

POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

5th February 2015

Introduction

This report sets out a summary of the commitments I have undertaken since the last Police and Crime Panel meeting held on 15th January 2015. I write a weekly blog which provides a brief overview for the public of what I have been up to. This is published on my website (www.wiltshire-pcc.gov.uk) and the content of these blogs is copied below for the Panel's information.

SO, WHO CARES FOR THE HOMELESS OUT OF HOURS?

Blog: 21 December 2014

Sunday 21 December 2014 to Sunday 4 January 2015

This has been a period when many have been on holiday and enjoying time with their family, as have I.

There were few formal meetings in the period, due to the holiday, but we did have a Commissioner's Monitoring Board on 22 December and will have another immediately we return on 5 January. The meeting discussed the revenue budget for 2015-2016, procurement contracts, collaboration and custody in the county.

On Christmas Eve Lord Wasserman called in. He was instrumental in developing the policy which led to the creation of Police and Crime Commissioners and he oversaw our establishment. It was useful to be able to share some of the successes and frustrations of the past two years. It seems that the Conservative Party are still supportive of the office of PCC and the principles that lies behind it. But others are not.

I enjoyed Christmas with my family and New Year with friends in the village. On the evening of New Year's Day I did a stint with the Filling Station in Swindon.

This is a small charity that I run for the homeless, offering hot soup and other food, clothes and toiletries to the homeless and those in need.

Over Christmas they have been supported by another charity, Christmas Care. But on every other Thursday night of the year the Filling Station runs a soup kitchen and offers support to those on the streets.

We generally have 50 clients, but this evening we were nearer ten, but I expect that we were not expected to be out in the holiday period.

One client - let's call him John - gave great cause for concern. Apparently he had been released from prison on licence and had also just been discharged from hospital. But he was obviously unwell, spending quite a lot of time sitting on the ground with his rucksack of possessions.

As the Filling Station meets in Queenstown Car Park, close to the Swindon Health Centre in Carfax Street, we took him across there to have a medical check. We arrived just before closing time, but the staff appeared unwilling to take a look at him, suggesting that we phone an ambulance. As they left to go home a member of staff offered to stay with John whilst we attempted to find some accommodation.

By now I had phoned the Crime and Communications Centre at Wiltshire Police HQ as it was pouring with rain and getting very cold and the man, who had no shelter, was at some risk.

Both the Culverly Court and Booth House hostels said they could not accommodate him, as did the emergency service at Swindon Borough Council, who told me, that, in their opinion, he had made himself intentionally homeless. As I mentioned earlier, he had been released from custody.

I tried to establish what contact or support John had received from probation, not least because I am spending a lot of money as PCC to try to ensure that people leaving custody are not homeless (because of the risk that they will return to crime). The answer did not give me confidence that the system had worked for him.

John had been living with both his parents and latterly his sister but he said neither address was now available to him.

With the "off duty" medic from the health centre we decided that the most important thing was to keep John dry and so I took him to one of the car parks and installed him, with his sleeping bag, out of the rain and wind under an exit ramp.

Somehow leaving him there did not seem the answer, but I told the Crime and Communications Centre at Devizes (who by now were as exasperated as me) where he was and the local town centre policing team were also informed.

There is a lot to unpack from this two-hour encounter, with issues for the hostels, the ambulance service, probation, the local authority emergency housing team, the health centre and Wiltshire Police who, in fairness, took ownership of the issue and tried their best.

Those of you on Twitter may have noticed that Chief Constable Pat Geenty tweeted recently that he had had “an Interesting meeting” with me discussing the plight of a vulnerable homeless person, sleeping rough. Mr Geenty summed up the issue in five words: “Who 'cares' out of hours?”

Food for thought.

A happy and safe new year to all readers.

WHY I BELIEVE THAT POLICING SHOULD BE KEPT LOCAL

Blog: 5th January 2015

Monday 5 January

In the morning I chaired the Commissioner's Monitoring Board at which we discussed services for victims, digital evidence management, community remedy and the police and crime element of council tax for 2015-16. We went through the presentation that my colleagues and I will present at Area Boards and Localities across Wiltshire and Swindon over the next few weeks. We also talked about one or two other issues which I will raise with the Chief Constable.

Overall my day was very office based but a good opportunity to catch up on paper work.

Tuesday 6 January

Today I signed off the communications on the police and crime element of council tax. I also read the surveys that showed overall crime dropped by three per cent from December 2013 to November 2014. Public confidence measured in the spring / summer survey is 86.6 per cent; victim satisfaction to November 2014 is 87.7 per cent.

