

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Police and Crime Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Thursday 1 February 2024** at **10.00 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor L Brown (Chair)**

### **Durham County Council:**

Councillors D Boyes, L Hovvells, D Nicholls, R Potts, K Robson (Substitute) (substitute for J Charlton) and A Savory

### **Darlington Borough Council:**

Councillors S Ali, N Johnson, G Lee (Vice-Chair)

### **Independent Co-opted Members:**

Mr N Hallam and Mr R Rodiss

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

There were apologies for absence received from Councillor J Charlton.

### **2 Substitute Members**

Councillor K Robson substituted for Councillor J Charlton.

### **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

### **4 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held 14 December 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Vice-Chair, Councillor G Lee noted a few outstanding issues in relation to information relating to civilian workers, impact on NHS in terms of Police not attending mental health call, detection and resolution.

The Chief of Staff, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Andrea Petty noted that there were further meetings of the Panel on 15 and 22 March, with further information to come back to those and subsequent meetings. The Chief Constable, Durham Constabulary, Rachel Bacon noted that she was the national lead on 'Right Care, Right People'. The Chief of Staff, OPCC noted she would send through some information to the Panel via e-mail.

## **5 Police and Crime Commissioner's Proposed Precept 2024/25**

The Panel considered a report of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Joy Allen (PCC) which provided an update on the process for setting the Policing precept for 2024/25 and sought the Panel's support for an increase of £13 per household per year for properties in Band D, and commensurate increases for other properties (for copy see file of minutes).

The PCC, Chief Finance Officer, Gary Ridley and the Chief Constable gave a presentation setting out the precept, budget context, results from public consultation, and highlighted performance and resource levels, as well as efficiencies being made in the context of the national picture.

The Chair thanked the PCC, Chief Finance Officer and Chief Constable and asked the Clerk to the Panel and Monitoring Officer, Helen Bradley to confirm the role of the Panel in terms of the budget proposals. The Clerk explained that the Panel had been notified of the PCC's proposed budget and it was a requirement for the Panel to review and respond to the proposals and publish that response by 8 February 2024. The PCC must have regard to the report made by the Panel including any recommendations. The Clerk explained the Panel's right to veto the precept if it considered the precept to be too high or too low. To pass, the veto required two thirds of the Panel membership to vote in favour, which would be eight members. She added that if the Panel decided to veto the budget, the precept would not be issued and the PCC would need to be a respond with a revised budget proposal, with changes based upon whether the Panel felt the budget was too high or too low. She concluded by noting that the Panel would then need to review any revised budget by 22 February, although at that point while the Panel could make further recommendations it could not veto those amended budget proposals a second time.

Councillor D Boyes noted the comprehensive report and presentation and explained he felt the budget position was such the PCC and Chief Constable were 'in between a rock and a hard place', with Government reducing their contribution to zero and with more work being asked of the Police with less money.

He added he welcomed the comments from the Chief Constable in terms of a focus on Neighbourhood Policing, a position a previous Chief Constable, M Barton had taken, and that Councillor D Boyes supported. He noted less presence of Officers and PCSOs on the street and asked if it was felt the survey results correlated with a decreased visibility on the street. He noted in the past he had agreed with the statement 'the Durham difference', though not so much lately. He welcomed the improved 101 response times and added that it was very important as a large number of people, such as older people, did not utilise new technology and preferred to be able to speak to a person on the telephone. He understood that increases to precept were difficult, especially given the cost-of-living increases being felt by all those across the county, however, he felt it would be detrimental to veto the budget proposals and therefore he would be supporting the proposals.

Councillor L Hovvels noted that all were experiencing difficult financial times, however, for a good service you needed to pay for it. She noted that within the survey, the public had stated they would have supported a £15 increase, therefore a £13 increase seemed to be a reasonable level. She added that she felt the partnership working in place was very good and added a lot of value. She also welcomed the improvements to the 101 response times, however, highlighted the issue of receiving feedback on reported crimes, noting she had confidence the new Chief Constable would look to improve response in this area.

