

## Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel

18<sup>th</sup> March 2014

### Public Engagement

#### Recommendations

- 1) That the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel approves:
  - The proposed Public Question Time Scheme for meetings of the Panel;
  - Improvements to the Panel's web page and proposals for further enhancement; and
  - Proposed methods, including the use of social media, to achieve wider promotion of the Panel and its scheduled meetings.
- 2) That the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel requests the Police and Crime Commissioner to accept and answer public questions at its meetings, on the basis laid out in the Public Question Time Scheme.

#### 1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel has been established as a joint committee of the Constituent Councils under Section 28 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. It is subject to Access to Information Act 1985 legislation, which stipulates that meetings will be held on public, unless either confidential or exempt information is being discussed.
- 1.2 The Panel's existing Terms of Reference makes provision for public attendance; however, at present there is no provision at the meetings for either public speaking and/or public question time. This report outlines options for increasing public awareness of and participation in the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel.

#### 2.0 Public Participation at Meetings

- 2.1 Research has been undertaken to assess how public participation is encouraged by Police and Crime Panels across the county and a summary of examples are included at **Appendix A**. From the research undertaken, it is apparent that Police and Crime Panels across the country have either introduced a formal Public Participation Scheme to the meeting, or are taking steps to introduce one in the near future.

- 2.2 The majority of Panels that have already introduced a Public Participation Scheme have applied a set procedure which outlines how either public questions and /or speaking will be managed in advance of, and during, the meetings. Research of these procedures (as outlined at **Appendix A**) indicates the following similarities:
- Public participation is limited to questions, rather than a statement;
  - Requests for questions should be submitted in writing either three or five working days in advance of the meeting;
  - Where time limits have been introduced, these are three minutes per member of the public and/or up to 30 minutes allocation on the agenda (some authorities grant less than this, i.e. 20 minutes).
  - There is a mixed approach regarding the stage in the agenda at which public questions can be raised. A number of Panels restrict this to the designated Public Participation item on the agenda, whereas others also allow questions to be raised before the start of agenda item which the question relates to.
- 2.3 It is worth noting that a number of Panels (e.g. Hertfordshire and Staffordshire) Participation Schemes extends public questions to the Police and Crime Commissioner. Research has indicated that the focus of public questions is predominately to the Commissioner, rather than to the Panel, and on this basis it is recommended that that Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel requests the Commissioner to accept and answer public questions at its meeting on the basis laid out in the Public Question Time Scheme.
- 2.4 Based on the research and feedback regarding the Schemes adopted by other Panels, a proposed Public Question Time scheme has been developed for the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel. The proposed scheme (attached at **Appendix B**) is based primarily on the Warwickshire County Council Public Question Time scheme which applies to its Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It is recommended that this be adopted as it is in line with the host authority's existing Public Question Time arrangements and is also similar to those adopted by other Police and Crime Panels.
- 2.5 The Panel is asked to consider the introduction of the scheme for all future meetings and that this is allocated as a standing item on the agenda (i.e. 'Item 2 – Public Question Time'). If agreed by the Panel, the agenda will advise the public on the requirement to submit questions in writing within the set timescale. Once contact has been made from the public, advice will be given at that stage so that members of the public understand the procedure for dealing with public questions at the meeting. Meet and Greet arrangements will be put in place for the start of the meeting.
- 2.6 It is also recommended that the Public Question Time scheme is published on the web page for the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel (see 3.2). Other Panels have reported that participation in the scheme has generally been low across the country, which may predominantly be due to a lack of public awareness about the existence and role of the Panels. To try to raise

awareness of Warwickshire's Panel, a number of publicity methods are outlined at Section 4.0 in the report.

### **3.0 Web Presence**

3.1 Information about the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel is published at the following web page: <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/policeandcrimepanel>  
The web page was enhanced on 12<sup>th</sup> February to include the following additional information:

- Brief background to the Police and Crime Panel
- Greater details regarding the Panel's roles and responsibilities
- Text links to the agenda, reports and minutes of Panel meetings
- Text links to other web pages, i.e. links to the OPCC.
- A link to the Home Office web site for more info on PCCs and PCPs.

3.2 To enhance the web page site further, and provide a greater source of information for the public, the Panel is asked to consider adding the following to the page:

- Public Question Time Scheme
- Police and Crime Panel Terms of Reference / Working Arrangements
- A 'Publications' section to include links to documents such as: Police and Crime Plan 2013-17; Reports of the Police and Crime Panel (i.e. precept responses); Annual Report of the Police and Crime Commissioner, etc.

