

WILTSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

MINUTES OF THE WILTSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL MEETING HELD ON 5 FEBRUARY 2015 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Abdul Amin, Cllr Glenis Ansell, Cllr Andrew Bennett, Cllr Richard Britton (Chairman), Cllr Trevor Carbin, Cllr Chris Caswill, Chris Henwood, Cllr Charles Howard, Cllr Peter Hutton, Cllr Julian Johnson and Cllr Steve Wakefield

Also Present:

Angus Macpherson – Police & Crime Commissioner
Kieran Kilgallen – Chief Executive, OPCC
Clive Barker – Chief Finance Officer, OPCC
Sarah Kyte – Business Manager, OPCC

11 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Cindy Creasy.

12 Minutes and matters arising

Resolved:

To confirm and sign as a correct record the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 January 2015.

13 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

14 Chairman's Announcements

There were no Chairman's announcements.

15 Public Participation

There were no members of the public present or councillors' questions.

16 Proposed Strategic Alliance between the Avon & Somerset and Wiltshire Police Forces

The Commissioner reported that the Chief Constable, Pat Geenty, had announced his intention to retire from his position with the Force in May 2015 in order to spend more time with his family. Mr Geenty joined Wiltshire Police in July 2009 and was appointed substantive Chief Constable of the Force in May 2012. The Commissioner went on to express his thanks for all the hard work, professionalism and total commitment to his role as Chief Constable carried out by Mr Geenty. The Commissioner would be giving consideration to the continuity plan for the Force to ensure that it was able to maintain consistency in leadership. A timeline had yet to be worked out for the appointment of a new Chief Constable and the Commissioner intended to provide an update at the next meeting.

The Commissioner went on to report that discussions had begun which would see specialist police resources and support functions in the Wiltshire and Avon & Somerset forces being shared under a new strategic alliance, or 'collaboration' as both forces sought to secure significant savings over the next five years. During the past four years each of the forces had been required to find substantial savings and, although this had not been easy, these had been achieved. It was noted that the two forces already collaborated on Brunel, a shared Major Crime Investigation Team, and Special Branch. Building on these successful foundations, the forces expected a wider collaboration would deliver a more efficient and cost effective police service for local communities.

It was anticipated that further significant savings would have to be found by 2018/19 and it was hoped that by collaborating where possible, the impact on the delivery of frontline services would be lessened.

Discussions between the Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables about a strategic alliance had begun in December 2014. These discussions were still at an early stage but it had been agreed that specialist police resources, protective services as well as corporate services would be included in the alliance. It had been agreed that both forces would retain their Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables, and that

neighbourhood and response policing would continue to be delivered and overseen locally.

The Commissioner stressed that this proposed strategic alliance was not a merger of the two forces and each would retain their own leadership and identity. This strategic alliance would look at how more resources, such as specialist police resources and office functions, could be shared. Local policing was of paramount importance and would continue to be delivered locally in response to communities' needs.

The Deputy Chief Constable stated that he was fully supportive of this strategic alliance with the Avon & Somerset Force, it being apparent that the current level of service could not be maintained over the next three year period without change, given the likely level of cuts to be made. He was confident that the savings that would be made following the strategic alliance would significantly help to protect the front line services. Police budgets were in a very challenging state and in the coming years this collaboration would help find the savings that both forces would need to make. The Chief Constable regarded the need for officers to be visible in the local community as a high priority and he was directing more of them to patrol either on foot or by bicycle. The public required a highly responsive service and were not really concerned with the name of the Force to which the officer belonged. There had been a number of occasions when officers had been mobilised from more than one Force to attend a particular incident.

The Commissioner further reported that Dorset and Devon & Cornwall Police Forces were working towards a similar strategic alliance but the Gloucestershire Constabulary had so far decided not to collaborate with any other force to that extent.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman expressed general support for the proposal but did consider that every effort should be made to ensure that local policing should be preserved as a high priority and improved. The Panel would need to measure the effectiveness of this strategic alliance and would await further regular update reports.

The PCC Diary report which set out a summary of commitments the Commissioner had undertaken since the last meeting of the Police and Crime Panel on 15 January 2015 was received.

