

Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel

MINUTES OF THE WILTSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2024 AT KENNET COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Cllr Steve Bucknell (Chairman), Cllr Stanka Adamcova (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Sudha Sri Nukana, Cllr Vijay Manro, Cllr Abdul Amin, Cllr Ross Henning, Cllr George Jeans, Cllr Dr Brian Mathew, Cllr Tony Pickernell and Cllr Elizabeth Threlfall

Also Present:

Philip Wilkinson OBE, MPhil – Police and Crime Commissioner
Naji Darwish – Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, OPCC
Clive Barker – Chief Financial Officer, OPCC
Matt Hitch – Democratic Services Officer, Wiltshire Council

1 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from:

- Louise Williams
- Denisa Ahmeti

It was noted that Swindon Borough Council would be appointing substitute members at their Full Council meeting later in the day.

2 **Minutes and Matters Arising**

On the proposal of Cllr Tony Pickernell, seconded by Cllr Vijay Manro, it was resolved to make the:

Decision:

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023 were agreed as a true and correct record.

3 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman announced that, on 10 January, the Home Affairs Select Committee had heard further evidence for their inquiry reviewing the impact of

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) over the past decade. He reminded the Panel that a [link](#) to watch the hearing had been circulated to them. He reported that the Home Affairs Select Committee would aim to produce its report in advance of the PCC elections in May 2024.

Cllr Ross Henning stated that he had watched the hearing and was interested to note the discussions relating to whether there would be a benefit in expanding the PCC's role to include fire, probation and youth services.

For the benefit of members not able to attend the previous meeting, the Chairman reminded the Panel that the PCC's Chief Financial Officer, Clive Barker, would be retiring. Clive's role would be filled on an interim basis until such time that a permanent appointment could be made. It was not the intention to hold a hearing to confirm the interim appointment. However, it was noted that when the Panel was informed of the PCC's preferred candidate to fill the role on a permanent basis, then they would hold a confirmation hearing. The Chairman reiterated that the Panel did not have the ability to veto the appointment but would be invited to make a recommendation.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman then wished Clive a very happy retirement.

5 **Public Participation**

The Chairman referred the Panel to the questions submitted by Mr Chris Caswill and the written responses provided in Agenda Supplement 2.

6 **Proposed PCC Budget 2024/25 and Mid Term Financial Strategy**

Clive Barker, the Chief Financial Officer in the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office (OPCC) delivered a presentation about the proposed budget for the forthcoming financial year as well as the mid-term financial strategy. The Chief Financial Officer gave an overview of the national and local context in which the proposals had been made, before outlining the different areas of expenditure and some of the key pressures facing the budget. He gave details about the different sources of revenue available to Wiltshire Police and identified a number of efficiency savings that had been proposed. The implications of adopting alternative financial strategies on Wiltshire Police were also highlighted to give the Panel an informed view about the choices available and why they were advocating a £13 increase in the precept on the average Band D property in 2024/25. During the presentation, key points included:

- Funding came primarily through a central grant from the Home Office and the local council tax precept.
- Whilst there had been a significant increase in the central grant from the Home Office, the majority of the uplift was to fund the nationally agreed seven percent pay rise as well as a 3.2 percent increase in police officer pension costs. The real increase after these costs was 1.9 percent, approximately £1.5 million.

