

Report to Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel January 2016

Review of Best Practice for Police and Crime Panels – a summary of recent research, consultation and publications.

Background and Summary

Police and Crime Panels (PCPs) have now been in existence for 3 years, since the creation of directly-elected Police and Crime Commissioners.

In that time, a reasonable body of evidence has built up, enabling an objective analysis of the new model for police accountability and how well the system is working.

There have been three reports published recently, which reviewed the current police accountability arrangements –

- In 2014, the Centre for Public scrutiny published its report: [“Police & Crime Panels, the first year”](#)
- The LGA published an updated [Good practice guide](#) for Police and Crime Panels on 2nd June 2015.
- The Committee on Standards in Public Life published its report– [“Tone from the top”](#) on June 29th 2015, following an extensive consultation and research exercise. (A sub-group of the Wiltshire PCP responded to the consultation in late 2014).

Between them, the publications make a number of recommendations for police and crime panels, to enable them to be as effective as possible in supporting and scrutinising the PCC.

This report seeks to summarise these collective findings and research, and to bring them together into one set of recommendations for the Wiltshire police and Crime Panel to consider.

Overall, there appear to be some common themes emerging with regard to good practice or success of PCPs:

- Strength of the relationship between the panel and the PCC/OPCC
- Public engagement and visibility of the panel
- Knowledge and skills of panel members
- Balance of panel membership
- Engagement with Community safety partnership and other partners

The Wiltshire PCP is already putting many of the suggestions into practice. However, there are some other learning points that the panel could focus on if it wishes to develop further.

Relationship with the OPCC

On the basis of the research, good panels:

- ✓ Have sought to engage constructively with their PCC from the outset, and usually have some kind of agreement in place with the PCC about information-sharing and joint working which goes beyond the terms of the Policing Protocol
- ✓ Where relevant, appropriate, and where resources permit, carry out proactive work to actively support the PCC, and to challenge their assumptions and priorities as they develop policy.

Wiltshire PCP has carried out a number of proactive pieces of work, having set up task groups to look at licensing and police volunteers, developing a new performance reporting system, and a revised police and crime plan,. This should be considered as a strength of the Wiltshire panel and it is a positive sign that the panel has been invited by the OPCC to engage further with them in developing a new commissioning strategy in 2016.

Some panels are concerned that key information is shared with the press before a police and crime panel has had a chance to consider any implications for the panel, or their own organisations.

Poor communication between PCCs, the OPCC and panels can have a negative effect on developing and establishing working relationships. To manage this concern, a number of panels have an agreed process with the OPCC for sharing public information that can include a press protocol.

Alternatively, panels may wish to review the style of their panel meeting. In one example, a panel which initially had a difficult relationship with their police and crime commissioner, has moved from a very formal committee structure to running the panel as a 'solution focused' conversation.

The Wiltshire PCP has a protocol in place for joint working with the PCC, however this was agreed in 2013 and there may be scope to review and update this. The protocol does not currently cover contact with the media.

Overall, the relationship between the Wiltshire PCP and the PCC has strengthened over time as understanding of the role and responsibilities of the panel has developed. Work is ongoing between officers on both sides to ensure the forward work plan of the PCP is aligned with that of the PCC and to promote a culture of "no surprises".

Public engagement and visibility of the panel

On the basis of the research, good panels:

- ✓ Are visible – usually by having a dedicated web presence, and having plans in place to understand the public's views, and to bring those views to bear on the scrutiny process

Protocol 13 of Wiltshire Council's Constitution (Police and Crime Panel) states:

A media protocol might look to cover:

Who the PCC can contact in an emergency to notify them of issues

What is agreed in a local area that needs to be fed back to key stakeholders?

What the PCC's media and campaign plan is – this could be a scrutiny item

Notification of any joint press and PR to be undertaken by the PCC and chief constable

“The role and work of the Panel shall be promoted by:

- the establishment and maintenance of a dedicated open access website including information about the role and work of the Panel, Panel Membership, all non-confidential Panel and Sub-committee meeting papers, press releases and other publications
- the issuing of regular press releases about the Panel and its work; and,
- The Authorities will each include information about the Panel on their websites, and will also include a link to the Panel website.”

The Wiltshire Council website has a section covering the Police and Crime Panel; however, it is not a stand-alone website in itself. Furthermore, the information on the web pages is both out of date (and therefore inaccurate) and insufficient in terms of its content. The Swindon Borough Council website does not appear to have a specific reference to the Police and Crime Panel at all.

