

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Police and Crime Panel** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Friday 12 March 2021 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor L Hovvels (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Boyes, P Crathorne, J Nicholson, S Quinn, A Savory and M Simmons

Darlington Borough Council:

Councillors B Jones (Vice-Chair) and N Wallis

Independent Co-opted Members:

Mr N J H Cooke and Mr D K G Dodwell

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Chair invited Steve White, Acting Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner (PCVC) to address the Panel at this, the final Panel meeting before the election in May. He began by extending his thanks to the Panel for their support throughout what had turned out to be a turbulent eighteen months. He paid tribute to the fortitude of his staff, who, during this time, had coped with the sad passing of the former Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner, Ron Hogg, and the changes resulting from the appointment of the Acting PCVC, whilst also dealing with the impact of the pandemic. He spoke of his focus throughout his time in office, on the provision of an efficient and effective policing service for the people of County Durham and the challenges of negotiating the political landscape whilst remaining impartial. He commented that having experienced the positions of Chief Executive and Acting PCVC, he considered himself to be in a unique position and he added he would take the experience forward, on his return to the post of Chief Executive. He concluded by reiterating his thanks to the Panel, his staff and the Interim Chief Executive, Sharon Caddell, whose support had been invaluable.

The Chair placed on record the thanks of the Panel to the Acting PCVC for meeting the challenges during such an unprecedented and difficult period and for all the positive changes he had made throughout his tenure.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from J Dulston.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members in attendance.

3 Declarations of interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

5 Media Report

The Panel considered a report of the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which provided an update on press and media activity (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The Senior Media Officer highlighted that, in February, the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner was highly commended by CoPaCC for transparency and openness. During the period, the team had worked on the refresh of the website, due to be launched on 15 March, which aims to improve user-friendliness and increase accessibility.

Councillor Boyes remarked that the commendation by CoPaCC was pleasing but not surprising, as, at no time throughout his tenure, had the Acting PCVC shied away from public transparency, even in difficult times.

The Acting PCVC informed the Panel that the appointment of the Senior Media Officer had brought new ways of working and the focus on engagement through social media had become increasingly important during the pandemic. He hoped that this increased community engagement would stand the next PCVC in good stead for the future.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6 2021/22 Revenue and Capital Budgets

The Panel considered a report of the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which presented the revenue and capital budgets for 2021/22 (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The Chief Finance Officer updated the Panel on the five key areas relating to the precept increase. He explained that steps are being taken to address pressures with regard to the recruitment and retention of call handlers, which currently has a 10% turnover of staff, and, who require three months' training. He referred to interest in the force control centre that was generated at a recent Panel meeting and suggested that, when social distancing measures are lifted, the Panel may wish to visit the control room to observe the work of call handlers.

Councillor Jones referred to the recruitment of officers from other forces and asked how this recruitment takes place. The Chief Finance Officer responded that an advert is placed on the website to encourage transferees from other parts of the country, including those with detective experience, to consider joining the force. The Acting PCVC added that part of the rationale for the increase in precept was to facilitate the recruitment of transferees, which, whilst more expensive to recruit than new entrants, are essential to maintain the balance of experience within the force.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7 Office of the PCVC Restructure

The Committee considered a report of the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which presented the outcome of the staff restructure and job evaluation process (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Acting PCVC informed the Panel that the restructure recognised the important work undertaken and sought to maximise efficiency. In addition, and, in the spirit of transparency, any member of the public wishing to know how the office is structured can do so as the information is publicly available. He added that an integral part of the restructure evaluation had been future considerations, such as an imminent government announcement which is likely to impact on the work of Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner offices.

Councillor Boyes asked what percentage the net employee costs of £870,000 will be of the grant budget, and, how this compares with other areas of the country. The Interim Chief Executive responded that, as a guide, Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner offices are not expected to cost more than 1% of the total grant received, and, the office is below 1%, is streamlined, and, compares favourably. The Acting PCVC cautioned that making comparisons with other PCVC offices is difficult as not all offices are equal in transparency.

Referring to the intern programme, Councillor Boyes asked whether the programme would continue and, if so, whether there would be opportunities for career progression. The Interim Chief Executive explained that the office will continue to host interns and consideration had been given to post and salary levels, in order to enable career progression as interns are talented and valued members of the team who often express a desire to move into leadership and management roles.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

8 Delivery of Priorities in the Police, Crime and Victims' Plan 2018-21

The Committee considered a report of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which presented an update on the main delivery and achievements of the priorities set out in the Police, Crime and Victims' Plan 2018-21 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Private Office took the Panel through the four strategic outcomes and priority areas, with a particular focus on the strategic outcome that communities are safe and crime is reduced, highlighting some of the challenges and achievements of the force during the pandemic.

