

Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel

Thursday 7 March 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Panel Members

Andy Davis (Chair) (Independent Member)
Councillor Derek Poole (Vice Chair) (Rugby Borough Council)
Councillor Barbara Brown (Warwickshire County Council)
Andrew Davies (Independent Member)
Councillor Natalie Gist (Stratford-on-Avon District Council)
Councillor Clare Golby (Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council)
Councillor David Humphreys (Warwickshire County Council)
Councillor Ray Jarvis (North Warwickshire Borough Council)
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher (Warwickshire County Council)

Officers

John Cole, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Caroline Gutteridge, Senior Solicitor – Legal Service Manager, Commercial and Regulatory
Andrew Harper, Head of Strategic Finance

Others Present

John Anderson, Warwickshire Joint Audit and Standards Committee
Emma Daniell, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire
Councillor Richard Dickson, Warwick District Council
Claire Morris, Head of Business Services and Assurance, OPCC
Philip Seccombe, Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Councillor Jim Sinnott and Polly Reed (Chief Executive, OPCC).

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There was none.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Chair highlighted the recommendations made by the Panel in response to the Police and Crime Commissioner's precept proposal on pages 6 and 7 of the minutes. The Panel had

recommended that the Planning and Performance Working Group work with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to develop an approach to securing an indicative overview of performance across specific areas of community concern. He advised that the Working Group had set a meeting date to consider approaches to this work.

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

(4) Public Speaking

There was none.

2. Report of the Police and Crime Commissioner

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) presented his report which provided an update on key activities since the meeting of the Panel in November 2023. He highlighted information within the report relating to Neighbourhood Policing, stating that the 2024/25 Budget had provided for recruitment of five town centre officers in the main towns of each borough and district. Two of these officers were now in place, and the remaining three posts would be filled by the end of March 2024. He had visited Nuneaton to gauge the effectiveness of this initiative. Positive feedback had been received from retailers who reported that the presence of a dedicated town centre officer had helped to address shoplifting and anti-social behaviour (ASB). Deployment of these officers would be determined by the relevant area commanders; however, it was likely that a town centre officer would be allocated to Atherstone, Leamington Spa, Nuneaton, Rugby, and Stratford-upon-Avon.

The Commissioner provided an update on the Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) initiative, stating that it would be implemented over three phases. RCRP would enable improved collaboration between Warwickshire Police and mental health professionals to ensure that mental health calls for service could be treated by appropriately qualified individuals. Phase one was underway and involved detailed planning between the Force and relevant partners. It was proposed to fully implement the initiative in October 2024.

The Commissioner advised that £1m would be awarded by the Home Office to all police and crime commissioners to tackle ASB hotspots through the provision of additional patrols. The initiative sought to establish a uniformed presence at locations where ASB most frequently occurred to deter and prevent offending. He highlighted that £1m was being awarded to all policing areas, irrespective of their size. This was to the benefit of Warwickshire.

The Commissioner reported that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Spring Budget had announced that His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) would receive additional funding to address court backlogs in rape cases. Reducing the backlog of court cases was also a priority for the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB). He reported that the increased number of courts and judges in Warwickshire had made a positive difference. However, there was a national shortage of criminal barristers which had resulted in delays. The LCJB would undertake some work to examine the causes of court backlogs, including hearing from a defence barrister to gain additional insight.

In response to Andrew Davies, the Commissioner stated that backlogs in the court system had improved, but not at the pace that was required. Engagement with organisations such as Women's

Refuge and Safeline, which were supported by the PCC, had provided insight into the effect that backlogs had on victims of crime. He emphasised that, as PCC, he could not singlehandedly resolve the problem; however, he would make use of opportunities to accelerate the process to remedy the backlog. The LCJB provided a forum for the relevant agencies to understand the causes of delays in the courts and measures that could support an improvement in Warwickshire. He also held meetings with judges to explore their concerns. He emphasised that the Pandemic had exacerbated the backlog, causing courts to be closed for several months to maintain social distancing.

The Commissioner advised that it was difficult to gauge how long it would take for backlogs in the courts to be resolved. It required action on a national level. Collectively, PCCs were focused on the issue and regularly liaised with the Ministry of Justice. The national shortage of criminal barristers presented an obstacle to achieving an improvement. However, the effect of the backlog was taken into consideration when determining grants and commissioning services, providing a means to offer support to victims of crime whose cases had been delayed.

