

Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel

MINUTES OF THE WILTSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL MEETING HELD ON 8 FEBRUARY 2024 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, MONKTON PARK, CHIPPENHAM, SN15 1ER.

Present:

Cllr Steve Bucknell (Chairman), Cllr Stanka Adamcova (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Vijay Manro, Cllr Ross Henning, Cllr George Jeans, Cllr Dr Brian Mathew, Cllr Tony Pickernell, Cllr James Sheppard, Cllr Elizabeth Threlfall, Denisa Ahmeti, Louise Williams and Cllr Claire Crilly (Substitute)

Also Present:

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

12 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr Abdul Amin – substituted by Cllr Claire Crilly
- Cllr Sudha Sri Nukana

13 **Minutes and Matters Arising**

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

Decision:

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

15 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman reported that Swindon Borough Council had appointed the following substitutes to sit on the Panel:

- Cllr Matthew Vallender (Conservative)
- Cllr Claire Crilly (Labour)
- Cllr Jo Morris (Conservative)

16 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

17 **Precept Public Consultation Report**

Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Philip Wilkinson OBE, MPhil, introduced a report about his office's consultation on the policing precept for the forthcoming financial year. He highlighted that, of the 2,610 responses received, 68 percent supported an increase of between £10 and £20 per Band D household. The PCC noted that whilst the survey was a relatively small sample of Wiltshire's population, he felt that the figures were indicative of the general feeling amongst residents. He noted that Wiltshire Police were investing in measures to improve service delivery, including upgrading training facilities and creating a Serious Assault Referral Centre. He believed that Wiltshire Police were now delivering value for money and urged the Panel to approve an increase of £13 on the average Band D property.

During the discussion, points included:

- The Panel thanked the PCC's office for the report.
- Ways to improve ethnic minority participation were suggested, including the possibility of attending events in Temples, or the Gurdwara, in Swindon. The PCC felt this was an excellent suggestion and noted that he had held a consultation on 6 February in Devizes with Independent Advisory Groups from a range of communities in order to discuss how they could strengthen communication with his office. He also noted that he had been invited by the Mayor of Salisbury to attend a number of Muslim prayer sessions. The PCC had accepted the invitation and was keen to engage with as wide a range of communities as possible.
- It was noted that the survey showed a strong level of support for Wiltshire Police, with 85 percent in favour of more investment to increase policing in the community.
- Given the cost-of-living challenges facing residents, the PCC was invited to comment on the results in the survey showing that 92 percent of those who wanted to see more investment to increase policing in the community wanted investment to come from central government. He was challenged by the Vice-Chairman about whether the support for different levels of precept increases, in paragraph 4.7 of the report, really indicated the 68 percent of respondents were in favour of his proposals as only 39 percent had supported increases of between £10 and £15.
- In response to the points made about the level of support for further investment, the PCC underlined that the first objective in his Police and Crime Plan was to improve engagement with communities and to put more officers on the frontline. He then outlined the progress made

towards those goals, including opening a new police station in Tidworth to provide a framework of neighbourhood teams across the county and introducing a new operating model. He also noted that the Chief Constable was putting measures in place to improve community engagement.

