpton Walsh
Warrington:	Councillors Kenneth Critchley and Jane Whalen
Independent Co-optees:	Mrs Sally Hardwick, Miss Yasmin Somani and Mr Evan Morris MBE
Officers:	Mr Martin Smith and Mrs Debora Nickson, Cheshire East Council
In attendance	Ms Clare Hodgson, Chief Finance Officer and Mr Damon Taylor, Chief Executive, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

46 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Mick Warren (Cheshire East Council).

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

No issues were raised.

48 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public wished to speak at the meeting.

49 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26th November 2021 be approved.

Cllr Martha Lloyd Jones indicated that she had sent her apologies, as she was unable to attend the meeting.

50 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair had no announcements to make.

51 DATES AND TIMINGS OF PANEL MEETINGS

Formal consideration of this item was deferred until the next meeting, as since publication of the agenda it had become clear that the Police and Crime Commissioner was unavailable for two of the proposed dates. The Secretariat were asked to review options and report back to the next meeting.

52 REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

The Panel noted that in the previous six months two complaints against the Commissioner had been received, both had been referred to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). In both cases the IOPC had returned the complaint to the Panel and the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Complaints Management Sub Committee had concluded that the Commissioner had no case to answer. Those making the complaints were informed of these decisions. In both cases the timescales set by the Panel had been met.

Mrs Sally Hardwick, Chair of the Sub Committee noted that both complaints, which had been of a historic nature, had in effect seen the Panel as a form of appeal for long standing complaints against the Police. The Chair noted that the process for managing complaints, introduced just over a year ago, appeared to be working well.

53 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel's work programme for the remainder of the municipal year was noted.

54 WELCOME TO AND INTRODUCTION BY THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

The Chair welcomed the Commissioner and his Team to the meeting. The Commissioner outlined that one of the most important things that he did each year was to set the Police Precept and that with the Chair's permission he would move immediately to item 10 on the agenda.

55 POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S PROPOSED PRECEPT FOR 2022/23

The Commissioner outlined the consultation that he had undertaken before developing his proposals for the 2022/23 Police Precept. He

highlighted the key elements of his proposals, which amongst a range of other things included an increase in the number of Police Officers and Police staff across Cheshire, improvements to the 101 system and road safety improvements.

Miss Yasmin Somani

Asked the Commissioner how the Constabulary were working smarter, by for example making use of such things as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics. The Commissioner noted that one of the key responsibilities of a Commissioner was to scrutinise the Chief Constable, as part of that process he regularly sought information on how the Police were adopting new methods of working and improving efficiency. Miss Somani indicated that the Panel would appreciate seeing some detailed examples of such initiatives. The Commissioner suggested that this should be discussed at the next informal meeting with the Panel. Miss Somani also noted that Panel members would appreciate seeing a future timetable of Scrutiny meetings, as this would help support Panel member attendance at such meetings.

Cllr Kenneth Critchley

Noting the proposed investment to improve 101 response times, asked the Commissioner what his target was for answering such calls. The Commissioner indicated that no target had been set, but that he wanted the public to be satisfied with the service, noting that if people were unhappy, they phoned 999. Such calls were answered by the same team of staff. Cllr Critchley suggested that the Commissioner should set a firm measurable target for the answering of 101 calls.

Making reference to the review of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), that the Commissioner was undertaking, asked for clarification on the proposals. The Commissioner indicated that he remained committed to the 122 community model introduced by his predecessor, where each Community had a PC and a PCSO. However, the Chief Constable was of the view that he wanted more Police Officers, the review would see, through natural wastage, a reduction in the overall number of PCSOs and an increase in the Police establishment. Cllr Critchley noted that PCSO's were highly visible and that he supported their retention.

Sought clarification on the Commissioner's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy. The question was answered by Ms Clare Hodgson, the Commissioner's Chief Finance Officer. She indicated that the MRP policy was part of the overall Treasury Management Strategy, details of which would be found on the Commissioner's website.

Cllr Martyn Delaney

Sought clarification over the likely reduction, as a percentage, in the numbers of PCSOs that could result from the Commissioner's current

review. The Commissioner indicated that the reduction would be in the region of 40, but that his Finance Office would provide additional information following the meeting. The Commissioner noted that the review was currently ongoing.

