

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Police and Crime Panel** held in **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 10 January 2022** at **9.45 am**

Present:

Councillor B Jones (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Boyes, J Miller (substitute for L Hovvels), D Nicholls, J Nicholson (Vice-Chair), R Potts and M Simmons

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors J Dulston, L Hovvels, A Savory and N Wallis and Mr N Cooke and Mr D Dodwell.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor J Miller substituted for Councillor L Hovvels.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the Meeting held 17 September 2021 and Special Meeting held 5 November 2021 were agreed as true records and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5 HMICFRS Inspection Reports

The Panel considered a report of the Police and Crime Commissioner which outlined the findings of the recent inspections conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) that have required a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) comment as follows:

- Police response to violence against women and girls - final inspection report;
- PEEL 2021/22 – An inspection of Durham Constabulary;
- A joint thematic inspection of the criminal justice journey for individuals with mental health needs and disorders.

Councillor D Boyes noted that previously the rating for Durham Constabulary had been 'outstanding', with the PEEL rating for 2021/22 being 'good', and asked what moves were being taken towards getting back to 'outstanding'. The PCC noted a new grading regime was in place, with 12 areas being considered. She added that, for Durham Constabulary, 11 out of 12 areas were graded as 'good' or 'outstanding'. She reiterated the inspection regime had changed, with Durham being one of the first force areas to undergo the new PEEL Inspection.

Councillor D Nicholls asked what was meant by 'standardise the approach in terms of tackling violence against women and girls', noting each situation would be different, requiring different levels of support. The PCC noted that it had been identified there was a need to have a plan in terms of tackling violence against women and girls, with a national plan having been launched just before Christmas. She added that work relating to Police and Crime Plan and new Champions in place would look to support victims, looking nationally and operationally in order to be the best when developing, alongside partners, a strategy to address violence against women and girls.

Councillor R Potts referred to the PEEL 2021/22 Inspection Report, noting a graph that set out that one would be four times more likely to be a repeat victim of domestic abuse in Durham compared to the national figure and asked what was being done and who was being held accountable in terms of the rise in domestic abuse numbers. The PCC reiterated that the Police and Crime Plan was in implementation and prior to Christmas 2021, with the help of Public Health and other partner agencies, a Domestic Abuse and Survivors' Champion had been appointed to work alongside the Victims' Champion. She noted domestic abuse continued to be a concern and explained she would be working with partners and agencies to address those trends. She noted the Inspection had found that the Constabulary had policies in place that enabled Police to alert victims of domestic abuse of their rights, as provided for in the domestic violence disclosure scheme. The PCC noted Durham Constabulary was above average, across England and Wales, in responding to victims' requests as regards potential abusers and added that as a new PCC it was timely to have the PEEL Inspection Report to highlight areas where work would need to be done, with further updates to be provided to the Panel at future meetings.

Councillor R Potts noted the appointment of the new Domestic Abuse and Survivors' Champion and the speedy response to victims in terms of intelligence, however, he noted the report had stated that the Constabulary needed to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service. He noted that his concerns related to the figures of four times the number of people becoming victims of domestic violence, with no one seeming to be accountable for that. The Chief Executive of the Office of the PCC (OPCC), Steve White explained that the standard of the recording of crime statistics by Durham Constabulary was considered to be very good. He added that a downside to that high standard was that there was an impression that crime in Durham was worse than in other parts of the country when in fact some of the reality, though not all, was that Durham Constabulary records those incidents better than other forces around the country, giving in some instances a 'false positive'. He added that, in the role of the PCC in holding the force to account, if the force was better informed as regards domestic violence than other forces, then there was the opportunity to tackle the issue. He reiterated that Durham Constabulary's crime statistics recording had been recognised nationally.

