

# Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel

Monday 1 February 2021

## Minutes

### Attendance

#### Committee Members

Councillor David Reilly (Chair)  
Councillor Derek Poole (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Ian Davison  
Councillor Jenny Fradgley  
Councillor Peter Gilbert  
Councillor Christopher Kettle  
Councillor Maggie O'Rourke  
Councillor Christopher Watkins  
Councillor Andrew Wright  
Andy Davis  
Andrew Davies

#### Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner

Philip Seccombe, Police & Crime Commissioner  
Sara Ansell, Treasurer  
Polly Reed, Chief Executive  
Neil Tipton, Head of Media and Communications

#### Officers

Deborah Moseley, Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Jane Pollard, Legal Advisor  
Virginia Rennie, Strategy and Commissioning Manager (Strategic Finance)

#### Guests

Alastair Murdie, Joint Audit and Standards Committee

### 1. General

The Chair welcomed Andrew Davies to the Panel and noted the presence of Alastair Murdie of the Joint Audit & Standards Committee.

#### (1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Nicola Davies.

#### (2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

### **(3) Minutes of the previous meeting**

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **(4) Public Speaking**

Councillor Keith Kondakor was welcomed to the meeting and invited to put his questions to the Commissioner:-

Councillor Kondakor asked about community engagement events.

The Police and Crime Commissioner responded that he would raise this with the force to ascertain the current policy as this was an operational issue. His general view was that public engagement meetings should be open to all but he understood that it was sometimes necessary to target specific groups. He noted that he would be attending a scrutiny meeting at Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council in the following days and he would no doubt discuss this further at that time.

Councillor Kondakor also asked about policing COVID, noting police operations in low transmission areas such as Hartshill Hayes but perceived limited operations in high infection areas such as the supermarket on Queens Road Nuneaton.

The Police and Crime Commissioner responded that this was an operational issue but he was aware that generally the force was working with communities and he had received very few comments to the Office that the force response was too light or too heavy. He could not provide hard and fast rules, but the police response was the 4Es. He noted that the amount of enforcement had probably increased during the third lockdown as members of the community were taking too much risk but it should be borne in mind that supermarkets were not the realm of the police and were generally dealing with the regulations well. He would raise this issue with the force to understand any local policy or guidelines.

Mr Ben Twomey was welcomed to the meeting and invited to present his petition and put his question to the Commissioner regarding the planned redundancy of a number of Domestic Abuse Risk Officers.

The Police and Crime Commissioner commented that as the petition did not include the usual address/location details for signatories he was not sure that they were all Warwickshire residents and it would be helpful to him to have that information. In response to the petition, the Commissioner stated that the text was flawed and resulted in the wrong conclusions. He noted that the proposals for the Domestic Abuse Unit sought to enhance provision and the claims that officers doing the job of DAROs would be “pulled away” were absolutely not true. The reforms would see a new operating model in place which would use warranted officers, instead of police staff, who were able to use their police powers and safeguarding responsibilities to greater effect to improve the service and benefit victims. The Commissioner noted that over his 5 year tenure, Warwickshire Police had been substantially enhanced with over 200 more officers and the rebuilding of standalone services post-Alliance resulting in a force that was more responsive to the communities of Warwickshire.

## **2. Proposed Local Police Precept 2021/22**

The Police and Crime Commissioner was invited to present his proposals for 2021/22. The Commissioner set out the background and key challenges to his proposals noting that the budget was based on a provisional government settlement and drawing attention to the reliance on reserves that had taken place in 2020/21, the three final services transitioning out of the Alliance with West Mercia Police, and his resolution to provide a balanced budget for 2021/22 that would result in a cessation of the reliance on reserves.

