

Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel

MINUTES OF THE WILTSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2025 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Junab Ali (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Stanka Adamcova, Denisa Ahmeti, Cllr Abdul Amin, Cllr Ross Henning, Cllr Vijay Manro, Cllr Kelvin Nash and Cllr Tony Pickernell

Also Present:

Police and Crime Commissioner, Philip Wilkinson, OBE, MPhil
Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer of the OPCC, Naji Darwish
Interim Chief Financial Officer of the OPCC, David Moran
Democratic Services Officer (Wiltshire Council), Matt Hitch

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr Steve Bucknell (Chairman)
- Cllr James Sheppard
- Cllr George Jeans
- Cllr Ian Thorn
- Louise Williams

As the Chairman was unavoidably delayed, the meeting was chaired by the Vice-Chairman, Cllr Junab Ali.

Cllr Ross Henning noted that he had been called by Miss Andria Tidmarsh-Hackett, from Legacy Law Foundation, who had asked to give her apologies for the meeting.

2 **Minutes**

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

Decision

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 14 November 2024, as a true and correct record.

3 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Vice-Chairman gave thanks to Wiltshire Police and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for organising the Panel's visit to the Crime and Communications Centre in Devizes on 10 January 2025. He stated that he would welcome the opportunity to go on similar of visits in future, as he felt that they added to the information that the Panel received in their business meetings and allowed members to pass feedback to residents.

Police and Crime Commissioner Philip Wilkinson, OBE, MPhil, thanked the Panel for putting the needs of residents before politics. He felt that extraneous factors had never interfered with their shared focus on improving policing.

5 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

6 **PCC Draft Budget 2025/26 and Precept Consultation**

Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Philip Wilkinson, OBE, MPhil, highlighted the reports on the draft budget for 2025/26, and his precept consultation, contained in the agenda pack. He noted that there were significant financial pressures on Wiltshire Police because of the police funding formula. The formula took into account population density, which was low in Wiltshire, due to Salisbury Plain, meaning that the force was the third worst funded out of the 43 forces in England and Wales. The PCC then introduced his interim Chief Financial Officer, David Moran, who had previously worked for the Kent and Metropolitan Police forces.

The interim Chief Financial Officer gave a presentation about the budget proposals for the forthcoming financial year. Points included:

- The government grant was due to increase by £5.6 million, a 6.2 percent increase on the current financial year.
- Whilst, superficially, the grant looked generous, the increases in costs over the same period were expected to total £16.8 million, including an additional, £2.4 million in National Insurance contributions, £5.1 million in staff pay increases, £1.4 million in non-pay inflation and £0.5 million in changes to dangerous dog legislation.
- £2.5 million of the £16.8 million was a consequence of the cessation of the annual drawdown of reserves, which was no longer considered to be sustainable. Going forward, reserve funding would only be used for essential purposes, transformative change and investments.
- If the PCC increased the police precept on a band D property by £14, (5.2 percent), this would raise a further £4.6 million. However, there

would still be a significant financial shortfall in 2025/26, requiring savings of around £6.8 million to achieve a balanced budget.

- Of the £6.8 million in savings required, £1.6 million had already been identified and £5.2 million would need to be found from new initiatives.
- It was expected that non-pay related inflation would continue to increase over time.
- If the PCC did not increase the precept on the 2024/25 level, £11 million, rather than £6.8 million, of savings would need to be identified, which would have a significant impact on service provision.
- If the precept was raised by £14 for a band D property, equivalent to £1.16 per month, it was highly likely that Wiltshire Police would still have the lowest precept of any force in South West England.

To give the Panel confidence that increases in the precept funding would be well spent, the PCC highlighted the recent progress that had been made by the force.

- He noted that significant improvements had been made in the 999-call response time and that they were now meeting the government's target of answering at least 90 percent of calls within 10 seconds. The average response time had fallen from 13 seconds in the year to November 2023 to eight seconds in the year to November 2024.
- Investigative capacity and governance had also improved, as evidenced by the increase in positive outcome rates, which were now in the top half of forces in England and Wales. The PCC had also heard lots of good feedback from Area Boards, and community meetings in Swindon, stating that the public had noticed an increase in the visibility of the police.
- Wiltshire Police had more police officers than at any time in the last 15 years.
- The PCC felt that morale in the force was high, particularly in neighbourhood teams. He reported that he had attended an Area Board where the neighbourhood team had received a standing ovation. He also took the opportunity to give details about a number of successful operations to combat drug dealing.