Though it may not be necessary to develop a stand-alone website, the pages on the Wiltshire Council website could easily be updated and improved. This could also be accessed via a link on the Swindon BC site.

Public attendance at Wiltshire PCP meetings has traditionally been very low. This is an issue common to the majority of PCPs across the country, except in circumstances where there has been a particularly contentious issue to discuss (such as the call for the resignation of Rotherham’s PCC in the wake of the Jay report into CSE in the town). There may be other, more meaningful ways to engage the public in the work of the PCP, such as contribution to task group work or public surveys. This might assist the panel in building up a body of evidence as to the priorities and concerns of the public regarding local policing. This in turn would support the anecdotal evidence that panel members receive from residents through their role as local councillors.

Knowledge and skills of panel members

On the basis of the research, good panels:

- ✓ Use information from a range of sources intelligently, bringing that knowledge and understanding to bear on their strategic, statutory duties

Case Study: Gwent

The panel invited the PCC, and other partners, to a Panel development day focused on improving the local scrutiny approaches.

This helped both the relationship building and priority setting for the scrutiny agenda.

This approach has been particularly effective in establishing and communicating the diverse and important role of police and crime panels.

- ✓ Have a clear idea of their role and responsibilities, which translates into a focused approach to work programming

The three reports all found that some Police and Crime Panels have a skills gap and should train members in scrutiny, risk management and governance. Experience, knowledge or interest in policing, community safety partnerships and the justice system would assist Police and Crime Panel members in carrying out their role effectively.

The Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel consists mainly of elected Councillors (plus 2 co-opted independent members). Through this role, members would have had exposure to scrutiny, risk management and governance.

Some members would have had experience of policing; perhaps having served on the previous Police Authority, or having some involvement in public protection or community safety partnerships.

It should be for the PCP members to decide whether they could benefit from further development in any of the above areas.

It may also be worth considering the value of regional networking, for example in the formation of a South West area PCP forum where panel members and support officers can share good practice and discuss common issues.

Frontline Consulting Ltd have offered to facilitate both of the above, should the PCP wish to pursue either, although it should be noted that other panels in the area have been approached in the past and the response was muted.

Balance of panel membership

On the basis of the research, good panels:

- ✓ Are well resourced – but more than that, use what resources they have proportionately, using the individual skills and expertise of Panel members to drive its work forward

Police and Crime Panels need to make good use of their ability to co-opt members and appoint independent members with the right skills. Police and Crime Panels should consider the diversity of its members. A Police and Crime Panel holds the PCC to account on behalf of the public and it is therefore important that the Panel is representative of the local community it serves.

The Wiltshire PCP is balanced both politically and in its representation from its member authorities. The panel also benefits from having 2 independent co-opted members, who bring additional skills and knowledge and provide a different perspective for the panel. The panel is well supported in terms of officer time, however panel members may wish to take the opportunity to identify any areas where they feel they could be supported better.

Police and Crime Panels receive a grant from the Home Office to support them in carrying out their duties. Panel members may want to consider whether the grant is currently being used to best effect.

Engagement with Community Safety Partnerships and others

On the basis of the research, good panels:

- ✓ Work well with others, usually CSPs and CSP scrutiny committees but also with a range of other partners where appropriate.

The Wiltshire PCP does not currently have any formal links with the Community Safety Partnerships of its member authorities. There is scope to establish more formal links with Community Safety Partnerships and also to identify other partners who may be able to enhance the Panel's understanding of local issues.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel consider:

1. Carrying out a review of the PCP/PCC joint working protocol, with the option of including guidelines on sharing information with the media.
2. Developing its public engagement in the following ways:
 - 2.1. To refresh the Wiltshire PCP web pages to be more user-friendly and include information on the work of the panel such as task group reports. [Hampshire PCP](#) provides a good example of something that could be achieved simply and quickly
 - 2.2. Carrying out regular opinion surveys or research/consultation – providing evidence to support anecdotes
 - 2.3. Inviting the public to be involved in task group work (as witnesses), where relevant
3. Whether there are any areas of skills or knowledge that members feel they could benefit from developing, for example through a panel development session.
4. Whether its members would benefit from regional networking opportunities to discuss common issues and best practice.
5. Agreeing more formalised engagement with Wiltshire and Swindon's Community Safety Partnerships, and identifying any other partners who may add value to the work of the PCP.
6. In considering these recommendations, Panel members are asked to note the Home Office grant of £65,000 per year which is intended to be used to support panel activity. In addition to officer support time and logistics (venues, refreshments etc) the grant can be used to support the implementation of some of the above recommendations.

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