The Commissioner's presentation set out core funding (£115.3m) and income (£10.4m) and the expenditure on staff, infrastructure and services. The 2021/22 budget pressures and savings were outlined alongside the delivery proposals for the 2021/22 budget. The Commissioner also set out the medium term financial plan and reserves which included Evolve savings target of £1.5m, retention of reserves at £10m and a number of assumptions in terms of central grant funding, pay award, recovery period for tax base and collection deficits, increases in precept from 2022/23 and contracted inflationary increases. The Commissioner also noted that a two phase approach had been taken to the public consultation with comprehensive stakeholder engagement. In conclusion, the budget for 2021/22 had been drafted based on a proposed precept of £14.99, which resulted in a council tax band D equal to £252.96 per year. The Commissioner acknowledged that whilst the current climate was challenging for everyone, many residents living in lower value properties would pay less and he had sought to balance the funding needs of Warwickshire police against the precept decision.

On behalf of the Commissioner, Neil Tipton provided a summary of the consultation activity which had been comprehensively detailed in a report circulated to the Panel prior to the meeting. The first phase of the consultation had seen 1500 residents respond to the survey, with 67% supporting an increase in precept. The survey responses had been supplemented by a number of focus group meetings to provide qualitative feedback. The second phase of consultation had seen a much smaller response rate as there was only a five day turnaround and a slightly smaller (63%) support for the increase.

A robust discussion took place with Members of the Panel asking the Police and Crime Commissioner and his staff a number of questions on the presentation and reports provided:-

Councillor Kettle acknowledged there were a number of budget pressures highlighted, including increased employee costs and he queried the scale of this. Sara Ansell, Treasurer, responded on behalf of the PCC, that there are a number of issues reflected in the strategic overview picture and she was able to attest to the accuracy of the figures. Noting Councillor Kettle's ongoing concerns regarding a perceived discrepancy in the budget, she offered to go through his concerns with him outside the meeting. Going forward, the Chair would discuss with the Budget Working Group how financial information was monitored and seek to agree a preferred way to receive financial information from the OPCC.

Andy Davis noted from the report that the first phase of the consultation provided respondents with a choice of increase but only 38% agreed the largest increase so whilst there was some support for an increase it was not unanimously in favour of the highest level of increase. Neil Tipton confirmed that the survey had sought a response on three potential increases together with the option of no increase; 67% of respondents were in favour of an increase which gave a measure of

support. The PCC added that there had been a need to consider what was fair in order to provide a policing service that kept Warwickshire as safe as possible and, when half of the available funding came from local tax payers, a balance was required between what was fair and what residents expected to pay for the service.

Andy Davis also asked how representative the consultation had been of the population, since the greatest impact was likely to be felt by the 25-45 age range, rather than older residents. Councillor Peter Gilbert also pointed to the sample size that the decision had been based upon and commented that those who responded that they would be happy with an increase, would expect a community policing service with a visual presence. Neil Tipton commented that, in common with the national picture, there were challenges to engaging with the working age population and whilst activities had taken place to promote the survey, there was some work to be done to increase the response rate from younger age groups in future years and he welcomed the Panel's ideas on this point. The PCC added that restrictions in place to manage the pandemic had limited face to face engagement but he felt that this had been the most comprehensive consultation that had taken place over the last five years with good geographic and demographic reach. He felt that the results were representative of residents who had an option to not reply or express a view.

Councillor Maggie O'Rourke acknowledged that this was a challenging financial time and asked whether the future of the standalone police force could be assured. The PCC reflected on the purpose of the Alliance and the options available on exit to either amalgamate with another force or rebuild a standalone force. His view was that Warwickshire residents were better served by a Warwickshire police force and engagement demonstrated that residents wanted a Warwickshire force. He was optimistic about the future and would be doing everything he could to make the force resilient and responsive to the challenges it faced. In response to a question from the Chair, the PCC noted that going forward there would not be a reliance on reserves and this was echoed by Sara Ansell, Treasurer, who noted that the MTFP did not show a routine reliance on reserves where there was an awareness of risk (e.g. collection fund deficits and ICT) but that reserves would be available for use over the next couple of years to meet unknown risks and covid related costs.