During the discussion of the draft budget proposals, points included:

- The Panel thanked the PCC and interim Chief Financial Officer for their updates.
- In response to questions about financial pressures created by changes to the Dangerous Dogs Act, it was reported that Wiltshire Police was predicted to spend £370,000 on kennelling in 2024/25, compared to around £30,000 in 2023/24. The PCC noted that this was a major issue for forces nationally and they were sharing best practice on how to deal with the cost challenges. The interim Chief Financial Officer stated that Wiltshire Police were seeking long term contracts for kennels in the forthcoming financial year so that they could use funding as efficiently as

possible. He reiterated that forces were working together to resolve kennel capacity issues but highlighted that the speed of the legislation had limited that opportunity for collaboration with other forces.

- The Chief Executive of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Naji Darwish, provided additional background information. He explained that it was often difficult to identify XL Bully type dogs, and that they were often kennelled for extended periods due to legal challenges. The change in legislation had been introduced by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) without the financial implications being fully understood. The Home Office were in negotiations with DEFRA about additional funding for policing to cover the extra costs incurred, but it was not likely that a settlement would be reached in the short term.
- When questioned about whether there were any other proposed changes in legislation that could have a major financial impact on the force, the PCC noted that he would soon be attending an extraordinary meeting of PCCs where issues such as these would be discussed.
- In reply to a question about whether the PCC was confident that he could achieve the required savings without impacting front line services, he stated that he expected the force to continue its trajectory of improvement over the forthcoming year. However, he felt that that this would be much harder beyond the 2025/26 financial year without changes to the police funding formula.
- The Panel welcomed the significant improvement in 999-call response times over the past few months and thanked the OPCC and Wiltshire Police again for their recent visit to the Crime and Communications Centre.
- Cllr Ross Henning praised Chippenham, Corsham and Calne Neighbourhood Police Team, noting that they had high morale.
- Given the financial challenges facing the force during the forthcoming financial year, the Panel said that they would welcome an update about the impact of the budget on service delivery in six months' time. The Chief Executive of the OPCC stated that this could be delivered and that regular updates on these issues would also be included in the quarterly papers provided to the Panel about the progress towards the PCC's Crime Plan.
- It was highlighted by members that they would have welcomed a detailed draft of the mid-term financial strategy in the agenda pack. The Chief Executive of the OPCC explained that there was information in the draft strategy that would have needed to be redacted, so it was not included on this occasion. The OPCC would provide further detail about the mid-term financial strategy within the next week or so.
- When queried about whether grant funding that Wiltshire Police received from central government would continue in the next financial year, the Chief Executive of the OPCC reported that external funding was due to expire on 31 March and they had not yet received confirmation about whether it would be extended. He assured the Panel that exit strategies were in place should they be required.

- The Chief Executive of the OPCC agreed with a member of the Panel that switching government funding away from annual grants for specific goals to general funding would enable PCCs to have additional flexibility.
- Concerns about the prevalence of drug dealing in the community were highlighted and the PCC was asked what he was doing to lobby central government for additional funding. In reply, the PCC noted that he chaired the South West Strategic Board and lobbied central government hard on the issue. He also highlighted that County Lines was an international challenge and that Wiltshire Police were one of the best performing forces in the country in tackling the issue. Work was going on to publicise the achievements of the police in tackling County Lines and a new Head of Communications for Wiltshire Police had been appointed. The Chief Executive of the OPCC suggested that the Panel might like to add anti-drug activity to the list of topics for further scrutiny.
- Details were sought about whether Wiltshire Police was still paying into its reserves. The interim Chief Financial Officer clarified that reserves had been declining since 2010, when the amount held was higher than required. Reserves were now equivalent to five percent of the force's annual spend and it would not be prudent for them to reduce it further given current uncertainty about future funding and operational needs. The force was not in a position to put the level of funding into reserves that it would like to help improve its estate infrastructure.
- Capital receipts from the sale of assets played an important role in funding future capital investment, whilst minimising the impact on the revenue budget. The sale of property to help build up Wiltshire Police's reserves would be at the discretion of the PCC. Funding was always made available to ensure that police buildings met health and safety standards.
- The 4.75 percent pay increase awarded to staff in 2024/25 was 2.25 percent higher than anticipated. Central government did provide some additional money to cover the gap for the current financial year. It was anticipated that the pay award would be 2.8 percent for the forthcoming financial year. If a pay award was agreed in excess of that amount, His Majesty's Treasury had indicated that individual departments would be responsible for funding the difference. Wiltshire Police's budget for the forthcoming year had been based on the assumption that there would be no additional top up from central government.
- When the PCC was queried about what he was doing to lobby central government for a share of the additional 13,000 police officers that they wanted to recruit nationally, he stated that he welcomed the government's intention to increase the number of neighbourhood officers. He reported that he was still awaiting the details of the scheme but reaffirmed Wiltshire Police's commitment to neighbourhood teams. He noted that the increased emphasis on neighbourhood policing by central government reflected the work that had recently been undertaken as part of the restructure in Wiltshire. The Chief Executive of the OPCC added that the force would have to make decisions in accordance with its overall resources and cost pressures, so they would need to analyse the

details of any conditions that might be attached to additional recruitment before proceeding.