Councillor R Potts noted the recent media reports of an injured Officer and asked as regards his condition. The Chief Constable noted she had spoken to the Officer on the phone and noted that their recovery would take a number of weeks.

Councillor R Potts noted there had been six years of maximum increases in precept, amounting to 41.45 percent over the that period. He noted additional officers at the OPCC, additional control room staff, additional ICT staff, however, not extra Police Officers or PCSOs, with 22,000 calls abandoned. He added while the improved 101 response times were encouraging, crime was up 8.9 percent, reductions in reserves and increased costs from £21million to £24.9million for the new centralised custody building. He noted he hoped the centralised custody would not be as bad as the centralised control room had proven. He noted the recent HMICFRS report that had given Durham Constabulary its first ever 'requires improvement' rating. He noted the context of Durham in terms of funding per 1,000 population and he did not see Durham as an outlier in terms of funding and demand. Councillor R Potts noted he felt that no lessons had been learned since the last budget and that he would be proposing the Panel veto the PCC's proposals.

R Rodiss congratulated the Chief Finance Officer on his presentation and asked with a cost of £3,200 per crime, what the public were getting for this price, adding that resolution rates had not improved.

He noted concern in terms of the response to the consultation on the budget proposals, with only around 2,000 responses from 500,000 population, with the low number seemingly an indication of the public's faith with the Police. He noted concern in respect of 15 additional staff for the control room and asked how many of those were Police Officers. He explained he had heard that new Officers were being utilised in the control room and he felt that they would be better served being out within communities gaining experience and knowledge. R Rodiss noted 643 Officers were 'Local Police' and noted that in his area, Crook, there was not a full compliment of Local Police, noting that a full compliment would be around 80 in each station, giving a total around 800. He noted the impact in terms of the Crook Station and explained that the message he was getting from people was that they felt abandoned. He noted given all those factors, he could not see a justification in terms of the proposed precept increase.

The Chief Constable noted she was very disappointed in respect of R Rodiss' experience in Crook. She noted that the Crook Neighbourhood Team was an outstanding team, having been nominated for a national award and added that it was important that the successes of the team were publicised more effectively to let residents know about the positive work was being done. She added she had met with the manager of the local Co-op store, and he had been very complimentary of the Neighbourhood Team. She added that local policing was a frontline resource and while there was not enough in terms of neighbourhood policing, she noted that when numbers had been cut in the past, this was as there had to be regard in terms of responding to 999 calls, with an impact then on neighbourhood policing. She added she was committed to increasing the number of Officers and to maintain the number of PCSOs. She added that all Councillors should be able to contact their Neighbourhood Teams, and reminded the Panel that Durham was ranked in the top three in terms of problem solving.

R Rodiss noted that the precept papers referred only to crime prevention, however, the public were interested in how crimes such as theft would be dealt with, adding that in the past prevention had meant 'arrest, detect, speak to the public'.

The Chief Constable explained that the number one priority was to pursue criminals, noted she was a career Detective, and reminded the Panel the Force had the best prosecuting rate in the country. She noted that while she was keen to increase Neighbourhood Policing, it would be remiss if the Force did not pursue crime.

She added it was a balance in terms of the resources available, however, she expected her Neighbourhood Teams to be impactful in terms of the prevention of crime, as well as pursuing those engaging in ASB or crime.

*Councillor S Ali entered the meeting at 11.08am*

Councillor D Nicholls thanked the PCC for her report and proposals, noting that it brought into focus the issue of impact on the North-East of the current funding formula that seemed to be so unfair. He noted there had been a number of improvements over the past year, including the improved 101 response. He added that the public were generally not aware that the Police did not receive any funding from Government in relation to items such as fleet, and the impact those costs would have on budgets. However, he noted that the consultation survey had shown that the public were supportive of an increase to the precept and given the level of deprivation in our local communities he noted that there was a need to increase funding just to be able to 'stand still'.

Councillor G Lee noted the report and explained he felt the main issue was Police presence. He noted only one PCSO in his area, operating over a very large area, explaining they were very good, however, were just a single person and therefore they were not able to attend every Parish Council meeting, meetings with Neighbourhood Warden, PACT meetings. He asked as regards rumours of moving the station at Cockerton. The PCC and Chief Constable noted there was no intention of moving the station.