- Increasing the precept on the average Band D property would raise an additional £3.5 million in funding for the OPCC.
- Outside London, police forces in England and Wales were expected to each achieve between £2 million and £7 million in efficiency savings.
- Wiltshire had the second worst funded PCC per head of population, £203.45 per person compared to an average of £230.68. If funded at the average rate, Wiltshire would have an additional £20.3 million in funding.
- Wiltshire had a lower rate of council tax than other regional forces and, even with a £13 increase on the average Band D property, it would still be the lowest in South West England. All other forces in the region were expecting to advocate a £13 increase, with the possible exceptions of Avon & Somerset and Devon & Cornwall.
- There was predicted to be a lower than expected council tax base increase in 2024/25 which would impact on the medium term financial strategy. However, it was possible that this would be revised up from 0.6 percent.
- The government's comprehensive spending review for 2025/26 was 'cash flat' suggesting a requirement to achieve 2.3 percent in efficiency savings for non-protected departments, such as the Home Office. Therefore, the medium-term financial strategy anticipated that there would be a greater reliance on precept increases to meet cost pressures.
- The removal of the capital grant in 2023/23 meant that there would be a need to transfer some revenue spending to spend on capital projects.
- The PCC was prioritising funding areas that make essential improvements to the force, such as performance management. Emphasis was being put on making the most of equipment available to improve efficiency, including by employing three new digital advisers.
- To fund these improvements, as well as capital costs and unavoidable costs, such as inflation, there would be a need to make £2.462 million in efficiencies in 2024/25.
- The Chief Constable had asked her staff to identify medium and low risk areas to make efficiency savings of around five percent in her budget. In addition, around £1.309 million in savings had been identified in corporate services, including lower than predicted fuel costs.
- The budget proposals would not see a reduction in the number of police officers or police community support officers.
- If the precept for the average Band D property were to increase by £10, rather than £13, the force would have to find £3.245 million in efficiency savings rather than £2.462 million. If there was no increase in the precept, then the Chief Constable would have to find savings of just under £6 million.
- The OPCC would receive a series of grants, totalling £3.712 million in 2024/25, which would present a good opportunity to proactively tackle underlying issues. Examples included the £500,000 Immediate Justice Fund and £1 million from the Hot Spot Policing Fund. Clarity was still being sought from the Home Office about what some of the funding could be targeted towards.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- The Panel thanks the Chief Financial Officer for his detailed report and wished him well for his retirement.
- In relation to the efficiency savings, it was confirmed that approximately £700,000 in low risk non-corporate savings had been identified.
- It was noted that the majority of low risk savings identified, as shown in paragraph 35 of the budget report, were from ACC Crime. It was clarified that ACC Crime excluded the neighbourhood and response police teams but included other investigative work and other areas such as public protection and criminal justice. Although he did not have the exact figures to hand, the Chief Financial Officer believed that the proposed savings in ACC Crime equated to approximately two percent of the total ACC Crime budget.
- When pressed about how concerned the OPCC were about the savings, the Chief Financial Officer reassured that Panel that no single area had been singled out and the available options had been carefully considered by the Chief Officer team. Some planned increases in expenditure had been withdrawn. Whilst there were risks in implementing some of the planned savings, there was less concern about the low risk areas.
- The PCC spoke about the importance of adopting a contextual approach to policing. He emphasised that investment in neighbourhood policing was a form of early intervention. Neighbourhood teams could often stop issues escalating and negate the requirement for more costly investigations downstream.
- The Panel welcomed the that a clear process had been utilised to identify savings and that they were linked to a risk assessment. They sought details on how the impact on Wiltshire Police as a whole, as well as individual departments had been considered. In response, the PCC explained that those considerations had been made and the Chief Constable had reformed the management in Wiltshire Police to make it more joined up and to improve accountability.
- It was acknowledged that the prescriptive nature of the grant funding model did make it difficult to commit to long term projects when there were conditions that the money had to be spent on specific priorities within certain timeframes. However, the PCC stated that he was committed to making the most of the grant funding and it had empowered his office. The OPCC had played a convening role with partners to make sure that grants were spent cost effectively.
- It was asked whether certain grants were so prescriptive that they could end up creating additional costs in setting up new systems. The PCC stated that he had built up the capacity of the OPCC in order to minimise that risk.
- When asked what he was doing to apply pressure on the government to revise the police funding formula, the PCC noted that he had lobbied local MPs including the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, John

Glen. Changes to funding were being considered by the government but it was not possible to put any timescales on changes.

- The Panel stressed that cost-of-living challenges of residents needed to be taken into account when setting the precept. It was highlighted that a higher proportion of residents in the Wiltshire Council area were receiving a council tax rebate, due to rising costs, than in previous years. In reply, the PCC emphasised that he recognised the economic hardship faced by many residents and was sympathetic to cost pressures. He noted that the increase would equate to £1.09 per month for a Band D property.
- As the PCC was asking for additional funding, the Panel asked for an update on when Wiltshire Police would get out of special measures. The PCC reported that the next PEEL inspection was due in March 2024 and he was confident that Wiltshire Police had made tangible improvements across all four priority areas in his Crime Plan, so would come out of special measures.
- It was confirmed that capital receipts from the sale of property would go back to the OPCC through the Capital Financing Strategy.
- Details were sought about the interest rates that the OPCC would pay on borrowing for long term capital investment, including projects such as the southern policing hub. The Chief Financial Officer reported that they needed to borrow approximately £3 million to balance the capital budget for the current financial year. As interest rates were projected to fall later in the year, to reduce interest costs, a process of internal borrowing was employed, where general reserve funds were used on a short-term basis until interest rates fell. It was emphasised that interest rates were projected to fall to four percent by December 2024 and internal borrowing would only be used on a limited basis.
- Asked about when the additional funding would lead to the public feeling safer, the PCC spoke about the need to sustain improvements to build trust in the longer term.
- When queried about whether he had concerns about the withdrawal of Capital Grant funding by the Home Office and whether he had lobbied government about the issue, the PCC confirmed that he had held discussions with the Home Office and Treasury. He had written a joint letter alongside other PCCs representing rural areas about the police funding formula.
- It was observed that Wiltshire had the second lowest crime rate in the country and was also the second worst funded force in the country. The PCC was then asked for his views on the balance between funding and the level of crime committed. In response, the PCC stressed that crime figures should be treated with caution and believed that an increase in confidence in the force would lead to an increase in crime reporting in rural areas. He observed that if he could demonstrate that improved performance was contributing to better reporting of crime then it may strengthen his case for better funding from central government.
- When pressed about the impact that a reduction in backroom staff would have on frontline policing and what the timeline was for neighbourhood policing to improve, the PCC emphasised that he was pushing more

neighbourhood officers on the frontline. A new operating model had been introduced the previous week to create better accountability.