Councillor Ian Davison referenced page 26 of the reports pack about policing and financial challenges facing Warwickshire in terms of serious and organised crime and asked whether the types of crime highlighted would be dealt with within Warwickshire or if there was opportunity to work in partnership in relation to issues such as modern slavery and county lines. The PCC advised that the response to serious and organised crime and counter-terrorism was a cross-boundary one which meant that multiple forces were working together in partnership. The PCC opined that organised crime gangs came from out of the area and it was therefore necessary to work with other forces to reduce the opportunity for them to enter the county and commit crimes. The PCC added that collaboration could be operational across the region and also he could seek to collaborate with the County Council, District and Borough Councils and the private sector on non-operational matters to create opportunities to eliminate this type of crime.

Councillor Ian Davison asked whether there would be potential for savings to be made if opportunities to work together on combined services came to fruition and the PCC replied that these opportunities were always being sought but on the basis that partnership working provided an improved service at no greater cost to the community. His post-Alliance experience was that

this was not always easy to achieve but he did offer reassurance that there was a lot of operational collaboration – e.g. motorway policing, vehicle crime, and the rural crime team.

Councillor Chris Kettle asked about the position on overspend and the PCC responded that he had become aware over the summer/early autumn of forecasting of an overspend that would require the current year's budget to be subsidised by reserves. He stated that reserves were called upon when large expenses that had not been known about during budget setting occurred. Sara Ansell, Treasurer confirmed that reserves were being used to finance the projected overspend for the current year. The vast majority of one-off costs related to the transition from the Alliance and would be enabled by the £10.5m settlement agreement with West Mercia. She supported comments from the PCC that expenditure did not fall evenly throughout the year and profiling had enabled steps to be taken to manage and reduce the overspend where possible.

Councillor Chris Kettle asked about the delivery of the savings programme and the PCC advised that he considered the savings programme would be delivered, pointing to redundancies and the subtraction of vacant posts which would be achieved by the end of March. The PCC noted that most of the planned redundancies were unwarranted police staff investigators that had been appointed in 2010 in response to the national shortage of detectives. These would be replaced by warranted officers who had served their probation periods and would ultimately provide a better service for the community. He also reminded the panel of the successful detective degree cohort that would be coming into the force.

Councillor Derek Poole asked about funding for improvements in ICT infrastructure and the control centre and the PCC responded that it was believed the settlement from West Mercia would cover the bulk of the revenue costs of transition and transformation. He noted that if the Alliance had remained, there would be a responsibility for the rebuilding of infrastructure in the sum of approximately £40m based on the split of costs and the planned bespoke rebuild was therefore of a benefit to the tax payer.

Andrew Davies shared further concerns around the risk of late delivery of ICT. In response, the PCC stated that this was a force project and they were confident that it could be delivered by September 2021. However, he was aware that this type of project could be complicated and overrun projected timescales although he was clear that any delay to delivery must be managed within the existing budget which provided an incentive to meet the timescale. He was also confident that the Control Room would be tested and ready to go live in Spring. Despite this, he was not technically qualified to give a judgment on confidence levels. Sara Ansell, Treasurer, commented that the absolute intention was that ICT would transition by September 2021 and some risk mitigation was in place in terms of any additional cost by setting aside the local council tax support grant (a one off grant from gov) in the sum of £781K into reserves to manage additional costs should they arise.

Councillor Derek Poole asked about any planned reductions to the PCC grant system and was advised by the PCC that there would be reductions in grants to beneficiary organisations of approximately £100K, which would include a reduction to the Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) and he would be encouraging them to submit their grant submissions. Neil Tipton added that the consultation had suggested a clear direction in funding from the public that grant funding was worthwhile but that the priority should be to protect the vulnerable and frontline policing.

Andy Davis asked about the PCC's lobbying efforts to obtain a fairer funding settlement for Warwickshire and was advised by the PCC that all forces felt disadvantaged by the current formula. This was a highly controversial topic as any change would result in winners and losers. He had raised the issue in letters, meetings and conference calls alongside Warwickshire's MPs who had raised the issue in the House of Commons. He was hopeful that there would be a fairer funding deal in future and had considered this year's settlement to be slightly better than anticipated although he would not stop pushing for a change in the formula.