Councillor G Lee noted the benefits of PCSOs working and being promoted to Police Officers, however, this could lead to areas where experienced PCSOs leave, and that extensive local knowledge is lost. He noted he did not receive regular information as regards detection rates and felt they would be useful in looking at various issues. He added he felt the ratio of 1,368 Officers to around 1,000 civilian staff was imbalanced and asked if hotspots were identified and resources allocated accordingly.

Councillor K Robson noted he would echo the comments from fellow Members that the public wanted to see Police out on the beat in their communities. He noted that his area, Newton Aycliffe would be losing their police station, moving to the trading estate and therefore Officers would be seen in the town even less. He noted the proposals in terms of maintaining Officer and PCSO number, however, he would like to see numbers increase.

The Chief Finance Officer noted the comments from Members and in response to Councillor R Potts, explained that the vast majority of Forces had also increased their precept by the maximum amount over the last six years. He noted the inflationary pressures being felt by Forces across the country, however, there had been no increase in grant.

He noted that HMICFRS noted Durham was not an outlier in terms of funding per head of population or in terms of demand. He added that a ratio of around 55:45 Officer to civilian staff was around the national average, with only very large Forces such as the Metropolitan Police or Police Scotland having a ratio closer to 75:25.

The Chief Constable reiterated no plans to close the station at Cockerton and while there was the move at Newton Aycliffe, there would still be a police presence within the town. She explained that the Force's resolve rate was excellent, being second in England for victim-based crimes, second in England for robbery and second in England for 'all theft'. She added this information would be included within quarterly reports and was published by Government. She added she was very happy with outcomes and detection rates and would be happy to share information. The Chief Constable explained that in terms of police staff who were not Officers, there were a number of different roles, including Crime Scene Investigation, detention staff, call handlers. She added that efficiencies were constantly sought out and that where there were hotspots identified in terms of ASB or crime, demand was managed. She added while that could often be within the larger towns, there important work in the more rural communities too, and she highlighted the work with farmers, such as in Middleton-in-Teesdale, that helped to build up relationships within those communities.

In response to R Rodiss, the PCC noted that a consultation response of 2,000 was double numbers reached previously and there had also been a number of consultation events held out within local communities. She noted that the recent ONS Crime Survey, for example, had only 372 responses from the same area.

The PCC noted that fair funding was an issue and that when looking at the period 2010 to 2020, there had been a reduction in Officer numbers of 145, while at the same time some other Forces had been able to increase their numbers by up to around 60 Officers. She added that some Forces had chosen to reduce their numbers of PCSOs in order to balance budgets, with Durham choosing to maintain numbers. She noted that the budget as proposed was to support the Chief Constable's vision in terms of policing and she reiterated that she was closing police stations.

Councillor S Ali noted she had worked closely with Durham Constabulary, even prior to being a Councillor, working with the late PCC, Ron Hogg. She noted the PCC attended a lot of meetings with vulnerable groups, and that feedback had been that people felt that more Officers on the beat would be a good deterrent. She added that it was important to take on board the views of digitally excluded people, noting the importance of offering face-to-face contact for the public.

She added that in her 17 years' experience working with PCSOs, she felt they were valuable in terms of gathering local knowledge which could have great impact in tackling issues such as human trafficking and modern-day slavery. Councillor S Ali noted that with reducing resources, it was more and more important to target those resources effectively. She added that from local engagement, she noted that people were less likely to report incidents to the Police, however, reporting rates were recorded as being good. She concluded by noting she felt it would be important to continue to work with communities to encourage confidence in the Police and to help increase reporting. The Chief Constable noted she was looking forward to working with Councillor S Ali, and all Members, in reaching vulnerable communities.

Councillor R Potts proposed that the Panel veto the proposed budget. The Chair asked if he felt the budget was too high, Councillor R Potts noted that was correct. R Rodiss seconded the motion to veto the budget and upon a vote being taken, the motion was **LOST**.

