

Wiltshire Council

Police and Crime Panel

12 January 2023

Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation

Questions from: Chris Caswill

To: Cllr Steve Bucknell – Chair Police and Crime Panel

Question

The draft Minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel include the following sentence in relation to the Part II discussion of the HMIC 'PEEL' Report:

“ ...

.That the public needed to know that the Police and Crime Panel took the outcomes of the PEEL findings very seriously.”

One of the questions I asked you at that same previous meeting concerned the seriousness with which the Panel was dealing with the two HMIC Reports on Wiltshire Police, and the fact that the Force is now in 'special measures' (in the ENGAGE process, in the HMIC vocabulary). These same draft Minutes assert that you have responded to me but I have not as yet received them (by email or post).

As far as I can see the only PCP public document which addresses the HMIC critiques has been limited to pages 21-26 of an Appendix to a September Panel agenda item. And then the item on the December agenda was placed in Part II, which is the Wiltshire Council vocabulary for keeping the paper from the public, and discussing it behind closed doors. Could you at the same time take the opportunity to explain how these two Panel events constitute reassurance to the public that the Panel is taking the situation 'very seriously'?

So while the public will no doubt welcome the above statement I would like to ask you to take this opportunity to give concrete examples of how the Panel has been taking these reports seriously, since the first one was published in July, along with the decision to put the Force in special measures.

This question and your answer provide an opportunity also to learn and look forward and state unambiguously how the panel will prioritise these issues in 2023. One suggestion would be to at least include them in the Panel's Forward Work Plan, but hopefully you can give some more concrete intentions.

Response

Thank you for your follow up letter regarding the work of the PCP and its response to the PEEL report findings.

Please be assured that the PEEL report and the PCC's response to it forms the very core of every PCP meeting. The Panel is very rigorous in its questioning of the PCC and you will see from recent minutes that we have required the PCC to address the specific points raised in the PEEL report when reporting to us. Many of the issues raised in the PEEL report had already been identified by the PCC and measures to address these were already in place. Key in all of this is the role of the Chief Constable and the senior leadership team within Wiltshire Police. You may have seen that the Chief Constable is to retire this year. The PCC has selected his replacement, subject to ratification at the next meeting of the PCP this week (which is the annual budget setting meeting, and so not one which includes on its agenda the normal quarterly reporting).

Your letter raises several very good points regarding the way in which the PCP communicates what it is doing. In response to your letter I have asked Wiltshire Council Officers to set out clearly what the PCP is required to do in terms of public communication and whether it is meeting those requirements. I have asked that the findings be reported to our meeting in March. I anticipate that, as a result of this research, the Panel will discuss ways in which it can better communicate the work it is doing. In the meantime, please do feel free to attend our meetings whenever convenient to you and you will, I am sure, see that members are given ample opportunity to question the PCC and to express their desire to see significant improvement in the performance of our police. You will also see evidence of the efforts being made by the PCC and his team to address the findings of the PEEL report and other concerns.

Finally, you expressed concern that the reporting of the actions regarding the PEEL report were discussed in camera at our last meeting. I was not happy that this was suggested by the office of the PCC and therefore specifically asked why this should be needed. The response was that there were issues and data within the report which, if discussed openly, could result in an increase in criminal activity. I have asked that in future such sensitive matters are taken out of the main report, which can then be discussed in public, and any sensitive matters addressed separately.

Thank you for your continued interest in the work of the PCP and the PCC. I am sure that you will see improvements in our communication and in results over the weeks and months ahead.

Wiltshire Council

Police and Crime Panel

12 January 2023

Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation

Questions from: Chris Caswill

To: Philip Wilkinson – Police and Crime Commissioner

Question

I sent in some questions for the previous PCP meeting but was unable to send them in within the then almost impossible deadline for a written response. You were however good enough to send me an email on 12 December, in advance of the PCP meeting on the 15th. Your email described how busy you had been with meetings at which the HMIC Reports had no doubt been discussed, Unfortunately it did not answer my questions, with one exception. One of my main concerns in all of this is the lack of public attention to the extremely serious HMIC findings and recommendations, and the inclusion of the Wiltshire Force in Special measures (ie the ENGAGE process). Accordingly I have revised the questions I sent you in December, taking account of your email, the last PCP meeting and other recent events. They have now been submitted within the published timetable and I look forward to your responses to these specific questions:

- There were 14 PEEL and 8 Child Protection time limited Recommendations, for all of which the HMIC deadlines have passed – and had passed by the time of the December PCP meeting. What assurance can you provide to the public at this time that you and your Office were focused on the timely delivery to HMIC of responses to those Recommendations, and that they were all delivered satisfactorily on time?
- Your public facing web site appears to have made no reference to either of the HMIC Reports and their headline conclusions, and ergo not to your actions in response to them? As far as I can tell, there was reference to either Report until 20 December, when a statement on a further HMIC letter of 20 December was posted. If there is information there that I have missed, please point to it, and when it was posted. If not, will your office now take the opportunity to use the web site to improve communication with the public about these vitally important issues?
- Related to the above, do you think it adequate in terms of public engagement that the only public information about your response to the PEEL Report was limited to pages 21-26 of an Appendix to a September Police and Crime Panel item, and that the only item on the December agenda was kept from public view in Part II (from which the public are excluded)?

- Why is so little public attention being given to the August 2022 HMIC Child Protection Report, with its very concerning conclusion that “The force’s response to missing children isn’t good enough.” – and several other important findings.
- Do these HMIC Reports and Recommendations (and the latest letter) not require some adjustment of your Police and Crime Plan?
- The ‘special measures’ ENGAGE process seems to take large parts of the oversight and management of Wiltshire Police out of your hands (and therefore out of the hands of the PCP). Where do you as the elected local Commissioner and your Office fit into ENGAGE?
- Overall, looking back over the 6 months since the first HMIC Report was published, would you not agree that opportunities have been missed to be open and honest with the public about the situation and the improvements that can and should now be made? Not least in your discussions with the Police and Crime Panel? And agree to give priority to increased transparency going forward?

Response

In response to your question regarding reassurance to the public, in the 3 months before Christmas, I have addressed the public on 31 occasions at which I have briefed on the issues that you have raised, I have given 8 interviews to the media and my comms team has made very many of statements across social media. I have also been held accountable by yourselves and the Joint Independent, Governance and Risk Assessment Committee.

I would also point out that my job is to hold the Chief Constable to account for the delivery of an effective and efficient police force and that includes getting us out of Engage and I now have a formal process of fortnightly meetings to do that. I cannot interfere directly in the conduct of police operations however, I have persuaded the Force SLT to introduce a new training regime, to review its HR and promotion processes, to change its strategic management processes and, as a consequence, we are now finally starting to see increased prosecution rates across the high priority crimes in my P&C plan and less complaints against the Force in general. And no I do not believe that I need to change my P&C plan. The priorities are correct. However I accept that delivery needs to be improved and that is what I am working on every day of the week with the Chief Constable. And hopefully we will have a new CC in post by the end of February.

To your final point, no I do not believe that I have missed any opportunities to be open and honest with the public, in fact quite the opposite. At every meeting I leave myself open to accusation that I have been overly brutal in my assessment of the performance of Wiltshire Police.

It is a shame that as a member of the public you have not attended any of the meetings at which I have discussed my concerns and those of the public with the public.

I am open to questions at any of my public meetings. However, it would be good if you could attend these public meetings.