The Acting PCVC reminded the Panel that the office holds the force to account in terms of the Police and Crime Plan through monthly meetings of the Executive Board. This engagement, though challenging, is well received by the force and the Acting PCVC informed the Panel that he intends to take forward, how to increase public awareness that this important work takes place, with the next PCVC.

Councillor Boyes asked how the twelve priority areas are ranked. The Acting PCVC replied that the views of the public on local policing priorities are vital and data continues to indicate that the main concern for the public is road policing issues. Priorities undoubtedly change, therefore there is a need for flexibility in respect of targeting resources and the Plan must be able to demonstrate that progress is being made in all priority areas. The Interim Chief Executive added that priorities are dynamic and based upon an understanding of needs and an assessment of risk. Whilst there is a constant feed of information on issues such as road safety, other policing priorities, such as domestic abuse are not as readily reported and require different methods of intervention. The Interim Chief Executive informed the Panel that the priorities of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner workplan are subject to thorough, thematic scrutiny at Executive Board meetings.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Quarterly Performance Report

The Panel considered a report of the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which updated on performance against the Police, Crime and Victims' Plan 2018-21 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Presenting the report, the Accountability and Scrutiny Officer focused on two key performance areas, firstly reoffending is reduced, and, secondly, rehabilitation is improved and the public have confidence in the criminal justice system. The Acting PCVC thanked staff for their hard work undertaken to monitor performance and for the comprehensive way in which scrutiny takes place.

The Interim Chief Executive reported that, at a recent meeting with the Home Office, she presented information on the governance structure, the scrutiny process, and, the challenge made by the Executive Board. She was pleased to report that the Home Office had informed her that they consider Durham's approach to be 'Gold Standard'.

Councillor Boyes made the observation that the report detailed performance during the past twelve months and therefore should be caveated with a reminder of the exceptional circumstances, whilst in the midst of the pandemic. He commented that, for example, information in the report that one third of offenders had reoffended in the period could be a temporary blip resulting from the pandemic. The Accountability and Scrutiny Officer responded that the reoffending rate remains relatively constant. The Chief Executive acknowledged that the report reflects on performance during the pandemic and was therefore not as comparative as under normal circumstances. She added that in terms of reoffending, there are individuals who are extremely hard to reach, such as those for whom criminality is a way of life. The force performs comparatively well and considerable resources are targeted at reducing reoffending, including prevention and diversion techniques and early intervention work.

The Acting PCVC spoke of the major challenge of the pandemic and he added that demand is expected to increase, which will necessitate a refocus on priorities. The need for continued investment to meet the challenges ahead had featured strongly when considering the issue of precept setting.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 PCVC Decision Records

The Panel considered a report of the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which provided an update on the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner's decision register for 2020-21 and addressed the forward plan (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

11 HMICFRS Inspections

The Panel considered a report of the Office of the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner which outlined the findings of the recent inspections conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) upon which Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioners are required to comment (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Accountability and Scrutiny Officer informed the Panel that the results of the COVID-19 inspection were yet to be published, however, initial feedback in relation to Durham Constabulary's response had resulted in some very positive comments.

The Accountability and Scrutiny Officer referred to the inspection published in February on the disproportionate use of police powers, the main finding of which was that police forces are unable to explain why these powers are used disproportionately, based on ethnicity. As a result, HMICFRS had called upon police forces to either explain the reasons for disproportionality in stop and search and use of force, or, to take action to address it. The context for Durham is that there are many strands of work that need to address the issue of use of force in stop and search, to ensure that outcomes from external scrutiny are followed up. Work will continue to address the concerns highlighted by the inspection.

The Acting PCVC commented that the most recent HMICFRS statement in relation to the fire service contains information to suggest that the government may soon announce a change of governance of Fire and Rescue Services and Fire Authorities which will also impact on Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioners in England and Wales.

Resolved:

- i. That the report be noted

- ii. That all HMICFRS inspections were postponed due to the initial COVID-19 emergency but resumed in October 2020 be noted

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 the number of formal complaints received since the last meeting (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Panel noted one complaint had been received and as it did not relate to the Police, Crime and Victim's Commissioner, it was not within the scope of the procedure. Therefore, the complaint had been referred to the relevant police department for consideration.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.