

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of the **Police and Crime Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Thursday 6 April 2023 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor B Jones (Chair)**

**Durham County Council:**

Councillors L Hovvels, D Nicholls, R Potts, A Savory and M Simmons

**Independent Co-opted Member:**

Mr R Rodiss

Prior to the formal business, attendees observed a minute's silence in respect of the sad death of former independent co-opted member, Nick Cook. It was agreed that a letter of condolence would be sent to the family.

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Nicholson and Mr N Hallam.

### **2 Substitute Members**

No substitute members were in attendance.

### **3 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4 Police and Crime Commissioner's Performance and Delivery Update Report (October 22 to December 22)**

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) presented the second iteration of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Performance and Delivery Update Report which covered the period October to December 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

The PCC commented on the positive picture as the force continues to deliver some of the best outcome rates in the country despite government grant cuts which has led to Durham operating with fewer resources and less finance than many of its peers.

The PCC provided a detailed overview of the report, highlighting areas of key performance including safer communities, safer people, non-crime demand, safer roads and services for victims. She was pleased to report that Durham was selected as an anti-social behaviour 'trailblazer' pilot area and it will receive significant extra funding to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Comments and questions were invited.

Councillor Hovvels thanked the PCC for listening to public opinion with regard to the negative impacts of anti-social behaviour, in particular on people's emotional and mental health and she added that she would welcome progress updates. Councillor Hovvels also acknowledged the importance of partnership working in order to achieve safer streets. The PCC stressed that tackling anti-social behaviour continued to be a key priority and she referred to the direct work undertaken in communities that were at risk of being 'left behind' and praised the anti-social behaviour strategy. She added that she would be pleased to provide a progress update to a future meeting.

The Chair enquired whether the PCC had received a response to her letter to the Home Secretary sent in December 2022 to express disappointment at the level of central grant allocated. The PCC confirmed that no response had been received and that consideration would be given to sending a letter to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up. She informed the Panel that as the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners lead for addictions and substance misuse she has access to the Crime, Police and Fire Minister for informal discussions. A meeting had taken place with local MPs to share data on the unfairness of the current funding system and the lobbying of government ministers and local MPs to raise Durham's profile and support the case for increased police funding was ongoing.

Councillor Potts welcomed the additional funding secured for victims of crime with regard to the Safer Streets initiative and he praised the increase in the number of breath-tests carried out. Referring to the statement in the Police and Crime Plan that community engagement will be open, honest and transparent, Councillor Potts raised concern that the performance report failed to mention the IICSA report. The PCC noted that the IICSA report had been discussed at a previous public meeting of the Police and Crime Panel and she added that she was satisfied with the work done to address the recommendations of the report. The PCC clarified that the report covered the period October to December 22 and the IICSA report pre-dated that period.

Councillor Potts referred to the purchase of the community engagement vehicle at a cost of approximately £50,000 and the creation of a new post of Strategic Partnerships Manager with a maximum salary of £52,000 and calculated the total cost of the vehicle and new post equated to the starting salary of four police constables and he asked whether the money would have been better spent on police officers to patrol the streets. The PCC referred to the correlation between public confidence in the police and the decline in visible neighbourhood policing and stated that the community engagement vehicle will be a valuable tool to engage with communities on what matters in terms of local policing. The Chief Finance Officer explained that whilst a police constable's starting salary is approximately £28,000, when additional costs are included, such as the cost of IT equipment and university fees, the cost of recruiting a police constable for the first year was approximately £50,000.

Mr Rodiss asked whether there are plans for additional police resources to target the increase in anti-social behaviour in hotspots in the Wear Valley area. The Chief Finance Officer replied that the matter is an operational decision for the Chief Constable. The PCC referred to the problem solving approach which is being adopted to develop interventions to reduce crime, at a local level. The PCC highlighted funding made available to support local neighbourhood policing initiatives including the £150,000 made available to address anti-social behaviour, managed through the County Durham Community Foundation. In the Fir Tree area of Crook £20,000 of support had been made available through the Commissioning Board to improve road and community safety and the PCC added that the issue of anti-social behaviour in the Wear Valley area will continue to be considered.

Mr Rodiss referred to the number of PCCs who are questioning the requirement that police recruits must undertake a degree-level qualification. He expressed the opinion that this may deter good candidates and he spoke of the value of other qualities such as life experience and soft-skills. The Chief Finance Officer acknowledged the national support for a more flexible approach and the development of a non-degree entry route. He referred to the increasingly complex policing landscape in terms of safeguarding, mental health and cybercrime. Mr Rodiss asked whether external agencies are engaged when expertise is required in complex cases. The Chief Finance Officer responded that whilst life experience is gained in time, some skills can be taught such as an investigative mindset, effective communication and de-escalation skills and he explained that external expertise may be used in complex investigations such as cyber and digital crime.