Councillor D Boyes acknowledged Durham Constabulary's good crime recording and noted that an issue for the Panel was in comparing performance if other forces were recording differently. He added that there was a need for uniformity in terms of recording across all forces, an issue he had raised back in 2013. The PCC noted that the Chief Constable was keen to speak to the Panel as regards the new reporting regime and statistics, how that would be used, and what other forces were doing. She noted an upcoming development session with Panel Members would be insightful and noted that the Domestic Violence and Survivors' Champion would be in attendance at a future meeting of the Panel.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6 Precept Consultation

The Panel considered a report of the Police and Crime Commissioner relating to the planned consultation on the level of the policing precept in 2022-23.

The Chief Executive, OPCC noted further details as regards consultation questions had been circulated and that the consultation would seek views on a precept increase of £10, for a Band D property, and also contained questions relating to the Police and Crime Plan and priorities areas.

He explained that there were a number of facets in relation to the consultation in order to reach people, with social media being key. He noted resources allocated for social media advertising, in order to reach as many people as possible. The Chief Executive, OPCC referred to the 'Keep in the Know' public contact database, with over 9,000 people signed up, adding they would be encouraged to respond to the precept consultation. He noted the timescales involved and that it was hoped a final report would be presented to the Panel at its meeting in February.

Councillor R Potts noted that precept data available via the PCC website was out of date and asked as regards the current grant from Government for 2022/23 as he had also been unable to find that information from the website. He noted the statement from the Chief Executive, OPCC in terms of 'the Government has determined a maximum increase of £10 per Band D property', around a four percent increase, and asked whether that was national or just for Durham. The Chief Executive, OPCC noted it was a maximum precept rise for English and Welsh forces. Councillor R Potts noted that the consultation questionnaire stated, 'The government funding settlement assumes that PCCs in England and Wales will increase their tax for policing by £10 per year...'. He added that he had been unable to find on the Government website or the PCC website any statement from Government in terms of assuming a £10 per year rise. The Chief Finance Officer, OPCC and Assistant Chief Officer, Durham Constabulary, Gary Ridley noted it had been within documents circulated to police forces, adding when the provisional grant settlement had come out in December 2021, the narrative included an assumption of a £10 increase per year for the next three years giving an extra £774 million collectively across English and Welsh police forces. The PCC explained as regards the website, noting staffing issues and work concentrating on the precept, with the Chief Executive, OPCC adding the comments relating to the website were noted and the issues would be looked at.

Councillor J Miller noted the headline figure of a proposed four percent increase in precept and explained that people would ask 'what am I getting for that increase'. The Chief Finance Officer, OPCC noted that the intention in the current financial year would be: to invest in additional 999 / 101 call handlers; introduce Operation Snap, the ability for the public to submit dashcam footage of incidents; to enable a standstill position in terms of the increased costs relating to gas, electricity, insurance, ICT costs that were not reflected in the Government grant; and in relation to the increase in Employers National Insurance contributions from 1 April 2022. The PCC noted that it was key, within the consultation, to give the public a list of priorities so that they could identify what areas were important to them to help identify priorities and spend, noting just under 200 priorities within the Police and Crime Plan, to be delivered within a challenging timescale.

She added that Durham Constabulary was recruiting for new Police Officers from today and that more detail on the precept would come forward following the consultation with the public.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That the Panel received a further detailed report on the consultation.

7 Performance Progress Report

The Panel considered a report of the Police and Crime Commissioner which updated on performance against the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor D Boyes asked questions relating to the 101 number, noting people had lost confidence in the service, and less Police visibility during the pandemic period, and also asked whether there would be any change in emphasis in respect of community policing. He noted within the OPCC there were the two Champions and Deputy PCC and asked as regards information so that the Panel could have an understanding of relationships and responsibilities. The Chair noted that it would be timely for the Panel to receive an updated 'family tree' setting out structure and areas of responsibility. The PCC noted the new Police and Crime Plan and explained that the Chief Executive, OPCC and the Champions had been working to assign names to the actions that had been set out. She added that there was a lot of work around anti-social behaviour, victims, and domestic violence, with around a third of the objectives being linked to the Champions. She noted there was a need within partner agencies, Durham Constabulary and the OPCC to set out who would be key in delivering the remainder of the objectives. The Chief Executive, OPCC noted the changes and recent appointment of the Champions and explained that the Panel and public would be informed of the people and their responsibilities. He noted the work in respect of the precept consultation and Plan, with structures for the office stemming from the Plan and suggested that an element of the upcoming development session may look at those areas.