Councillor D Boyes moved that the Panel support the proposed budget, he was seconded by Councillor L Hovvels and upon a vote being taken it was;

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the current position of the consultation and the outcome be noted;
- (ii) That the proposal for a £13 precept increase at Band D be approved;
- (iii) That there be no veto to the proposal; and,
- (iv) That a report be produced.

## **6 Commissioner Victims' Champions**

The Panel considered a report and presentation from the Police and Crime Commissioner which gave an overview of the work of the Victims' Champions, presented by Michael Banks and Andrea Patterson, the Crime and Domestic Abuse Champions respectively (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chair thanked the Victims' Champions and asked as regards victims and intimidation. The Chief Constable noted the trust and confidence, and quality of the conversations with victims and highlighted the investment made in terms of domestic abuse resources. She noted the improved journey for victims, with regular contact, helping to speed up the criminal justice process, and signposting to independent services if required. She noted as regards interventions and the strong powers that were available and noted the importance of supporting the confidence of victims in being able to report intimidation. The PCC noted that at the court stage, the Victims' Champions were highlighting issues such as shared use of entrances, waiting rooms, vending machines and other facilities between victims and perpetrators.

M Banks noted there was victim care support services, independent sexual violence advocates and domestic abuse advocates.

Councillor D Boyes noted issues of ASB in his area and asked where he should direct residents to, was it the Police, ASB Team, or Community Protection at DCC. He noted the time it took for courts to list cases and that the public did not feel sentences were sufficient in many cases. He noted the use of the Checkpoint scheme, and raised concern in respect use of this where people were caught in possession of a blade, highlighting a number of high-profile stabbings of young people.

M Banks noted the backlog within the courts system, almost caught up following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. He added that it was not acceptable that victims of rape and sexual assault were sometimes into a second year before cases were heard, highlighting the impact upon victims trying to move on with their lives. He noted that a positive was that Durham had one of the lowest backlogs nationally and noted meetings between the PCC and a Durham Judge, with the Judge suggesting special courts for victims of sexual crimes and for victims of domestic abuse.

A Patterson noted that information as regards where ASB could be reported was set out on the Councils' websites, as well as the Police and OPCC websites. She noted it broke down which organisation was responsible for different areas of ASB. Councillor D Boyes asked who was at the apex. A Patterson noted it was managed by the Safe Durham Partnership, highlighting areas of joint responsibility. She noted the aspiration for a single point of contact, and work relating to ICT to enable this. She added that introduction of 'salesforce', as previously mentioned, would help provide additional functionality. She noted improvements with around a 30 percent increase in reporting. The PCC noted that in ASB hotspots that cards were delivered to each household with contact information in respect of who to report incidents to.

The Chief Constable noted the comments in relation to knife crime and agreed it was a big issue. She highlighted that Checkpoint had been very successful in terms of preventing reoffending, however, she took on board the point made in terms of public confidence. She emphasised that domestic abuse cases would not be taken through Checkpoint.

Councillor R Potts asked as regards Victim Case Reviews relating to children. A Patterson noted that the report and presentation related to ASB was separate and there were case reviews for those, working to look at repeat ASB. The Chief Constable noted she would be very happy to speak to Councillor R Potts as regards Victim Case Reviews and stated that Durham Constabulary was protecting the children of County Durham.



Councillor G Lee complimented the focus on victims, and he noted the improvements in terms of tackling intimidation and the atmosphere within the court setting. He asked that his thanks be passed on to all those working in that regard. He noted that ASB was one of the largest issues raised with Councillors by their local residents.

**Resolved:**

That the report and presentation be noted.

**7 National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels Annual Report 2023**

The Panel considered report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which set out, for information, the annual report of the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels (NAPFCP) (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Clerk to the Panel noted that key lines of enquiry within the annual report would help inform the work programme for the Panel and outcomes from HMICFRS Inspections would also help inform, as they feed into those key lines of enquiry.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**8 Complaints Update**

The Panel considered a report of the Clerk to the Panel which provided an update on complaints relating to the PCC or the Deputy PCC (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Clerk to the Panel noted there had been no complaints received since the last report to the Panel at the meeting held 14 December 2023.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.