The Commissioner advised that:-

- there were shortcomings in the care for the homeless out of normal working hours. He cited an example where one client who had been released from prison on licence and had also just been released from hospital had nowhere to go and spent a lot of time just sitting on the ground with his rucksack of possessions. He was taken to a soup kitchen which was about to close but a member of staff was willing to stay with him whilst the Crime and Communications Centre at Wiltshire Police HQ was asked for assistance. In view of the heavy rainfall, the client was taken to one of the car parks and installed, with his sleeping bag, out of the rain and wind, under an exit ramp. This was most unsatisfactory with issues for the hostels, the ambulance service, the health centre and Wiltshire Police, who did take ownership of the issue and tried their best to solve the problem. It was noted that in Swindon, Cllr Wright was co-ordinating arrangements for the homeless. The Commissioner was pleased to advise that this client had now been found accommodation in a hostel.

Resolved:

To note the Police & Crime Commissioner's report.

18 The PCC's Proposed Precept for 2015-16

The Commissioner presented a paper setting out his proposals for his precept for 2015-16.

He reminded the meeting that at the Panel's previous meeting on 15 January 2015, he had provided a detailed report setting out his reasons for his proposed precept and which also included a copy of his Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS); he was proposing an increase of the Band D Precept by 1.9% to £163.98, which represented a £3.06 increase from the 2014-15 Police part of the Council Tax of £160.92.

The Commissioner also reminded members that he had been carrying out a wide consultation from 6 January until 4 February 2015 with presentations being given to area boards and locality meetings during which he disclosed that there had been a significant reduction in central funding in the previous four years and had forecast that this was most likely to continue over the next three years. The central funding reduction for the total seven year period was estimated at £25m, which represented 24% of the budget. He had also consulted the public through town and parish councils, chambers of commerce and the farming community. From the responses received 86 were in favour of his proposal

whilst 35 were against. The public who attended area board meetings, tended to support an increase in precept, stating that they wished the service to be protected as much as possible and in particular, the local response teams. It was noted that all but one of the area boards consulted had been made aware of the strategic alliance proposals with Avon & Somerset Police Force during their consultation.

Cllr Andrew Bennett reported that there had been no major opposition to the proposed increase in Precept in the Swindon area during the consultation, it being regarded as inevitable.

The Commissioner stated that following this consultation he wished to maintain his proposal to increase the Band D Precept by 1.9% to £163.98, which he estimated would provide an additional £729,000 income. He also explained that a zero percent increase in the police precept was likely to produce £384,000 in government freeze grant. He stated that reserves were forecast to be £11.1M of which £3.1M represented his general reserves. The Chief Constable's operational reserves amounted to £1.1M.

Members referred to the projected savings that were likely to be accrued as a result of the proposed strategic alliance with the Avon & Somerset Police Force and enquired as to the level of savings expected. Clive Barker, Chief Finance Officer explained that it was estimated that the alliance was likely to produce a saving of about £6M but this work take a few years to work through.

However, some Members were of the opinion that, given the level of reserves and the savings anticipated following the strategic alliance with the Avon & Somerset Force that a frozen Precept at the 2014-15 level could be justified. Furthermore, the Chairman referred to the Council Tax Collection Fund Surplus and noted that £600,000 had been received, of £200,000 was over and above what was expected. The Chief Finance Officer explained that, whilst acknowledging receipt of the additional £200,000, £1M savings had still to be found in the next financial year and the expected savings from Human Resources and Finance had so far not materialised. These savings were now expected to materialise as part of the strategic alliance proposals but, as previously explained, would take several years to work through.

After further discussion,

Resolved

To approve the Police & Crime Commissioner's proposed Precept for 2015-16, which represented an increase of the Band D Precept by 1.9% to £163.98, a £3.06 increase from the 2014-15 Police part of the Council Tax of £160.92.

19 Task Group Update

The Panel received an update on the activity of the following Task Groups:-

- Volunteers and Special Constables Task Group
- Licensing Task Group
- Police Performance Review Working Group
- Regional Collaborations Task Group

Resolved:

(1) To note the update on task group activity provided.

(2) To request that regular updates be received on regional collaborations.

20 Forward Work Plan

A document was received showing the Panel's Forward Work Programme.

Resolved:

To note the contents of the Forward Work Programme for this Panel.

21 Future meeting dates

Resolved:

To note that the next meeting of the Panel was due to be held on Thursday 5 March 2015, at Monkton Park Offices, Chippenham, starting at 2.30pm.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 1.15 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Roger Bishton, of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 713035, e-mail roger.bishton@wiltshire.gov.uk

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