- With regard to the issue of funding from central government, the PCC noted that he had, together with other PCCs representing rural areas, lobbied MPs, including the policing minister. He reported that he had met with Home Secretary James Cleverly the previous day to discuss the Police Funding Formula, but thought it was unlikely that there would be reform until after the next general election. However, he had helped to persuade the Home Secretary to invest in specific funds such as Serious Violence Duty and the Safer Streets Fund. The Home Secretary had agreed the previous day to give Wiltshire Police an additional £1 million for Hot Spot Policing
- The PCC also emphasised that he had sympathy for those struggling economically and stated that he was trying to target resources according to need to benefit less affluent areas of Wiltshire.
- The Chairman remarked that additional funding, whether from local or central government would ultimately come from the taxpayer. He also highlighted that lower income households receiving council tax relief would not be subject to the increase.
- The PCC explained that he had done everything possible to apply pressure on central government to review the funding formula.
- Cllr Dr Mathew noted that it was the responsibility of both local and national government to keep people safe. He observed that those with the deepest pockets would be paying the greatest increase.
- Reassurance was sought that the additional funding, if approved, would go towards the priority areas identified by the public in Section 5 of the consultation. The PCC noted that they used public engagement to help to direct priorities and the consultation helped to supplement the other forms of public engagement undertaken by his office.
- In response to a query about whether there had been an improvement and investment in Integrated Offender Management, the PCC explained that there had been investment in facial recognition technology and a brand new Retail Crime Strategy had been developed. He spoke about the importance of targeting repeat offenders and said they were engaging with different stakeholders to tackle the issue of persistent crimes.
- It was noted that improved crime reporting may assist Wiltshire Police's case for higher funding from the Home Office. The importance of working closely with the Probation Service was stressed.
- It was queried whether a minimum threshold for responses from different ethnicities and genders could be adopted in future years to ensure that responses from each group were proportionate to the overall population. The PCC welcomed the suggestions and said he would feed them back to his office.
- The Chairman noted that there were companies that specialised in consultations that may be effective at increasing participation.

On the proposal of Cllr James Sheppard, seconded by Cllr Vijay Manro, it was then resolved to make the:

Decision

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

18 Police and Crime Commissioner's Budget and Precept Proposals 2024/25

Clive Barker, the Chief Financial Officer at the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), introduced the report starting on page 19 of the agenda pack, which recommended an increase of £13 in the precept of a Band D property for 2024/25. He then gave an overview of the changes since he reported at the previous meeting. There had been a slight uplift in the collection funds estimated by Wiltshire Council, but he stated that this did not materially impact the settlement. There had also been a reduction in the Safer Streets Fund since the publication of the Mid Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) due to financial pressures on the Home Office.

The Chairman clarified the options open to the Panel were to:

- support the proposals without qualification;
- support the precept and make recommendations, or
- veto the proposed precept by the required majority of nine (at least two thirds of the persons who were members of the Panel at the time when the decision was made).

During the discussion, points included:

- The Panel thanked the Chief Financial Officer for the report.
- Funding for the newly published Estates Strategy would have to come from the revenue budget.
- The Police Officer Uplift Grant and Police Pay Award had been funded from the Home Office's budget. Whilst there had been a perception that a greater proportion of funding was coming from local, rather than central government, once the Police Officer Uplift Grant and other Home Office grants were taken into account, the balance of funding remained similar.
- The police funding formula linking the level of crime to the level of funding was written in 2013 and it was unlikely to be updated in the near term.
- The OPCC was legally obliged to deliver a balanced budget.
- Under the Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) proposals a Band A property would see a precept increase of £8.67 and a Band H property £26. Overall, a Band A property would be paying £179.51 from 2024/25 and a Band H property £538.

- In response to a query about the level of flexibility in the way that grant funding allocated by the Home Office for a specific purpose, could be used, the PCC noted that there was a degree of flexibility to identify areas of greatest need.
- It was noted that most forces in the region were proposing to increase the precept by the maximum possible amount of £13 on a Band D property. Some forces, such as Devon and Cornwall (£12.94), were proposing to increase it by slightly lower amounts.
- When asked about whether investment in South West Forensics Collaboration, would remove the need for further outsourcing of forensics work, the Chief Financial Officer noted that the aim was to eliminate further outsourcing within three years.
- The cost-of-living pressures faced by residents were emphasised.
- The Vice-Chairman raised concerns about the PCC's lobbying of central government about funding.
- It was noted that any increase in funding for 2024/25 would have a knock-on effect for future years.
- Given the feedback in the consultation paper about crime prevention, a question was asked about the increased investment in senior leadership positions and whether there was the right balance between that and investment in other staff to ensure optimum performance. In reply, the PCC spoke of the importance of investing in senior leadership to drive the plans and procedures to improve. Once the procedures had had more time to embed there was likely to be a gradual shift towards greater investment in frontline officers. The PCC was confident that the processes being put in place were delivering and had improved monitoring and oversight. He stated that there was a very strong leadership group in Wiltshire Police and that they had the support functions in place in order to be able to deliver.
- Members of the Panel expressed differing opinions about whether increasing the precept by a lower amount than £13 on a Band D property would impact morale within Wiltshire Police.
- The PCC noted that they were seeing an increase in morale as the issues that had put the force into special measures were being addressed. He noted that the police wanted to feel appreciated by the public and joined because they wanted to catch criminals. He felt that resources, clarity and good management were contributing factors to improving morale. He also emphasised the importance of ensuring that promotions within the force were on merit and that senior officers were open to reform.
- When pressed about whether undercapacity in certain areas was leading to an underspend, the Chief Financial Officer noted that there was a slight overspend at present as fewer people were leaving the force than anticipated but the budget would be balanced by the end of the financial year. Underspend in any area would go into the reserves. He noted that there had been a sizeable reduction in the reserves for the current financial year due to a £5 million investment in capital projects.
- It was asked whether there were any plans to reform the facilities at Monton Park in Chippenham so that they did not have to be shared with