Cllr Lynn Riley

Sought clarification over how the increase in the Police precept would benefit partnership working, noting that overall outputs were more important than raw numbers. She noted that collaborative working was becoming ever more important and that she was concerned that organisations appeared to be retreating to concentrate on their own specialisms and as a consequence were working in silos. The Commissioner stressed the importance of working together across organisations. Using the example of road safety, he indicated that he hoped that working alongside local authorities, the increased use of technology such as ANPR cameras, could free up Officers and staff for other tasks.

Welcoming the increase in the numbers of Officers and staff that was proposed, asked what the impact would be on cybercrime and online fraud. The Commissioner recognised the scale and impact of cybercrime and noted the very significant contribution made by Police staff in combating such crime.

Asked for information on the Commissioner's approach to victim support and victim prevention. The Commissioner indicated his commitment to improving victim support and to reducing the number of victims, especially in areas such as cybercrime. Mr Evan Morris, noted that in his experience PCSOs were extremely committed to crime prevention and played an important role in this area.

Sought clarification as to how the Panel could be made aware of the developments over the coming year. The Commissioner noted that the Chief Constable had complete operational independence and that his role was to hold the Chief Constable to account. However, he agreed that all public sector organisations did need to work together.

Cllr Laura Jeuda

Sought clarification on the disproportionate rise in the amount of theft across Cheshire, asking if this included such things as "door to door" scams, which could particularly impact the elderly. The Commissioner indicated that such crime would in all likelihood be included in overall theft figures, but that he would provide further information to Cllr Jeuda following the meeting.

Making reference to the Commissioner's recent consultation exercise, noted that many of those who had responded, had in her view, thought that the number of PCSOs would increase, and would be annoyed to learn that this

may not be the case. The Commissioner indicated that he was not sure how people could have reached such a conclusion, but wanted the Panel and the public to be reassured that if his proposed Precept was agreed there would be an enhanced Police presence across Cheshire

Cllr Paul Findlow

Noting his support for the role of PCSOs, sought clarification as to what proportion of the proposed increase in Police Officers was due to the Government's uplift policy and what would be a consequence of the proposed increase in the Police Precept. The Commissioner's Head of Finance explained that Government funding of £2m in 2022/23 would fund 120 additional Police Officers. However, this money would not be added to the base budget, meaning that the increased costs would have to be found by the Cheshire Council Taxpayer in future years.

Raised concern at people's ability to pay the proposed increase in Council Tax, noting the increase in the cost of living being faced by families across Cheshire. Whilst he supported the Commissioner's overall objectives, he did wonder if increases should be phased over a period of time. The Commissioner noted that the proposed increase of 4.4 percent was below the current rate of inflation. He was of the view that if the Precept was not increased, services would have to be cut. He did, however, recognise the challenge faced by many across Cheshire in relation to the increased cost of living.

Cllr Norman Plumpton Walsh

Expressed a desire to see more Police Officers on foot patrol. The Commissioner recognised this desire, noting that this was an operational policing issue decided by the Chief Constable.

Cllr Jane Whalen

Indicated that she had found the Panel's recent visit to Police HQ to be helpful but had not appreciated the "marketing" tactics employed by those speaking. The Commissioner indicated that this had not been the intention, but that he had been keen for Panel members to understand fully the implications of his proposed Precept not being approved.

RESOLVED

That the Panel support the Commissioners proposed Precept for 2022/23, with a number of recommendations being made.

A copy of the letter sent to the Commissioner by the Panel's Chair is attached to these minutes.

56 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

Cllr Rob Bissett

Making reference to information provided in the papers which supported the Commissioner's recent scrutiny meeting with the Chief Constable, he asked about the reduction in the number of drug drive arrests. He also asked if the decrease was due to the cost of drug driving tests. The Commissioner commented that the reduction was of concern to him but that it highlighted the importance of scrutiny sessions in drawing attention to such important issues. However, he did note that some statistics could be misleading and that he had asked for further work to be undertaken to ensure that meaningful information was available. The Commissioner agreed to provide further information on the cost of testing.

Mrs Sally Hardwick

Sought clarification as to the definition of "solved" in crime statistics. She was particularly concerned in the context of cases of rape and sexual violence. The Commissioner noted that there were 24 categories that could be applied, these were set by the Home Office. The Commissioner offered to discuss this in more detail at the next informal meeting with the Panel.