Councillor Savory was pleased to see Durham leads the way in many areas and she commented that the community engagement vehicle will increase public confidence.

The PCC agreed that it will benefit the reach of neighbourhood teams, that it will improve access to the police in rural parts of the county and it will be used to display vital public safety messages such as the 'fatal four'.

Councillor Nicholls thanked the PCC for the excellent report and he congratulated her on the increase in funding which, he said, reflected the results of the PEEL report which found that Durham is outstanding in terms of value for money.

He spoke of the benefit of the introduction of the 24/7 non-emergency live chat service and he added that he would like to see more action to increase public awareness of this new contact method. He referred to comments from the Chief Constable made at a previous meeting regarding the number of calls made to the police relating to non-crime matters, due to a lack of capacity in mental health and social care services and he asked what action was being taken to address the issue. The Chief Finance Officer explained an initiative 'Right Care, Right Person' piloted by Humberside Police, designed to ensure that when there are concerns for a person's welfare linked to mental health and welfare issues, the right person with the right skills, training and experience will respond. Early evaluation of the initiative indicates a more informed and appropriate response to incidents. The Chief Finance Officer pointed out that it is clear that mental health partners would need to be in a position to cope with an increase in demand. The PCC spoke of how she has raised concerns regarding the increasing number of people who are suffering from a mental health disorder, who are being sent to prison, as there is no safe alternative available.

**Resolved:**

That the Police and Crime Commissioner's Performance and Delivery Report be noted.

**5 National Association of Police Fire and Crime Panels Annual Report - follow up:**

**i. Police Recruitment and Vetting Processes**

The Chief Finance Officer presented a report on the current police recruitment and vetting processes (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Potts commended Durham's performance in relation to vetting adding that he was pleased to see the vetting of transferees.

**Resolved:**

- a) That the report be noted.

- b) That the accountability structures with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner are a continually maturing process in line with the Association of Police and Crime Chief Executives (APACE) and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners) (APCC) best practice.
- c) That a vetting process update be listed for annual consideration on the Police and Crime Panel Work Programme.

## **ii. Accountable Policing Behaviours and Standards**

The Chief Finance Officer presented a report on the current governance structures and oversight activity in relation to acceptable policing behaviours and standards (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Potts voiced his concerns regarding the independence of the process of the Constabulary investigating complaints against the Constabulary and pointed out that other forces have independent investigation processes in place. The Finance Officer clarified that the PCC has a role to investigate complaints made against the Chief Constable and that complaints made within the force may be investigated by another force.

### **Resolved:**

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That the accountability structures with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner are a continually maturing process in line with the Association of Police and Crime Chief Executives (APACE) and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners) (APCC) best practice.
- c) That an acceptable policing behaviours and standards update be listed for annual consideration on the Police and Crime Panel Work Programme.

## **6 Former Tele-communications Mast**

The Chief Finance Officer presented a report on the former telecommunications mast formerly located on the site of the old police headquarters which included a chronology of the main issues of the mast from the period 2011 to 2023 and related governance issues (for copy see file of minutes).

Mr Rodiss expressed disappointment at the current state of the Grade II listed building which had not been relocated on the new headquarters' site, in line with the original planning obligation. The Chief Finance Officer explained that the proceeds from the sale of the land were used to fund investment in IT and fleet, that there had been no requirement to set money aside.

Mr Rodiss asked whether Mr Ridley's dual role as Chief Finance Officer to the PCC and Assistant Chief Officer of Durham Constabulary was a governance risk. The Chief Finance Officer responded that the dual role is widely accepted and a number of individuals carry out the dual role across the country, adding that independent safeguards are in place.

Councillor Potts expressed his concern with regard to outstanding breaches of planning conditions which could lead to enforcement action in the future.

The Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel reminded Members that the planning process was ongoing and at this stage there is no enforcement action or any criminal offences made out.

The Head of Estates clarified that advice from planning consultants was that the mast could not be delisted and an application for demolition should be made which was subsequently refused by the County Planning Committee at a meeting held in February. However, there are ongoing discussions with Development Control regarding the options available.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**7 Complaints Update**

The Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel presented an update on the formal complaints received since the last meeting (for copy see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that since publication of the report, a complaint form had been received in respect of the complaint received on 6 March 2023 which was being dealt with in accordance with the procedure.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**8 Such other business**

The PCC announced that it was Councillor Jones' final meeting and she thanked Councillor Jones for his even-handed chairing of meetings and for being a critical friend to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Councillor Jones thanked colleagues, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Clerk to the Panel, Committee Services staff and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and expressed that it had been a pleasure and a privilege to serve as Chair.

## **9 Exclusion of the public**

### **Resolved:**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **10 Complaint against the Police and Crime Commissioner**

The Panel considered a report of the Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel in relation to a complaint against the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Panel resolved not to publish the outcome of the complaint.