In response to Councillor Poole, the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (DPCC) advised that higher costs of living had resulted in increased retail crime. The Retail Crime Response included a focus on encouraging retailers to report crime, as well as partnership initiatives to prevent and detect retail crime. Direct reporting by retailers was supported by the DISC app which had proved to be an asset. Increased reporting had led to better outcomes, including convictions which made use of evidence gathered by DISC. She advised that the recent 'Refreshing Warwickshire's Approach to Retail Crime' conference had been well attended by business leads and partnership organisations. The Conference had showcased recent work by the Force to address retail crime and it was hoped that this would improve public confidence. She highlighted the good progress that had been made by the Force. Efforts would be made to ensure that positive outcomes and retailer confidence were retained. She agreed to provide a report to Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) outlining recent work to address retail crime.

Councillor Brown highlighted the forthcoming meeting of the Planning and Performance Working Group to consider approaches to the Panel's recommendation to measure performance across specific areas of community concern with a focus on the tangible outcomes of the Commissioner's Budget for 2024/25. She emphasised the potential value of this work to inform an understanding of areas where a measurable improvement had been achieved and areas which could require further attention.

The Commissioner highlighted the gamut of analytical work which was undertaken by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and Warwickshire Police. The OPCC also provided funding to Warwickshire County Council to produce resources for CSPs. This was resilient data which could help to inform the Panel's analysis of performance in key areas.

In response to the Chair, the DPCC highlighted the advantages of a phased rollout of the RCRP initiative. West Midlands Police was slightly ahead of Warwickshire in implementing RCRP which provided opportunities for learning. Planning for the introduction of RCRP had run smoothly with support for the initiative from partnership organisations. She emphasised the importance of effective planning to ensure that the measures in place were robust and well-conceived.

In response to Councillor Poole, the DPCC advised that progress was being made towards completion of a countywide ASB strategy to support CSPs to deliver their statutory obligation to

have a strategy in place for the reduction of crime and disorder, including ASB. This would be an overarching strategy, enabling CSPs to tailor their individual approaches according to local priorities. A meeting had been held between CSP leads and the OPCC to develop the initiative. An update would be provided to CSPs quite soon.

In response to the Chair, the Commissioner advised that 'spotlight' topics were allocated to monthly Governance and Performance Board (GPB) meetings held with the Chief Constable and senior officers of the Force to explore specific matters in detail. These topics were selected at the beginning of the year. Prior to each meeting, the Force was expected to prepare a report on the relevant topic. Questions were devised ahead of the meeting and responded to in writing by the Force. A series of supplementary questions could then be posed to inform a more developed understanding of the spotlight topic.

Claire Morris (Head of Business Services and Assurance, OPCC) advised that GPB meetings provided a means to monitor implementation of the Empower model by the Force. The GPB meeting in April 2024 would focus on Roads. In 2023, the Force had updated its Road Safety Strategy. The effectiveness of the new strategy would be examined at the meeting and measured against the relevant key performance indicators.

In response to the Chair, Claire Morris advised that the Chief Constable's responses to the Commissioner's questions were published on the OPCC website. It was recognised that details of the Commissioner's holding to account activities could be more prominently displayed on the OPCC website. The structure of the website was being reviewed to remedy this.

The Chair highlighted that, at the end of December 2023, a year-end underspend of £0.156m was forecasted. The Commissioner's report stated that "the most significant expenditure variance is on police officer overtime (£1.884m) ... these higher overtime costs are forecast to be met from underspending elsewhere – primarily in staff and PCSO pay..." He queried whether this was sustainable, given the drive to recruit additional Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to reach the targeted headcount.

The Commissioner advised that, at present, there were around 20 vacancies for PCSOs. The next intake course was scheduled in April 2024 which included 19 candidates. An additional seven candidates were in the process of being interviewed and vetted. This could bring the number of PCSOs to the required level and resolve the underspend. He emphasised that recruitment activities in recent years had focused on appointing the required number of police officers to meet the national Police Uplift Programme target. Many PCSOs had made use of the opportunity to train as police officers. More recently, it had been possible to focus more closely on PCSO recruitment.

The Commissioner emphasised that the overtime budget was difficult to control and manage. A homicide investigation or large-scale protest could have considerable resource implications, leading to higher overtime costs. The Budget for 2024/25 provided for increased overtime costs. It was hoped that this would be adequate to cover any unanticipated expenditure.