In response to a question from Councillor R Potts in relation to staffing and current job adverts, the Chief Executive, OPCC noted that the position of Policy and Communications Officer was a replacement for an Officer who had left the organisation. The Chief Executive, OPCC added that the other three roles advertised had been existing roles that had been carried out under different organisations, now being brought into the OPCC. The PCC noted as additional services that had been commissioned, following Government grants during COVID-19.

The Chief Finance Officer, OPCC added that there was around £2 million per year from Government to commission services with those being put out for tender for periods of two to three years. He noted the challenge, in practice, was to ensure that monies given to organisations had a clear link back to the objectives within the Police and Crime Plan and added that the role of commissioning was becoming a full time job. He added the Government had recognised the changes needed and supported those with funding, such as in the support of victims, and also recognised that those funds were best spent locally, based on local decision making.

Councillor D Boyes noted the update and noted the short period of time to embed changes and make a difference. He noted the impact of the pandemic asked how change would lead to a return to the 'outstanding' policing of three or four years ago, where community policing was the bedrock. The PCC reiterated that the recruitment of additional police officers had gone live today and noted that notwithstanding the time it took to recruit and train new police officers, the commitment to increasing the number of police officers was there. She added that information would be coming forward to the Panel in relation to the Fair Funding Formula noting, as explained in the Police and Crime Plan, that between 2010 and 2020, Durham had lost 27 percent of police officer strength. She explained that while 226 police officers would be replaced by 2023, that would not make up the 408 police officers lost, adding that other PCC areas had noted they had the highest number of police officers ever in their areas. She reiterated that a future report as regards the Fair Funding Formula would provide information on how it would impact Durham and noted she would need the support of the Panel, local Councillors and the local Members of Parliament in relation to funding. The Chief Finance Officer, OPCC noted last year was year one of the uplift and Durham Constabulary had recruited 68 additional police officers and a new shift pattern would go live in two weeks' time with an increase in night-time working. He added there were current 31 police officers in training, a further 32 police officers starting in March and that there was ongoing work in terms of detective roles, noting the national and local shortage of detectives. The Chief Finance Officer, OPCC explained that next year a further 90 police officers would be recruited, with the next intake after that being March 2023.

Councillor J Miller noted the work involved in investigating crimes and noted the work of Northumbria Police, signing up to the 'Police Now' national detectives scheme, and asked why Durham Constabulary had not. The Chief Finance Officer, OPCC explained that the police officer would carry out the initial 'primary investigation' and that would then be passed to 'secondary investigation' involving detectives, but also involving custody and crime scene investigation. He noted he felt 'Police Now' was not right for Durham and that Durham was asking new police officers within their first year if they wished to become a detective.

He added an issue with 'Police Now' was that organisations that signed up to 'Police Now' took a degree of responsibility for their recruitment and training. The Chief Finance Officer, OPCC explained he would prefer to retain a higher degree of control in terms of who was recruited and how they were trained, to maintain the low attrition rate Durham had when compared to other Force Areas, that low rate suggesting that Durham was doing it right in terms of recruitment and management.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That the Panel await the new iteration of the Quarterly Performance Report.