- In order to achieve the savings needed, a number of efficiency measures would be looked at, including the adoption of new technology, as well as reviewing vehicle numbers and contracts. It was emphasised that the force was committed to maintaining the number of police officers. Wiltshire Police would keep the same number of stations that housed neighbourhood teams and would also continue to look at options for the creation of a policing hub in the south of the county.
- The PCC felt that Wiltshire Police were probably delivering more, with less, than any other force in the country. He argued that they would only be able to continue to deliver a service at the required standard if the precept was raised by £14 per annum for a band D household.
- The PCC was working alongside other PCCs in South West England to help rationalise procurement. He chaired the regional body of PCCs where they shared best practice.

Other matters discussed included:

- When asked about what he was doing to tackle the issue of retail crime, the PCC noted that Business Crime Reduction Partnerships were being set up across the county as part of a Wiltshire wide retail crime strategy.
- The force was looking at the potential of using a new crime information sharing system called Disc to help retailers, which would help them to fast-track reporting on an app.
- The PCC's Crime Plan included greater specificity about what he was asking Wiltshire Police to deliver than his previous Crime Plan, due to his increased confidence in the force.

During the discussion on the budget consultation, which opened on 6 January 2025, the following points were raised:

- The PCC noted that that had been around 1,000 responses to the survey; most of the respondents were broadly supportive and aware of the challenges facing the police. He added that he was conscious of the financial pressures on the public when asking for additional funding, particularly at a time when there were challenges in the private sector.
- It was reported by the Chief Executive of the OPCC that OPCC evaluated all campaigns, including the consultation. The decision had been taken not to invest in external advertising for this year's survey, as the funding spent on print advertising had not yielded many responses the previous year. Greater effort was being made to interact with the public in-person, with staff attending schools and sporting events.
- The PCC would be out and about supporting his communications team as he felt that it was an important part of his job to listen to the public. He would be attending consultation events in Fovant and Mere later that day.

At the conclusion of the discussion, on the proposal of Cllr Abdul Amin, seconded by Cllr Vijay Manro, it was resolved to make the:

Decision

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

7 Forward Work Plan

The Vice-Chairman reminded the Panel that, at their next meeting, they would be considering the Police and Crime Commissioner's precept proposals. At their March meeting they would then be focussing on commissioning and future harm reduction.

He also reiterated that, during discussion of the previous item, the Panel had requested an update on the impact of the budget after six months. This would be ready for their meeting in September. The Panel had also requested that efforts to tackle drug taking be added to the list of topics for future consideration to be presented to the Panel in March.

The Panel were then invited to suggest other topics that they would like to see added to the forward work programme.

One member stated that they were keen to have an update on the mental health of perpetrators, and victims, of crime. The Chief Executive of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), offered to take further information outside of the meeting if there were any specific concerns and stated that the OPCC could add it to the list of topics for future consideration that they would provide to the Panel in March. He highlighted that there had been a shift in emphasis away from a mainly policing response, through the Right Care, Right Person programme, so that mental health professionals were able to provide support in cases where they were better placed to do so.

Another member mentioned that they were keen to be kept updated about the support on offer for recently released prisoners. The Panel noted that they had received a presentation covering this topic at their previous meeting in November but would keep it under review. The Chief Executive suggested that it could also be included in the list of topics for future consideration that the OPCC would provide to the Panel in March.

The Police and Crime Commissioner, Philip Wilkinson, OBE, MPhil reported that he had a small team in his office dedicated to working with the probation service to reduce reoffending. He noted that over half of prisoners released went on to reoffend, so it was important to monitor rates closely and do all they could to reduce them.

8 Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Panel was confirmed as being on 5 February 2025, at 10:30am, in the Council Chamber, Monkton Park, Chippenham.

Other, future meeting dates were:

- 26 March 2025, 10:30am – Kennet Room, County Hall
- 26 June 2025, 10:30am – Old Fire Station, 2 Salt Lane, Salisbury
- 11 September 2025, 10:30am – Committee Room 6, Swindon BC Offices
- 25 November 2025, 10:30am – Committee Room 6, Swindon BC Offices

9 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.35 am - 12.07 pm)

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