- It was confirmed that the response times to both 999 and 111 calls had improved significantly over the past three months.
- Details were sought about the increase in precept across different council tax bands of property. It was confirmed that the increase would be £8.67 for a Band A property and £26 for a Band H property.

Cllr Abdul Amin left the meeting at 12:00pm.

On the proposal of Cllr Dr Brian Mathew, seconded by Cllr Vijay Manro, it was resolved to make the:

Decision

To note the reports on the draft budget settlement and mid term financial strategy.

7 The Police and Crime Commissioner's Precept Consultation Process

Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Philip Wilkinson, OBE, MPhil, referred the Panel to the report on pages 53 to 56 of Agenda Supplement 1. He explained that his office had been conducting a consultation on the proposed budget for Wiltshire Police, including the proposed precept increase in 2024/25. As of the previous day, 2,254 responses to the consultation had been received. 86 percent of those that took part stated that they would welcome more investment into Wiltshire Police and 69 percent said they that they would support an increase in the precept of between £10 and £20. The PCC felt that the statistics showed widespread support for the police and emphasised the need to continue to build trust with the public. During the discussion, points included:

- The Panel welcomed the report on the consultation so far.
- The consultation would be open until 29 January.
- The survey had included responses from a wide cross section of society, with questionnaires given out at supermarkets, Swindon Football Club and Bath Rugby.
- A number of free social media posts had reached around 2,500 people each.
- Some members of the Panel suggested that the high level of support for increased funding reflected the need for improved policing.
- The PCC welcomed suggestions about how the consultation could be improved.

On the proposal of Cllr Sudha Sri Nukana, seconded by Cllr Vijay Manro, it was resolved to make the:

Decision

To note the report on the consultation process with Wiltshire and Swindon residents so far.

8 Communications

The Chairman reported that the recording of the Panel's previous meeting had been viewed on [YouTube](#) around 50 times and encouraged members to share their videos.

Reflecting on public feedback about the publication of the Panel's agendas, the Panel requested that they be published as soon as possible.

The Democratic Services Officer explained that Wiltshire Council would work together with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to try to ensure that agendas were published in a timely manner. He also noted that public participation deadlines had recently been extended and explained the statutory requirements for agenda publication outlined in Protocol 12 and Part 5 of Wiltshire Council's constitution.

The Chief Executive of the Office of the OPCC, Naji Darwish, emphasised that it was important for the papers to contain as up to date as possible and that papers were almost always provided in line with the processes agreed between Wiltshire Council and the OPCC. He also noted that the information contained in the reports was often compiled from multiple sources, including the constabulary and partner agencies, so it would be very difficult for them to be published earlier given their governance cycle.

When asked for an update on the progress made towards improving the part of the Wiltshire Council's website about the Panel, the Chairman noted that the text had been reviewed to make sure that it was up to date and all of the Panel's agendas and minutes were listed.

9 Forward Work Plan

The Panel noted the forward work plan. They asked to be kept updated on the improvements being put in place following historic failures relating to Clare's Law disclosures.

10 Any Other Business

In response to a query about how the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) was liaising with the Criminal Prosecution Service to reduce delays, the PCC stated that he chaired the Criminal Justice Board and they were working to identify disconnects in the system to reduce delays.

When asked whether it might be possible for members of the Panel to go out on patrol with the police, to get a greater insight into their work, the PCC noted that this could potentially be arranged.

The PCC provided an update on the investigation into historic failures relating to the Clare's Law disclosure scheme, which allows individuals to request information about their partner's history of abusive behaviour. The PCC stressed the importance of ensuring that the public had the confidence to come forward. He noted that domestic abuse awareness training was taking place and that historic incidents were being investigated by the Independent Office of Police Conduct. He also underlined that the Chief Constable and he were taking the situation extremely seriously and were determined to ensure that failures were not repeated.

11 **Future Meeting Dates**

The next meeting of the Police and Crime Panel will be on Thursday 8 February 2024 at 10:30am in the Council Chamber at Monkton Park.

Future meeting dates were confirmed as:

- Thursday 8 February 2024, 10:30am – Council Chamber, Monkton Park
- Thursday 7 March 2024, 10:30am – Council Chamber, County Hall
- Thursday 27 June 2024, 10:30am – The Enterprise Network, Salisbury
- Thursday 26 September 2024, 1:30pm
- Thursday 14 November 2024, 10:30am

(Duration of meeting: 10.35 am - 12.35 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Matt Hitch of Democratic Services, direct line , e-mail matthew.hitch@wiltshire.gov.uk

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