Councillor Ian Davison asked the PCC for further detail on how climate change issues would be addressed. The PCC responded that it was important that the organisation was alert to climate change and he understood it was necessary to make some changes although this would not be easy in financially challenging times and there were two main areas in which a difference could be made: estates and fleet. He noted that there had been some disposal and closures of police property prior to his tenure and he did not anticipate any further disposal in the medium term. Covid would have an impact on working practices and the demand on the force's real estate. Whilst he felt it was necessary to exercise caution in spending capital on buildings, he believed that there may be opportunities to look at the energy efficiency of the estates (e.g. insulation, heating, led lighting) which would incrementally help to get on target in 2050. There was also a procurement exercise for the fleet taking place which included consideration of electric vehicles and the cost of charging points in police bases.

Councillor Ian Davison asked when the PCC would know that the Evolve savings were achievable and was advised that the force were asked to produce savings every year and this year's savings were not viewed as onerous. The PCC wanted to see efficiencies made and he noted an improved culture now in the force where budget holders had a responsibility to come in on or under budget each year. He was confident the savings were achievable. Sara Ansell, Treasurer, added that as part of the financial settlement, the government expected PCCs and forces to build on progress made to improve efficiency and productivity. The Chief Constable reported regularly to the Office of the PCC through regular holding to account and finance meetings. The PCC reiterated that every effort was being made to meet the savings target and the force would be held to account on realising those savings across the MTFP.

Councillor Jenny Fradgley asked for reassurance on the delivery of the new approach in the Domestic Abuse Unit. The PCC noted that domestic abuse had come further to the fore during lockdown and he had spent time over the last couple of months understanding what the new officers role would be in replacing the dedicated and knowledgeable operators (DAROs). The change was the operational choice of the Chief Constable as a way to improve the service and whilst it was acknowledged that this would bring some risks and challenges, every opportunity would be taken to improve the first response to victims, and the PCC welcomed assurance that Officers would be out and about in communities. He felt that ultimately victims would rather be attended by a warranted officer. The PCC noted that other financial resources were also made available to deal with this issue, including a £250K grant for the provision of ISVAs and ring-fenced granted for victims of domestic abuse in 2021/22. Neil Tipton commented that the role of the DAROs was to manage the risk of offending, and the long-term support to victims through Refuge was not changing. He sought to reassure the Panel that constables in warranted positions were not necessarily uniformed officers and would be dressed according to the role they were carrying out.

The Chair noted that there was a clear statement from respondents to the consultation around burglary and vehicle crime and he sought the PCC's views on this feedback. The PCC drew parallels with the comments made in a previous survey undertaken during the summer with the force. He felt that whilst Covid had had a terrible impact, in terms of policing there were some positives: reductions in the number of accidents or collisions and the number of associated fatalities, reduction in house burglary and vehicle crime and a reduction in the number of Gypsy and Traveller unauthorised encampments. Funding for additional officers had made a difference with more offenders being apprehended and he hoped to see the trends remain post-Covid.

The Chair called for a vote on support for the proposed precept for 2020/21, which was accepted by the majority of those present.

The PCC thanked the Panel for their robust scrutiny of the precepting process which had resulted in some difficult decisions and he expressed gratitude for this decision in what were difficult times due to the pandemic; he welcomed the solidarity this decision would convey to the public.

**Resolved:**

That the Police and Crime Panel accepts the Police and Crime Commissioner's budget and precept proposal for 2021/22.

*The Police and Crime Panel's response to the Police and Crime Commissioner's budget is attached as Appendix 1.*

### **3. Work Programme**

The work programme was noted.

### **4. Dates of Meetings**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting had been brought forward to 18 March 2021 at 2.00pm to accommodate the pre-election period.

### **5. Any Urgent Items**

None.

### **6. Reports Containing Confidential or Exempt Information**

There were no further reports to be considered at the meeting.

### **7. Complaints**

There were no further reports to be considered at the meeting.