### **4.0 Wider Publicity and Social Media**

4.1 There have been useful discussions with the Council's Communications team regarding how wider promotion of the Police and Crime Panel and its scheduled meetings can be achieved. The team has advised that the following methods can be used:

- Link from the home page of the Warwickshire Direct web site
- Posts on the Warwickshire Democracy blog
- Links from the Police and Crime Commissioner's web site
- Promotion through the County Council's 'Warwickshire News' Facebook and Twitter pages
- Promotion through the Localities Facebook pages
- Electronic mailshot to all Parish Councils, media contacts, police contacts, MPs, key stakeholders, etc.

4.2 It is suggested that the launch of the Panel's Public Question Time scheme (Appendix B – if agreed by the Panel) is publicised via these avenues, followed by regular promotion of scheduled Panel meetings, with a focus on

agenda items which may stimulate public interest. The Panel is asked to consider these proposals.

**Appendices:**

Appendix A – Research of Police and Crime Panels – Public Participation Schemes  
Appendix B – Proposed Public Question Time Scheme for the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel

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### Research of Police and Crime Panels – Public Participation Schemes

The information below provides examples of Public Participation Schemes that are used by Police and Crime Panels:

#### West Mercia

The Panel has a 'Public Participation' section on the agenda, whereby the public is asked to notify Democratic Services of the nature and content of their proposed participation no later than 9.00 a.m. on the working day prior to the meeting.

#### West Midlands

Each meeting designates an agenda item to public questions to the Panel. Questions must be submitted by 5 clear working days prior to the meeting. There is a set criteria. Questions:

- a) must relate to the Panel's roles and responsibilities scrutinising and supporting the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC);
- b) must not be substantially the same question put to the meeting in the past 6 months;
- c) must not be defamatory, frivolous, vexatious or offensive;
- d) must not require the disclosure of confidential or exempt information; and
- e) must not refer to any matter of a personal nature.

#### Northamptonshire

The Panel requires notification of requests from members of the public to be submitted to the Chair (c/o the Committee Manager) before the meeting (no specific deadline is set).

#### Staffordshire

The Panel allows members of the public either living or working within the constituent authorities to have the opportunity to put questions to the Police and Crime Commissioner. Questions must be submitted three clear working days prior to the Panel meeting. A questioner may submit up to two questions per Panel meeting.

#### Cheshire

The Panel allows members of the public to put questions direct to Cheshire's Police and Crime Panel via social media platform Twitter. The Cheshire Police and Crime Panel's Twitter account '@CheshirePCP'.

## Hertfordshire

Interestingly, Hertfordshire has an extensive Public Participation Scheme which includes the following:

- General questions to the Panel – a maximum of 20 minutes is allowed at each meeting for general public questions. Members of the public are encouraged to email their questions at least seven days in advance of a meeting and answers will be provided orally at the meeting or in writing after the meeting, if an immediate response is not possible.
- Specific questions to the Panel – members of the public can ask further questions at meetings when there is an agenda item for the Panel to consider the Police and Crime Commissioner's proposed precept, draft Police and Crime Plan or annual report. A maximum of 15 minutes per agenda item is allowed for public questions which will take place prior to the Panel's consideration of the agenda item.
- Petitions – members of the public may present a petition containing 10 or more signatures to a meeting of the Panel. The petition must be sent at least 14 days before the date of a meeting. The presenter of the petition may address the meeting of the Panel for up to three minutes. If the subject matter of the petition is on the agenda, the topic will be discussed at the meeting. If the subject matter of the petition is not on the agenda, the petition will be referred to the next meeting of the Panel.
- Questions to the Police and Crime Commissioner – the constitution of the Panel allows members of the public to ask the Police and Crime Commissioner questions at its meetings when the Commissioner is present. The same procedure as general questions applies.

## Lincolnshire

Members of the public can ask questions, which must be submitted in writing at least 5 clear working days in advance of the meeting. The question must relate to the work of the Panel and be directed to the Panel. The person submitting the question or a nominated representative must attend the meeting to ask their question and will be invited to ask their question either:

- under the agenda item 'Questions from the Public' if their question relates to matters which are not otherwise on the agenda (subject to an overall time limit of 20 minutes); or
- when the relevant agenda item is being considered if they wish to ask a question on a matter which is on the agenda at a particular meeting.

No person may submit more than one question at any one meeting. In addition, the Chief Executive of the Host Authority may reject a question if it:

- (a) Does not relate to a matter of general interest;

- (b) Does not relate to a matter for which the Panel has responsibility or which affects the interests of the Panel;
- (c) Relates exclusively to an individual grievance or personal issue;
- (d) Is defamatory, offensive, or frivolous;
- (e) Is substantially the same as a question which has been put at meeting of the Panel within the previous six months;
- (f) Requires the disclosure of exempt or confidential information.