Those are important figures for the Constabulary and for the public. But equally important is the assessment made by [Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary \(HMIC\)](#) in which they state that “in terms of its effectiveness, in general, the force is good at reducing crime and preventing offending, is good at investigating offending and good at tackling anti-social behaviour”. HMIC concluded that the force carries out its responsibilities with a good level of efficiency. This is against the background of reduced costs over the last year .

I am now aware that the central grant from the Home Office to Wiltshire Police will be 5.1 per cent less in 2016. The projection is that our funding gap in 2017/18 will be around £13m. I am keen that we should maintain neighbourhood policing and response operating from Wiltshire alongside our partners in Wiltshire and Swindon Borough Council.

There is still much talk about the possibility of regional policing and, whilst I am supportive of working with our neighbouring forces in the south west to get value for money, I am also very conscious that British policing has the support of the public it serves. If policing becomes divorced from Wiltshire and Swindon, I think something very important would be lost.

Local policing provides a firm base upon which regional operations can be carried out.

I am proposing an increase of £3.06 a year (or 6p a week) for the average home (band D property). This modest increase would help to reduce the impact of significant cuts in Government grants for policing and crime services in the county.

It would still leave us with the lowest precept for policing in the south west. It is worth remembering that, when the Government cuts its grant to policing, the effect in Wiltshire is greater than a cut in funding to local authorities as they raise a greater proportion of their precept from local people.

I know that neighbourhood policing and local response are just two aspects of our service that the public value and I hope that my argument for the £3.06 increase will be accepted.

In the afternoon I went across to the hangar at Devizes HQ from where the [new Wiltshire air ambulance](#) is now operating . There I signed a new lease that allows the air ambulance to use the facilities for up to three years whilst they secure a new base with a visitors centre.



(Trustee Mandy Clarke and Angus signing the lease)

Wednesday 7 January

After lunch I attended the Swindon Health and Wellbeing Board where we discussed the strategic needs assessment for 2014/15 and voluntary sector commissioning in Swindon. We also had an update from Health Watch Swindon.

All partner agencies have now signed the Mental Health Crisis Concordat. I am very pleased this has been signed by Swindon and Wiltshire council partners and I look forward to reading the new reports to both the Health Wellbeing Boards about those whom we hold in custody. The aim of the act is to confirm that custody cells are not suitable for a person with mental health issues.

Afterwards I caught a train to London for an early meeting tomorrow at The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). I was pleased that the meeting observed a silence to remember those killed in the Paris shootings.

There has been a positive reaction to my blog published last week which prompted full-page coverage in the Swindon Advertiser and on the FLIC Wiltshire and This is Wiltshire websites. Regular readers may remember that I recounted the tale of a homeless man in Swindon. One of the media outlets wanted to know if he has found accommodation and I was pleased to tell them he was now in a hostel. You can [read the story here](#).

Thursday 8 January

This morning I met fellow Commissioners at London Living Room which is on the top floor of MOPAC . It has splendid views over The Tower of London and HMS Belfast. This meeting was a great opportunity to talk to colleagues about their experiences in office. All 43 PCCs have different challenges and it's interesting to note that many of those challenges we have already addressed in Wiltshire and Swindon.

Our structure of two unity authorities is extremely useful in the delivery of focused local policing. Those forces that cover larger areas such as Thames Valley do not seem to have the local focus that we have. I believe this focus is one of our major strengths. As we look towards a model of working over a greater area we must find a governance structure that protects local police and the public.



(Angus with other PCCs on the top floor of MOPAC)

I then caught the train from London to Salisbury to attend my first Area Board on the precept consultation. The presentation went well and was generally well received. I was also able to speak about the provision of a custody unit in the south of the county. I explained why we were taking time and care at looking for a location for the unit and why Salisbury plans were put on hold.

Friday 9 January

I spent last night in Salisbury with an interesting wake up at 7am which involved getting dressed in the dark as the lights in my hotel room had blown a fuse.

I caught the train to Warminster where I was joined by one of my colleagues to set up a stall at the local market. It wasn't busy as the weather didn't encourage people to stop and chat for long . But those we did speak to were supportive of their policing service in Warminster and were fond of their local neighbourhood officers.

There were some complaints about low-level anti social behaviour (ASB) in some car parks and these complaints have been passed on to the Neighbourhood Policing Team. I was also pleased to meet the local inspector to chat about the progress of a partnership campus in Warminster.



(Angus at Warminster market)

After the market I came back to my office and was joined by Temporary Assistant Chief Constable Paul Mills to discuss the progress of the implementation of the volunteer strategy. You may remember that I produced an update in December and some of the ideas in that, as well as others, are taking root.

I then met Claire Perry, MP for Devizes, and we spoke about policing performance in her area. She had no concerns that she wished to raise. To end the day I attended a Conservative association dinner with two Swindon MPs.

Angus Macpherson
Police and Crime Commissioner
For Wiltshire and Swindon