Wiltshire Council. In response, the Chief Executive of the OPCC, Naji Darwish, noted that, whilst there were often operational challenges in the sharing of sites, discussions were ongoing to ensure policing had the right amount of desk and briefing space. He noted that the office space at Monkton Park was well located and high quality. The OPCC were considering ways to mitigate the limitations of the site, such as the limited parking.

- When questioned about whether the PCC could guarantee that the additional funding from the precept increase would go towards more front-line officers, he confirmed that officer numbers were increasing and reiterated his focus on neighbourhood policing.
- The Panel stated that they would be keen to receive information about trends in staff retention figures. The Chief Financial Officer noted that there had been a reduction in staff leaving Wiltshire Police since September 2023.

On the proposal of Cllr James Sheppard, seconded by Cllr Elizabeth Threlfall, it was proposed to support the PCC's precept proposal for 2024/25 without qualification. It was then resolved to make the:

Decision

To support the PCC's precept of £73.488 million for financial year 2024-25, which would require council tax to be set on all property bands based at £269.27 for a Band D property. This represented a £13 (5.1 percent) increase on the 2023/24 level.

19 **Communications**

The Chairman noted that the meeting was being recorded. This was the first time that one of the Panel's meetings, held outside either Wiltshire Council or Swindon Borough Council's main offices, was being recorded. The Democratic Services Officer, Matt Hitch, noted that the [recording](#) would be uploaded to Wiltshire Council's website after the meeting.

20 **Forward Work Plan**

The Panel requested that they receive a short report on the National Police Air Service at the next meeting.

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) regretted that he would be unable to attend the Panel's next meeting in person, as he would be attending the World Police Summit in Dubai on 7 March.

It was asked whether it would be possible to have an update at their next meeting on the progress made towards addressing the findings of the Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) Inspection and whether Wiltshire Police had come out of special measures. The Chief Executive of the

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Naji Darwish, reported that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services were satisfied that progress had been made but, as a further inspection was forthcoming, it was unlikely that they would be able to confirm at the next meeting whether Wiltshire Police had come out of the ENGAGE process.

An update on the reforms being put in place by the PCC was requested by the Panel. They also requested information about the level of voluntary work being undertaken to help Wiltshire Police and how to support voluntary work going forward.

The OPCC stated that they would prepare a paper for the Panel to consider further 'deep dive' topics at the next meeting.

The Panel reiterated that they would welcome the opportunity to join the police to go out on patrol. The Chief Executive of the OPCC explained that the PCC had held conversations with the Chief Constable about this issue immediately after the Panel's last meeting. He noted that Wiltshire Police were very keen on working with local councillors and that further information would be provided in due course.

21 **Any Other Business**

As Clive Barker was attending his final Panel meeting as Chief Financial Officer at the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Panel wished him a very happy retirement.

22 **Future Meeting Dates**

The next meeting of the Police and Crime Panel will be on Thursday 7 March 2024, at 10:30am, in the Council Chamber, County Hall.

Other future meeting dates were:

- Thursday 27 June 2024, 10:30am
- Thursday 26 September 2024, 1:30pm
- Thursday 14 November 2024, 10:30am

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 - 11.56 am)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Matt Hitch of Democratic Services,
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