Cllr Laura Jeuda

Noting the current national media coverage on police behaviour and attitudes, especially as they related to women, asked what the situation was within the Cheshire Constabulary. The Commissioner indicated that he could not provide detailed information at the meeting, but that he would come back to the Panel with further information. However, he did indicate that neither he nor the Chief constable would tolerate the types of behaviour that had been widely reported in the media as occurring in other parts of the country. The Chairman noted the very helpful and informative presentation that had been made on this issue at the Panel's previous informal meeting with the Commissioner.

Cllr Jeuda congratulated the Commissioner on the work of the Cheshire Stalking Unit.

Cllr Jane Whalen

Noted that during the previous year Cheshire Police had undertaken over 5,000 "Stop and Searches", but that these had only resulted in 16 arrests. She asked what could be learnt from the statistic. The Commissioner indicated that he had taken this issue up with the Chief Constable and would report back to the Panel when he had additional information.

Cllr Norman Plumpton Walsh

Noting that the issue had been raised at the Panel's previous meeting, queried the pay rise made to the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner. The Commissioner indicated that he had written to the Panel about this, but in summary he had concluded that the original salary level had been wrong. The salary level had not been in line with the tasks been undertaken by his Deputy, or indeed with the salary of deputies elsewhere in the country. The Chair noted that it was likely that the Panel, at the Confirmation Hearing in June, would have supported a higher salary, but the very significant increase in salary once appointed, had raised the Panel's concerns. The Commissioner indicated that he felt that the salary was now correct.

Cllr Martha Lloyd Jones

Noted that when the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner had been appointed the Panel had recommended that he receive training. She asked if this was taking place. The Commissioner indicated that training was being delivered.

Asked for details of the Commissioner's office administration costs in comparison with those of his predecessor. The Commissioner indicated that this information would be provided to the Panel.

Cllr Martyn Delaney

Noting previous discussions earlier in the meeting on problems with the 101 call system, enquired what information was available on the number of abandoned calls. The Commissioner indicated that this information was available within the data provided for his scrutiny meetings with the Chief Constable, and that he would make it available to the Panel.

Miss Yasmin Somani

Recognising that minority groups were likely to have lower levels of confidence in the Police, she asked what steps the Commissioner was taking to build bridges with such groups and how this was being evidenced. The Commissioner indicated that there was an Advisory Group and that he was about to create an Ethics Committee. He wished to work with individuals on the Advisory Group to better understand the needs of minority groups. He noted that he wanted to see more representatives of minority groups working for the Constabulary as either Police Officers or Police staff. He invited Miss Somani to work alongside him in the area of engaging with minority groups.

Cllr Kenneth Critchley

Having reviewed the statistics made available for the Commissioner's Scrutiny Meeting, queried why when the overall level of vehicle offences

had remained static, the solved rate had dropped. The Commissioner committed to provide information on this to the Panel.

Sought further information on projects being developed to combat anti-social behaviour. The Commissioner indicated that anti-social behaviour did have a very significant impact on a great many people, he was working with the Chief Constable to ensure that there was an adequate police presence on the streets at the right time to have an impact on such behaviours.

Cllr Lynn Riley

Sought reassurance that information reported through the 101 system and through other routes such as local authorities on issues such as minor road traffic accidents was correctly recorded, so that it was available to inform the wider picture about what was happening in a community. The Commissioner recognised that there were limitations as to what could be recorded but agreed that where practical such information should be collected as it did help provide a more comprehensive picture. The Chair noted the good work done by the former Cheshire Safer Roads partnership in areas such as this.

Asked whether custody suites were still being used to triage people to receive support in areas such as gambling addiction and domestic violence. The Commissioner indicated that Cheshire had some of the best custody suites in the country and that conditional cautioning did take place, although not in relation to domestic violence. He was aware of work in Hampshire relating to domestic violence, this was being reviewed as it could be of benefit to Cheshire.

Highlighted current levels of Police Officer absenteeism due to anxiety, stress and depression, noting the innovative work being undertaken by the Fire and Rescue Service in this area. The Commissioner indicated that he had raised the issue of such sickness with the Chief Constable and that his staff would liaise with the Fire and Rescue Service to see if any lessons could be learnt.