### Wiltshire

The Panel has provision for either statement or questions. Statements have to be in relation to an item on the agenda and the request must be registered at least 10 minutes prior to the meeting. Speakers are permitted to speak for up to 3 minutes on any agenda item.

With regard to questions, members of the public are able to ask questions in relation to the responsibilities and functions of the Panel at each meeting. Those wishing to ask questions are required to give notice of any such questions no later than three working days before the meeting. Questions may also be asked without notice if the Chairman decides that the matter is urgent.

### Devon and Cornwall

Members of the public can attend Panel meetings and may ask questions at each meeting (up to two questions per person per meeting and up to 100 words per question) that are relevant to the Panel's functions. At the start of each meeting, 30 minutes will be allocated to questions asked by members of the public and responses may be oral or written. Questions must be put in writing at least five clear working days before the Panel meeting.

### North Yorkshire

Members of the public may ask questions or make statements at Panel meetings if they have delivered it in writing or by electronic mail no later than midday three working days before the day of the meeting. Each speaker is limited to 3 minutes on any item. Members of the public who have given notice will be invited to speak either:

- at the Public Participation item on the agenda, if their questions/statements relate to matters which are not otherwise on the agenda (subject to an overall time limit of 30 minutes); or
- when the relevant agenda item is being considered if they wish to speak on a matter which is on the agenda for the meeting.



## Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel Public Question Time Scheme

### General

The Chair of the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel has the power to manage the Public Question Time session and has the discretion to reject any question which:

- (i) has already been answered;
- (ii) is not relevant to the business of the Panel or the Police and Crime Commissioner; or
- (iii) he/she considers unsuitable.

Where a number of members of a particular organisation wish to ask questions on related matters, the Chair may limit the number of questioners as he/she considers appropriate.

The Public Question Time session shall be limited to thirty minutes.

### Eligibility

Any member of the public who is resident or working in Warwickshire may put a question to the Panel. The questions:

- (i) must relate to the Panel's roles and responsibilities;
- (ii) must not be substantially the same question put to the meeting of the Panel within the previous six months;
- (iii) must not be defamatory, frivolous, vexatious or offensive;
- (iv) must not require the disclosure of confidential or exempt information; and
- (v) must not refer to any matter of a individual grievance or personal issue.

Any member of the public who is resident or working in Warwickshire may put a question to the Police and Crime Commissioner. The questions:

- (i) must relate to the role, responsibility and statutory powers of the Police and Crime Commissioner;
- (ii) must not be substantially the same question put to the meeting of the Panel within the previous six months;
- (iii) must not be defamatory, frivolous, vexatious or offensive;
- (iv) must not require the disclosure of confidential or exempt information; and
- (v) must not refer to any matter of a individual grievance or personal issue.

## Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel Public Question Time Scheme

### Submission of Questions to the Police and Crime Panel and/or the Police and Crime Commissioner

The following procedure shall apply to the submission of questions to the Police and Crime Panel and/or the Police and Crime Commissioner:

- (i) Questions should be notified in writing and received by Democratic Services at least **3 working days** before the meeting.
- (ii) The questioner may ask a maximum of two questions.
- (iii) Each questioner shall have a maximum of three minutes to speak.
- (iv) Each question must give the name and address of the questioner and the name and date of the meeting to which it is to be put.
- (v) Democratic Services will record each question received and will immediately send or give a copy of the question to the Chair and/or the Police and Crime Commissioner and/or any other person to whom the question is likely to be put.
- (vi) Exceptionally the Chair, in consultation with Democratic Services, may accept questions notified in writing at least fifteen minutes before the start of the meeting.

### Procedure at the meeting

The following procedure shall apply to the consideration of public questions at meetings of the Police and Crime Panel:

- (i) The Chair will take the questions in the order he/she considers most appropriate.
- (ii) The questioner will be invited to ask the question.
- (iii) The Chair or the relevant person present will reply.
- (iv) The questioner may ask one supplementary question.
- (v) Any supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the reply and must not be interpreted as allowing a debate of either the question or the reply.
- (vi) Questions and answers given at the meeting will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

### Absence of Questioner

In the absence of the questioner, the Chair has discretion over how to deal with the question and may put the question him/herself to the meeting.

### Form of Answers

Answers may take the form of either a direct oral answer or reference to a publication. Where an oral answer cannot immediately be given, a written answer may be given to the questioner as soon as practicable following the meeting.

**Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel  
Public Question Time Scheme**

Any question which cannot be dealt with during public question time, either because of lack of time or absence of the appropriate person, will be dealt with by a written answer.

All written answers given following the meeting will be circulated to all members of the body and, unless the contents would involve disclosure of exempt or confidential information, shall normally be made public.