8 Media Report

The Panel considered a report of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner which provided an update on press and social media coverage concerning the work of the Police and Crime commissioner since the previous meeting (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Councillor R Potts noted negative comments and feedback as regards the precept received via social media. The PCC noted that she was aware and added that Members would appreciate that many different views would come forward. She explained that all views were important, and she would be cognisant of those views, however, some statements being made via social media were factually incorrect. She noted that comments would be taken on board and she hoped that those commenting on social media would also take time to respond to the consultation and to respond on other issues through the proper mechanisms that were in place.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 PCC Commissioning Update

The Panel considered a report of the Police and Crime Commissioner which provided an update on the decisions taken at the Commissioning Board in October 2021 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Governance and Finance, OPCC, Charles Oakley explained the main areas related to: bringing the Victim Care and Advice Service (VCAS) and Community Peer Mentors in-house; the Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) and Counselling Services being subject to procurement exercises for a three year contracts, with a potential to extend for a further two years; confirmation that a three year grant would be awarded to the supplier for the Tees Valley Inclusion Project for the HALO service.

Councillor D Boyes asked how people accessed those victim services, whether there was an outreach service, and how they would be linked in terms of improving the direction of travel given the PEEL Inspection Report grading of 'adequate' in respect of supporting victims. The Head of Governance and Finance noted that in respect of the sexual violence service it was generally a referral following an initial crisis conversation at the sexual violence referral centre. He added that this would be following a person being a victim of crime and the support offered would be as appropriate. He also noted community outreach programmes in terms of education and added that a proportion of the funding was aimed at being preventative. Councillor D Boyes asked as regards those harder to reach groups and asked as regards the numbers involved and what work was undertaken. The Head of Governance and Finance noted the numbers were not huge and explained in relation to minority communities, such as the LGBTQ+ communities, some of the funding received from Government was provided to specialist organisations that could get into those communities to make people aware of services that were available. He noted around 100 contacts had been made, however, he was not sure of the number of people supported. The PCC explained that this related to bringing the Victims' Service back in-house alongside the Victims' Champions to help deliver the best victims' service in class. She explained that there was also the Community Peer Mentors who had dealt with around 499 victims of crime, 81 percent having identified as being the victim of crime at some stage, and 71 percent within the last month. She noted 44 percent of those supported had also been victims of domestic violence. She added there was an importance in terms of the type of language used, in supporting those that may not see themselves as a victim, to make sure all were aware of the support services that were available. She noted that as the VCAS was unable to support victims of anti-social behaviour, the Community Peer Mentors offered the opportunity to provide support for those victims. She concluded by reiterating that bringing the service in-house and having a Champion with links nationally to the Victims' Commissioner, and across England and Wales with other PCC appointed Victims' Champions, would give the ability to feed into the national level and to also bring in best practice for Durham.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 PCC Decision Records

The Panel considered a report of the Police and Crime Commissioner which provided an update on the Police and Crime Commissioner's Decision Register for 2021-22 and addressed the forward plan (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

11 Independent Co-Opted Members of the Police and Crime Panel

The Panel considered a report of the Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel on the proposed recruitment of an Independent Co-opted Member of the Police and Crime Panel (for copy see file of minutes).

The Governance Solicitor, Kamila Coulson-Patel noted the Panel consisted of 12 Members, seven Durham County Councillors, three Darlington Borough Councillors and two Independent Co-opted Members. She explained as regards the background to the vacancy, the process in terms of advertising, and the Panel appointing an Appointment Panel from its Membership, comprising at least one Member of each of the constituent Local Authorities to undertake the recruitment and selection, after which the Chair and Vice Chair would make a recommendation to the Panel on the appointment.

Resolved:

- (i) That the recruitment process as set out within the report for the appointment of an Independent Co-opted Member be agreed.
- (ii) That the composition of an Appointment Panel to conduct the recruitment process be agreed.
- (iii) That the Panel receive a recommendation of the Appointment Panel at a future meeting on the proposed appointment.

12 Complaints Update

The Panel considered a report of the Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel which provided an update on complaints relating to the Police and Crime Commissioner or the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (for copy see file of Minutes). It was noted that between 10 September and 22 December 2021 there have been no formal complaints received in accordance with the procedure.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.