Andrew Davies highlighted a recent newspaper article which reported on the high number of thefts of Land Rovers in the UK. Recognising that Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) was a major employer in Warwickshire, he asked if the Commissioner had engaged with the company to explore this issue, including the prospect of working in partnership to reduce the number of stolen Land Rovers.

The Commissioner advised that he had previously discussed the subject of vehicle safety with JLR. However, no overture had been made for investment by JLR to support crime prevention initiatives. He reported that the latest figures showed a reduction in vehicle crime of 15.6% over the past 12 months. This was a good result. He highlighted that vehicle theft was often perpetrated by a small number of individuals operating within organised crime gangs. Apprehension of one of these individuals could considerably reduce the number of vehicle thefts.

In response to Councillor Humphreys, the Commissioner advised that he had made site visits to review the progress of projects funded by the Safer Streets initiative, including installation of CCTV cameras in Warwickshire's towns. This was done alongside a formal evaluation programme to ensure that money had been properly spent. Organisations that had benefitted from Safer Streets funding were required to provide quarterly reports outlining their progress to deliver funded projects. In cases where CCTV was funded, attention was given to the effect of investment, such as a measurable reduction in ASB.

3. Warwickshire Joint Audit and Standards Committee (WJASC) Annual Report 2023

Mr John Anderson (Chair of Warwickshire Joint Audit and Standards Committee) introduced the Joint Audit and Standards Committee (JASC) Annual Report for 2023. The report included details of how the Committee had complied with its terms of reference and provided overall assurance to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Chief Constable on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance arrangements. He highlighted the key points of the report, stating that:

- The Committee had considered the Internal Audit annual opinion for 2022/23 which confirmed that control environments provided 'substantial' assurance that significant risks were being addressed. This constituted an improvement on the 'moderate' assurance provided in previous years.
- The External Auditor, Grant Thornton, had provided unqualified opinions on the statutory accounts. Grant Thornton had largely completed its audit by September 2023, but it was not signed off until January 2024. This was mainly due to a delay in receiving external confirmations on pension fund liabilities. It was not related to the well-documented backlog in statutory audits in the public sector. The new External Auditor, Azets, had provided assurance that it would meet the September 2024 deadline for the 2023/24 accounts.
- Grant Thornton had also provided a report on Value for Money. This report provided assurance on the arrangements in place to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, and economy.
- The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) had provided a report on financial management. Its first report in 2020 had given a three (out of five) star rating which was upgraded to four stars in the latest report. This reflected the significant improvements brought about by Jeff Carruthers (Chief Finance Officer, Warwickshire Police) and Sara Ansell (Treasurer, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner).
- In the year ahead, the Committee would give attention to Warwickshire Police's recent organisational changes by undertaking a Review of the Corporate Governance Framework.

- The Annual Report had been presented to the Commissioner and Chief Constable giving notice that the JASC considered the arrangements in place to be adequate and operating efficiently and effectively.

In response to the Chair, Mr Anderson advised that a change of external auditors presented specific challenges. However, Jeff Carruthers and his team were experienced and had shown that they could manage this transition effectively.

The Chair thanked Mr Anderson and his colleagues on the JASC. A representative of the JASC regularly attended Panel meetings as an observer. As an action point, he would seek to coordinate more regular attendance of JASC meetings by the Panel.

The Commissioner highlighted the value that the JASC brought to the Force and PCC activities, including an important emphasis on professional standards.

The Panel noted the JASC Annual Report.

4. Issues Raised by Community Safety Partnerships

There was none.

5. Work Programme

The Chair highlighted that a report outlining funding arrangements for Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) would be brought to the next meeting. He suggested that the report build upon earlier updates to the Panel, providing details of future arrangements including the roles and responsibilities of CSPs, the support that was provided to CSPs, and how these could complement the Panel's work.

The Panel noted the Work Programme.

6. Dates of Meetings

The Panel noted the dates of future meetings.

7. Any Urgent Items

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair expressed his thanks to Virginia Rennie for her dedicated support as Financial Advisor to the Panel. She had provided exceptionally valuable advice and insight. He wished Virginia well in her new role as Interim Director of Finance for Warwickshire County Council.

In anticipation of any changes that could result from elections due to be held on 2 May 2024, the Chair expressed his thanks to all attendees for their efforts and contributions.

8. Reports Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

Resolved:

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Mr John Anderson and Councillor Richard Dickson left the meeting at this point.

9. Complaints

The Panel held a confidential discussion.

The meeting rose at 15:04.

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Chair